

Chapter 3: New People

15 June 1864

Tryphena Moore stopped by the office that morning to have a cup of tea with Eli and Carson in the editor-in-chief's office. Since taking the job in January, Eli had been forced to turn a rather spartan room into a more accommodating setting for his employer.

Truthfully, Eli would have been happy slugging his beverage out of a tin cup, sitting at an improvised desk made from a plank and two sawhorses, and using a crate turned on its end for a seat. But he couldn't do that, not with Tryphena at the helm. With Carson's assistance, he had brought in a comfortable sofa, a small but tasteful tea table, and fine, matching chinaware.

Carson also knew all about appropriate décor – including the burgundy wallpaper with the fussy diamond design etched in gold that now adorned the office walls. Eli's window was swathed in long white draperies festooned with pink roses and burgundy trim.

Damned unmanly, Eli often thought. But Tryphena liked them and so they stayed.

The drapes were pulled back with burgundy ties, revealing lace curtains behind. Eli thanked God that Carson at least allowed a bit of sunlight in. Otherwise, he would have been better off as a bat hanging upside down from the brass lamp overhead.

The only remaining evidence that *The Register* had once been a livery was in the back of the building. The large room there was dominated by a steam-powered rotary press. The walls were made of rough planks, and the few stalls still existing served as storage areas for paper, ink, and other supplies. There also was an old Franklin stove in the center of the room to provide heat, as well as hot water for the staff's tea breaks.

As Carson poured fine black tea from India into three cups, Tryphena relaxed on the settee. "Well, Mr. Smith, what have you to report this week?"

"It's been pretty quiet, Miss Moore."

Carson handed their employer a cup and saucer.

"Thank you, Mr. Carson." Tryphena favored him with a smile. "I do declare, you are quite the accomplished gentleman."

The man's white mustache lifted as he beamed at her. "Thank you, Miss Moore."

"You certainly have smoothed out Mr. Smith's rough edges."

Eli rolled his eyes, and not very subtly.

Carson passed a cup and saucer to him. "Yet, without Mr. Smith's 'rough edges,' *The Register* would not be half the newspaper it is. He gives it a strength and daring other papers lack."

"I agree, sir."

Touched, Eli said, "Thank you, Carson."

"Don't let it go to your head," the other man replied, shooting him a grin.

Eli rolled his eyes again and took an agitated gulp of tea.

"What war news is there?" Tryphena wanted to know.

"There's fighting at Cold Harbor, Virginia," Carson replied.

Eli's stomach clenched. Two years earlier, he nearly had been killed in Virginia by artillery fire. All he knew was that there had been a lot of noise and then something exploded close enough to throw him into the air. When he came down, he hit his head and came to in a field hospital. Despite its location in a church, the hospital was as close to hell as Eli ever wanted to get. Abruptly, he realized his mind was drifting.

"The battle seems to be rough going," Carson continued.

Tryphena nodded. "And our boys?"

"The New Jersey Fifteenth Volunteers are there."

"I am glad both Sergeant McCoy and Captain Frost are safely serving at Mower Hospital in Philadelphia," Tryphena responded. "Your stepdaughters' hearts seem to be in no danger of being broken now."

Eli nodded. "I'm glad of that, too. They've had enough pain." He changed the subject. "Have you seen the new hotel yet?"

Carson passed Miss Moore a plate with an assortment of dainty cookies from Miss Amelia's Tea Shop.

Tryphena selected one. "Of course. Who can miss it, situated as it is on the square and bigger than the Presbyterian Church?"

"I meant, have you been inside it yet, Miss Moore?"

Tryphena nibbled delicately on the cookie. "I am not sure I want to do that."

Carson and Eli exchanged surprised glances.

Miss Moore continued, "Gentlemen, if it is as ostentatious on the inside as it is on the outside, then I want nothing to do with it." She sniffed. "I am grateful Mr. Norton bought the lot where your wife's boarding house once stood. It provided the funds with which we purchased Greybeal House. However, the building he has erected in its place is a shameful waste of money. Mr. Norton's wealth from his mills and uniform factory could have been put to better use. For instance, he could have used it to help our soldiers."

"Don't worry about that for the moment," Eli assured her. He grinned widely. "I've spoken to him. Mr. Norton wishes to take out a quarter-page ad with us for his hotel. He plans to do this on a trial basis."

