

Chapter 4: A Surprise Return

20 June 1864

Edward Caldwell was taking a short break from his duties as telegrapher. He always liked to have a cup of tea with Andy the receptionist. This enabled the two young men to exchange stories about Eli's foibles. They respected his knowledge and acumen as an editor, but the portly man also provided them with a consistent source of humor.

They currently were chuckling over how Eli was willing to babysit little Faith. It struck them as funny that as manly and rough-edged as Eli appeared, he could be tender and loving with his baby daughter.

"Yeah," Andy was saying, "but he made Danny bury a shitty diaper out back. I nearly split my sides watching the poor fella gag as he dug the hole."

Edward swallowed his tea in a big gulp. "You need to stop saying things like that when I'm drinking. The tea almost came out my nose."

The front doorbell jangled.

The two looked up. A thin young woman was standing in the entry. She was shorter than Frankie, which is to say she was quite short. Her brown skin was a shade lighter than Edward's and she wore a tired straw hat and a faded dress. One hand was clutching a carpet bag, and the other was holding a piece of paper.

Edward, who had been slouching by the desk, immediately straightened up. "May I help you, Miss?"

"I..." she said.

He frowned slightly behind his wire-rim glasses. "Yes?"

"I..."

Her eyes rolled back, and she fell to the floor.

Alarmed, Edward rushed over, plopped down beside her, and began patting her face. "Miss? Miss? Miss!"

He noticed the slip of paper in her hand and took it up. As he read, his eyes widened. "I think you'd better get Mr. Smith, Andy. And quick!"

Andy pounded out of the room.

Edward got to his feet and fetched the pitcher of water from the reception desk. Returning to the unconscious girl, he sat down beside her once more, pulled a handkerchief from his jacket pocket, dipped it into the pitcher, and began to bathe her overly warm forehead.

"Edward?" It was Eli's voice. "What the hell's going on out here?"

"This young lady came in and swooned."

Eli stood over the prone figure. "Funny. She doesn't look like the swooning type."

"Why do you say that?" Edward gave Eli an accusing glare. "Just because she's colored, doesn't mean -"

Eli held up a hand. "Hold it. I didn't mean it's because she's colored. I mean that any woman might take to fainting if they have lived a pampered life. But this has not been this young lady's fate. Take a gander at her hands. They're rough. That means she's a worker. And I've noticed that workers generally don't have the time or the luxury to swoon."

As Eli looked more closely at the young stranger, a frown creased his forehead. "You know, she looks familiar. But I can't place her."

Edward held the paper up. "Perhaps this will jog your memory."

Eli took the slip from his telegrapher and read the words written on it. His eyebrows arched. "Huh. Don't that beat all."

The young woman moaned.

Edward returned his attention to her. "It's all right, miss. You swooned."

She grimaced. "I never swoon..."

"Told you," Eli said.

The young man ignored his boss in favor of the pretty girl, whose head he was cradling on his lap. "I'm sorry to say, miss, but you did faint." He put the back of a hand to her cheek. "And you're terribly warm. Are you ill?"

"No. It's hot out." She struggled to a sitting position and focused her eyes on Eli. "Hey... I think I know you."

"Do you, young lady? Well, you definitely know my wife." He held the slip of paper out. "This is her handwriting and her name."

A few minutes later, the young woman was sitting in Eli's office and drinking a cup of cold water, which she drained in one long gulp.

"Thanks," she said. "That's real good. I haven't had a tall drink in I don't know how long."

Eli nodded. "Are you hungry?"

"I am. I haven't eaten much either."

Eli turned to Andy. "Go to Miss Amelia's and get a sandwich." He dug into his pocket and deposited some coins in the boy's hand.

Andy turned to the girl. "What kind of sandwich?"

She shrugged.

"Cheese okay?"

"I'll eat anything you bring back."

With a quick nod, Andy was off.

"So..." The portly newspaperman perched himself on the edge of his desk. "How do you know my wife?"

"Camp Fair Oaks. I'm Rosa. Rosa Hamilton. I was one of the laundresses with the Fifteenth."

"Oh, yeah. Frankie's friend. We did meet, after all."

"I thought so. I recognized you, too."

"I'll take you to my wife as soon as you've eaten and rested some."

Edward refilled Rosa's cup with water. "When did you leave Virginia, Miss Hamilton?"

"How'd you know I was there?"

“Frankie’s beau, Patrick was with the Fifteenth’s medical corps.” Edward handed the tin cup to her. “He’s now serving at Mower General Hospital. But we get reports on the regiment’s whereabouts over the wire.”

Rosa took the cup and began to gulp.’

Eli laughed. “Whoa! Slow it down, Miss Hamilton. A little at a time.”

Rosa nodded and set the glass down.

Edward asked, “So you’re no longer with the Fifteenth?”

Rosa dropped her gaze to the floor. “I left after the battle in North Anna.”

“Why?”

“I just didn’t want to do laundry anymore.” She didn’t sound terribly convincing.

Since her eyes were cast down, Edward took the opportunity to glance questioningly at Eli. The older man shook his head and put a finger to his lips.

Edward nodded. Obviously, something bad had happened to their visitor.