This nearly knocked Tryphena into speechlessness. Nearly. "How long a trial?"

"Three months."

"Indeed." She blinked, thought a bit more, and then said, "Well done, Mr. Smith. I expected him to laugh you out of his office, given his feelings for this paper."

Eli chuckled. "We're lucky he loves money more than a grudge."

Tryphena harrumphed. "I hope some of the money he gets from increased business will go to helping the soldiers."

Eli replied easily, "Let's just be proud *The Register* skunked its competition."

"Mr. Smith, language!"

"Outsold the competition?"

"Do try not to use slang."

When pigs fly, Eli thought, but smiled charmingly back at his boss. "I'll consider it."

Edward poked his head in the door. "Mr. Smith?"

"Yes, Mr. Caldwell?"

The young man advanced and bowed politely to Tryphena. "Good morning, Miss Moore."

"Good morning, Mr. Caldwell."

Edward turned to Eli. "I just received this over the wire." He handed him a handwritten note.

Eli's dark eyebrows shot up as he read. "Huh."

"News, Elijah?" Carson asked.

"Yeah." Eli glanced at the others in the room. "Mrs. Greybeal has passed on."

Tryphena heaved a sad sigh. "Oh, dear. I had heard that she was not doing well. I'm glad she went to live with her son in Trenton. It makes such – transitions – all the easier."

"It says she died early this morning." He frowned. "That's odd."

#

After the noon dinner, Eli pulled Maggie out to the porch and gave her the telegram.

Maggie said nothing as she read. Then she looked up and simply stared into Eli's eyes for a moment. "This morning, you say?"

Eli nodded.

"You're sure?"

"That's what it says. This morning."

Maggie realized that her hands had gone cold. "Perhaps Mrs. Greybeal *was* giving me a message."

"Oh, now, sweetheart, it was just a dream."

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me if Mrs. Greybeal *were* trying to communicate. If I were her, I would want this beautiful building filled with people and voices and laughter."

"Maggie... sometimes there is such a thing as coincidence."

"Yes," she answered with a slight frown. "And sometimes there isn't."

#

A little while later, Maggie rapped gently on the door to Emily's room. Emily, who was nursing Jarena, smiled as her friend entered. Maggie walked

briskly over, her skirts swishing about her ankles, and sank onto a chair beside the bed. "Jarena seems to be feeding well."

"She has a good appetite, thank the Lord."

"How are you healing?"

"Well enough. Thank you. Despite what Nate may have told you, her birth was easy compared to her brother's."

"Lydia was the most difficult for me. I think the first often is. But once she arrived, I fell deeply in love with her."

"That's how God planned it." Emily gazed at her daughter's face. "The pain is unimportant once you hold that baby in your arms."

After a brief pause, Maggie said, "Emily..."

Her friend looked up.

"I received some sad news today."

"What is it?"

"Mrs. Greybeal passed away early this morning."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I wonder if she realized what a gift she gave us?"

"Probably not." Maggie briefly collected her thoughts. "But I had a dream about Mrs. Greybeal early this morning. It wasn't very long, but I remember we were standing in my bedchamber and she said, 'This old place wants people, Maggie. It needs life. See that it's filled.' And then I woke up." She took a deep breath. "Do you think it's possible for the dead to give us messages?"

"Of course! My mama saw my granny's ghost. Granny was living in Virginia on a plantation. Mama hadn't seen her in years, but she saw her clear as day standing in the kitchen. Mama was cooking up some greens. When she turned around from the pot, there was Granny just standing by the table and smiling at her. Mama said, 'Mammy?' And she just disappeared."

"When we had the fire, someone knocked on my door to rouse me," Maggie offered. "Remember?"

"Someone knocked on our door, too. I think it was Mr. Madison warning us."

Maggie leaned forward, resting her elbows on her legs. "It troubles me, though. The Bible says we shouldn't practice sorcery."

"That's true, but it doesn't say anything about ignoring the dearly departed. If they're gonna visit us, they're gonna visit us."

"Shouldn't they be in heaven?"

"I don't know, Maggie. Maybe they come down when they want us to know something."

"Maybe."

Maggie watched as Emily sat Jarena up on her lap, supporting her little head with one hand and patting her back with the other.

"I asked Eli about the dream, but he's no help." Maggie sighed. "He's such a nay-sayer about things spiritual."

"Mm, hm." Emily grinned at her friend. "He may be a nay-sayer, but in his heart, he knows different. He just can't get his heart and mind together. That's all."

Her best friend's wisdom never failed to give Maggie light. "True. He's had things happen to him that he cannot explain. I know he's searching. He doesn't want to search, and yet he can't help it."

"Stand strong, Maggie. He needs you to show him the way."

Then Jarena added her thoughts on the matter by issuing a loud, healthy burp.

#

16 June 1864

School was dismissed about 2:30 in the afternoon. Young Bob Smith gleefully hurried home, entered the house through the kitchen, gave his mother a kiss, and then barreled upstairs to the bedroom he shared with Natey to change his clothes. He threw off his school clothes, boots, and socks, and pulled on an old shirt as well as a pair of knickerbockers (these he left unbuttoned at the knee).

Wiggling his bare toes, Bob heaved a happy sigh. He was free from the restriction of shoes. He loved summer!

But there was no time to contemplate the joy of going barefoot, not when he had work to do on the fort.

Bob dashed out of the bedroom, clambered upon the bannister on the grand staircase in the center hall, and gleefully slid down. He then leapt to the floor and fairly flew down the hallway and into the oldest section of the house.

Maggie smiled at the sight of her son's energetic entrance. She remembered well her girlhood days: sneaking away from the house with her brother after lessons were over, racing him to the orchard, and enjoying an afternoon free from childhood duties. Such things had become precious memories. She hoped Bob's experiences would create similar ones for him.

Her son screeched to a halt in front of the dining table. Maggie had just finished wrapping something in an old, frayed napkin. "It's biscuits today," she told him, "with apple butter."

"Thank you, Mama." He took the afternoon snack from her and waited until she kissed his cheek. Then he turned to Natey, who had been impatiently waiting in the sitting area with his governess Birgit and baby Faith. "C'mon," Bob said to his younger friend. "We gotta fix the chinking in the fort's walls today."

The two happily sped out the open door and across the yard.

Birgit flashed a grin at Maggie. "They certainly keep themselves occupied, don't they, ma'am?"

"Indeed, they do," was Maggie's reply as she walked to the sitting area. "Why don't you give me Faith now, Birgit? I'll take her out for a walk, and you may have a rest before we start the supper preparations."

"If it's all the same to you, ma'am, I wouldn't mind taking that walk with you. I crave a bit of fresh air."

"By all means. Do come along. I'd enjoy your company."

#

Bob set the sack with the biscuits on a pile of stones that they brought had into the fort.

The “fort’s” walls were the remnants of a building from an earlier era. Like many buildings in northern New Jersey, its foundations had been built of stone. The foundations, in fact, were all that remained. They protected what had once been a root cellar, now filled with decades of dirt and leaves. It was a perfectly suited for the boys to imagine a fortification.

Bob pointed at a spot in the wall. “See that, Natey?”

“Uh, huh.”

“That’s got a big hole in it.”

“It sure does.”

Bob grabbed an old wooden bucket they had found in the barn. “Let’s you’n’me go down to the stream and get some water. Then we can bring it back, mix it with that dirt over there, and make mud to plug up that hole.”

A happy forty-five minutes passed as they trekked to the stream, filled the bucket, returned, made an impressive pile of mud, and did their repair work. When they were finished, both boys were dirty, sweaty, and tired.

“Let’s eat our snack now,” Natey suggested.

But when they turned to the pile of rocks, they were surprised to see that the napkin with their biscuits were gone.

“A bear musta took it,” Natey said, voice low and slightly scared.

Bob paused and listened. He didn’t hear any big footsteps crashing through the woods. “Nah,” he decided. “Bears don’t bother us here. They usually stay up on the mountain.”

“So, who took our food?”

Bob listened some more. He thought he could hear voices, but it was faint.

“What’s wrong?” Natey asked. “What d’you hear?”

“Shh!” After a few moments, Bob whispered, “I think someone’s in the spring house.”

When Greybeal House had been a thriving farm, the family had kept some cows for milk. The spring house, a stone building built over a spring, had been used to keep the milk and other items cool until they could be used. This, too, had been abandoned and new one built closer to Greybeal House.

“Come on,” Bob murmured. “I think someone’s in there.”

The two boys crept over to the old building.

Sure enough, they could hear voices – girls’ voices.

The wooden door protecting the building’s front was long gone. The only other way out of it was a very small window one side. Like the doorway, it also was open to the elements. But it would take some effort even for a thin child to get through it.

Bob turned to Natey. At his signal, both boys barged through the doorway.

Two girls, who had been in the process of eating the biscuits and apple butter, leapt to their feet. They had dark skin and wide, frightened eyes. And, like the boys, they were barefoot.

“Who are you?” Bob demanded. The girls were not quite as tall as Birgit and Moira, but they certainly were taller than he was. But the boy was determined to stand his ground. The girls had stolen the food his mother had made. He wanted answers.

The tallest of the girls swallowed a mouthful of biscuit. “Don’t tell! Please.”

Bob frowned. “I won’t, but why did you steal our food? Me and Natey were going to eat it.”

“We’re sorry. We’re hungry,” the smaller girl said. “We ain’t had nothing to eat in two days.”

“Oh.” Bob thought a moment. “How come you haven’t eaten?”

“We ain’t got no home,” said the taller one. “Our mammy and pappy died two month ago.”

The other added, “And we ain’t et in two days.”

“Well...” Bob considered their situation. “That’s not good.”

Natey looked concerned. “They need more’n biscuits, Bob.”

“You’re right.” Bob turned to the girls. “Come with us. My mama’ll give you more.”

“No,” the older girl pleaded. “If you do that, we might end up in an orphanage!”

“No you won’t,” was Bob’s confident reply. “Lots of people live in our house.” He took a breath. “And I was in an orphanage once. My second mama and papa took me to live with them. Maybe they’ll let you stay with us, too.”

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The door to the kitchen opened.

“Mama,” Bob called.

“Yes, Bobby.” Maggie did not look up.

She was busy standing at the table as she sliced up the lamb that had been left over from the noon dinner. Beside her, Moira was chopping cabbage, potatoes, turnips, and onions which would be added to a soup with the lamb and canned tomatoes.

“Mama!” The boy’s voice was insistent.

A bit irritated, Maggie looked up, saying, “Robert Smith, can you not see that I am...” The word “busy” died on her lips as her eyes lit on the two strange girls standing beside her son and Natey.

“Oh,” she stammered. “Oh, my!”

Moira looked up next. “What...?” She, too, was at a loss for words.

“We found ‘em outside,” Bob said.

Eyes still focused on the girls, Maggie said, “Moira, would you please run quickly and fetch Mrs. Johnson?”

“Yes’m.” Moira hurried wiped her hands on her apron and jogged out of the kitchen.

“Well, then...” Maggie cleaned her hands on a towel. “What a surprise this is. Bob, I didn’t know you had made some new friends.”

“Oh, we didn’t. Not ‘til today.”

"They don't have a mama or papa," Natey blurted.

The newcomers were nervous and clad in dirty, threadbare dresses. Maggie had to keep from wincing when she saw they were barefoot. Pitifully thin, they also needed a good bath. Despite their ragged appearance, though, the girls had beautiful skin the color of mahogany and intelligent, deep brown eyes. It was clear that at one time they had been well-cared for and well-loved.

She approached the foursome. "I'm sorry to hear about your parents," she said to the girls. "My name is Mrs. Smith."

"I'm Addie Brooks," the taller girl said.

The younger added, "My name's Mary Brooks."

"They don't got a home," Natey said. "They stole our biscuits and ate 'em."

"Well, if they did that, then I imagine they must have been very hungry." Maggie focused her eyes on the girls. "Where did you live last?"

"We lived near Trenton until mammy and pappy decided to move," Addie told her. "We was traveling when they both took ill and died." She looked down at her feet. "We buried 'em ourselves."

Maggie's heart broke in two. "Oh, my poor dears!"

At that point, she heard footsteps enter the kitchen. She turned to see Moira and Emily, who was holding Jarena, striding toward them.

"Girls," Maggie said, as calmly as she could, "this is Mrs. Johnson. She and her husband are part of our household. Mrs. Johnson, these two young ladies are Addie and Mary Brooks. I think they shall be visiting with us for a while."

"I see." Although Emily cast her friend a slight questioning glance, she turned to the girls. "Well, then! Welcome to Greybeal House, young ladies."

"What's your baby's name?" Mary wanted to know.

"We call her Jarena."

"She's so small," Addie wondered.

"And real pretty," Mary added. "Her eyelashes are so long!"

"Thank you. She's Natey's little sister." Emily smiled at the baby and then lifted her eyes to meet Mary's. "How old are you, dear?"

"Thirteen," the girl replied.

Emily said to Addie, "And you?"

"Fifteen, ma'am."

Maggie turned to Moira. "You know, I think our visitors might like a snack. Would you fix something for them, please?"

"Yes, ma'am," Moira replied. "We've a bit of bacon left from breakfast, some lovely strawberries, and bread and butter."

"Excellent! Thank, you."

Moira indicated for the girls to come to the table. "Why don't you sit down over there? Would you fancy cuppa milk?"

The girls nodded and eagerly followed Moira to the table.

"And you rascals," Moira nodded at Bob and Natey, "why don't you go with 'em?"

As the boys happily scampered to the table to join the newcomers, Maggie and Emily walked to the fireplace where they could speak in private.

"Tell me what you know," Emily said.

"Apparently, they and their parents were on the move, perhaps to a better life further north. But along the way, their parents contracted a disease and died. Emily, they buried their own mother and father!"

Emily's eyes filled. "Those poor babies!"

Maggie's eyes watered up, too. "What do you think we should do?"

"Keep them here, of course."

"For a while, obviously. But they really should go to the town orphanage, don't you think? Mrs. Connor probably knows of several colored families who would love -"

"No," Emily interrupted.

Maggie knew what her friend was thinking. "Now, Em, you can't possibly -"

"I can too possibly," was her friend's stubborn reply. "You listen to me, Maggie. Nate and I have always wanted large family, but we've had such difficulty. You know that. We lost baby after baby until Natey finally came along. And Jarena... well, she's a beautiful surprise. And we're happy with our boy and girl, we really are. But I'm not getting any younger and maybe God has found a way of giving us more children by sending these two girls here. It isn't the way we expected our family to grow but, Maggie, I feel God's hand is in this."

Smiling, Maggie took her friend's hand. "Then go sit with the girls and get to know them. I'll fetch Birgit and Faith. Having younger people at the table will help Addie and Mary warm up. Perhaps we'll learn more about their lives."

The plan worked. Once everyone was seated and sharing a bite to eat and milk or tea, the girls relaxed, especially when they heard the Brennan sisters chatting easily.

"It's nice being in a house again," Mary suddenly blurted. "See, we ain't had a roof over our heads since we slept in that barn two weeks ago."

Maggie gently asked, "Where else have you slept?"

Addie swallowed a bit of cake. "Anywhere we wouldn't get soaked from rain or get hurt."

"What sort of places?"

"Under brush, behind rocks, sometimes in old buildings."

Mary shivered. "When they weren't haunted."

"Oh, hush! There ain't no such thing as haunts!"

"I saw 'em, Addie! There were four of 'em staring right at us. I was too scared to wake you up."

Emily jumped in now, steering the conversation away from their fears. "Well, you're here now, and you're safe. You don't have to wander anymore. Not if you don't want to."

Addie's eyes widened. "You mean we could we stay here?"

"Yes. For as long as you like."

"I'm glad. I was starting to think we'd be walking forever. I got to thinking no one cared whether we lived or died."

"Now, you listen to me." Emily straightened her shoulders. "I care about you, and so does Mrs. Smith and everyone who lives in this house. You don't

know us all right now, but you soon will. And do you know who else cares about you? Who really knows you inside and out? God! Nothing and nobody escapes his notice. Why, Jesus says God even cares about a little sparrow falling from the sky. Just think how much he must care about you two. After all, he cared enough to lead you to us.”

#

When teatime was over, Maggie took the Brooks sisters up the winder staircase and showed them to a bedroom near where the maids and Frankie stayed.

Mary’s eyes were wide as saucers as she looked around the chamber. “You mean this is all ours?”

Maggie nodded. “It is. Would you care for a bath?”

“Oh, yes,” Addie said. “We ain’t had a bath in weeks.”

“We had to wash in a creek,” Mary added.

Moira spoke up. “Birgit and I’ve bathed in a creek, too. That was before our Mam and Pap found our house. We’ll have a clean bath ready for you in a tick. Birgit’ll come get you when it’s all set up. Meanwhile, I’ll help you get settled and tell you all about Greybeal House.”

Birgit and Maggie left to prepare the bath. As they descended the winder stairs to the kitchen, Birgit said, “Shall we put the tub in the butler’s pantry, like always, Mrs. Smith?”

“Yes. It’s more private.” They entered the kitchen now. “Perhaps you should stay in there with them, Birgit. They might need help. If they seem shy, simply turn your back and allow them some privacy. And, Birgit...”

“Yes’m?”

“When Frankie gets home, would you please tell her what’s happened? We’ll need new clothing for the girls. So, if you would, please go with Frankie to her room and see what skirts, waists, petticoats, and drawers she has to spare.”

“Of course, ma’am. In the meantime, Moira and I will find something of ours to fit them, too.” Birgit lifted her head high. “Ya see, Mrs. Smith, you’ve been so good to us that we don’t need all we have, and we’d be pleased to give some of our things to Mary and Addie.”

Touched, Maggie said, “That’s a lovely, generous thing to do.”

“Well, we’ve got to help each other, don’t we?”

“Yes, Birgit. We do.”

As the young woman set about getting the bath ready by drawing water from the wash boiler, Maggie returned to the sitting area, where Emily was nursing Jarena.

Lifting Faith off the floor, Maggie took a seat on a sofa and gave her daughter her well-loved rag doll. “There you go, sweet Fay. You’ve your dolly and finally your Mama.” She glanced up at Emily. “I think perhaps tomorrow morning we should take the Brooks girls to Madame Louisa’s dry goods shop. We will need material for dresses as well as sundries.”

“We will. Those girls’re wearing rags.” Emily sighed happily. “You know, I can’t help but like those girls, and I realize God’s working every day. Most of the time we silly creatures don’t notice. But today I did.” Emily gazed down at little Jarena, who was staring up at her mother as she nursed. “Jarry, I think you and Natey are getting two big sisters. That is, if Addy and Mary agree.”

“And Nate will be getting two half-grown daughters,” Maggie teased. “Eli can teach him how to protect the girls from the attentions of wayward boys.”

Both women chuckled. Then a dreamy expression crossed Emily’s face. “Maggie, those girls remind me so much of Nate’s nieces. We used to be real close until his brother decided they’d be better off in Canada.” She sighed. “When those girls walked in the door, I knew the Holy Ghost was up to something.” Smiling, she added, “And I know Nate’ll agree.”

“I’m sure he will.” Maggie took a deep, satisfied breath. “I believe Mrs. Greybeal is looking down on us and is very pleased with our new family members.”

#

The Greybeal House men who worked at *The Register* arrived home for supper in their usual boisterous manner. But upon seeing Addie and Mary sitting at the table with Emily, they all screeched to a halt.

Eli thumped in behind the others, late as usual. He grunted irritable at the human knot created by Carson, Edward Caldwell, and Grandpa O’Reilly, and found his way around them. Upon spotting the Brooks sisters, he lifted a dark eyebrow, gave Maggie a pointed look, and nodded at the sitting area.

Maggie followed him to the fireplace.

Eli cleared his throat and said, “Really, Maggie, don’t you think you’re taking that dream about filling up the house just a bit too seriously?”

Maggie wiped her hands on her apron. “Oh! Well... yes... yes, of course.”

Eli guffawed and added, “Just say the word and I’ll put an ad in *The Register* so you can finish the job.”

Nate suddenly strode in the door.

“This should be good,” Eli whispered to his wife.

Nate passed the group from *The Register*, saying, “Evening, all.”

“Evening,” Edward replied.

“Aren’t you gonna say hello to our guests?” Grandpa asked.

Nate paused. “Guests?”

Carson indicated the girls.

“Gentlemen,” Emily said, “I’d like you to meet Addie and Mary Brooks.”

Nate gaped at the girls for a moment. Then he whispered, “Well, I’ll be...”

“These two young ladies were visiting our property this morning,” Maggie explained as she returned to the table. “Bob and Natey discovered them and invited them to be our guests.”

“Well, I’ll be...” Nate repeated. Leaving the group, walked to where Emily and the girls were sitting. “Hello, there, young ladies. I’m Mr. Johnson.”

“Hello,” they replied.

He turned to his wife. “Em, if I didn’t know better, I’d say these girls were my nieces. I’ve been missing them ever since they moved up to Canada.” He nodded at the girls. “Yes, sir... you look so much like them! Seems to me God must’ve known how much I missed them and sent you right to us.”