Eli changed the subject. “Well, Miss Hamilton, my wife’ll be delighted to see you and so will Frankie.”

“I can’t wait to see them,” Rosa replied. Suddenly she was cheerful once again.

“And my wife no doubt will ask you to stay with us. Please don’t hesitate to accept. Mrs. Smith seems to want to fill the place up these days. Anyone who walks in the door gets free room and board.”

“You mean there’s room at the boarding house?”

“Um... no,” he replied. “That is, there isn’t a boarding house. Not anymore. We had a fire.”

“Oh, no! I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine, Miss Hamilton. Everything worked out for the best. We were able to sojourn for a while in my hometown.” He left out the fact that his hometown was Gettysburg and that part of his family had been there for the battle. “Eventually we returned to Blaineton. Maggie sold her property on the square. Now we live in place that is a rather...” He hesitated, searching for the right word.

“Commodious?” Edward suggested.

“Yes. Thank you. A place that is rather commodious. Although I prefer to think of it as a monstrosity. Just the same, my wife is desirous to stuff it with people. She’ll be glad to see you.”

A breathless Andy reappeared with a cheese sandwich on a plate. “Miss Amelia would like the china back.”

“Of course. It’s hers.” Eli took the plate from him and offered it to Rosa. “Eat up.”

The young woman seized the sandwich and began to wolf it down.

“Whoa!” Eli chuckled. “Slow it up. You don’t want what you’re putting down there coming back up again, do you?”

Mouth full, Rosa began to chew more carefully. “Thank you,” she said around the bread and cheese.

“My pleasure. Rescuing young ladies in distress is what we do here. We’re a full-service newspaper.”

Edward and Andy rolled their eyes at this.

#

Moira, Maggie, and Emily had just finished setting the table for the noon dinner when the group from *The Register* as well as Nate tramped into the kitchen.

“Maggie,” Eli called out. “Look who I found today.”

Maggie turned. When she saw Rosa standing by his side, her eyes went wide with delight. “Why... is that Rosa?”

The young woman smiled, happy to be recognized. “Yes, ma’am.”

Hurrying to her side, Maggie embraced her. “What a pleasure to see you! What brings you to Blaineton?”

Rosa opened her mouth to speak but suddenly found she couldn’t. Against her will, her face scrunched up, her eyes filled, and she began to cry.

“Oh, dear!” Maggie put her arms around the girl and pulled her close.

Sobbing, Rosa buried her face against the other woman’s shoulder.

“Come with me, dear,” Maggie whispered, and escorted her out of the kitchen.

Emily watched them go. “Birgit, we can use some help getting food on the table.” She glanced at her husband. “Nate, why don’t you take Jarry from Birgit?”

Happy to do so, Nate gathered the baby into his arms. “Why, hello there!” The infant stared up at her father’s face. “Yep That’s right. It’s your Pa.” He kissed her forehead. “We two are gonna sit for a bit and exchange news. How’d you like that?” As he settled in a chair near the fireplace, he called, “Natey! Come join us.”

Natey scampered to his father’s side.

Realizing that the kitchen was shorthanded, Eli took his cue from Nate and scooped Faith up. “And what have you been up to today?”

The baby made a grab for his glasses.

“Oh, no, missy! Those are mine!” Eli removed his spectacles and put them safely in his jacket pocket. “Let’s go sit with Uncle Nate, shall we? We want to hear how his day’s been so far.”

#

In the back parlor, Maggie sat on a sofa and let Rosa cry until her tears were exhausted. After a bit, she murmured, “Tell me what happened.”

The young woman lifted her head and wiped her wet face with the back of her hand.

Maggie produced a handkerchief from her sleeve and offered it to her.

“Thank you.” Rosa mopped her cheeks and eyes dry. “I... um... was in North Anna. And there was a battle. We were away from the fighting, but...” She choked back a sob. “There was artillery fire and some of it began hitting near us and...” She buried her face in her hands. “I can’t...”

Maggie put an arm around her shoulders. “Tell me, Rosa. Please. You can do it.”

Rosa took a breath and lifted her head. "And one fell on our camp. It hit the blacksmiths' tent. And my brother..." She began to cry once more.

"He was in the tent," Maggie finished.

Rosa nodded.

"Was he killed?"

Rosa nodded again.

"I'm so sorry."

"They buried him with the others in a big grave. I couldn't take him home and I couldn't stay there. It was too awful. And I lost my stomach for it. I quit the laundresses. I had the piece of paper you'd given me and so I just started walking to Blaineton."

Maggie was stunned. "You *walked* through Virginia?"

Rosa nodded.

"My dear, you could have been captured and enslaved!"

"I walked at night and slept during the day until I got to Maryland. Other colored people helped me along the way." Rosa sighed. "I don't know what to do, Mrs. Smith." She wiped her face with the handkerchief again. "I don't have any people anymore. I don't even have a home to go to."

Maggie put a hand to the young woman's cheek. "My dear Rosa. You *do* have a home. You may stay with us as long as you like."

Her eyes widened. "You really mean that?"

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't."

#

When the two women returned to the kitchen, they found the family just starting dinner. Rosa took a seat on the empty chair beside Edward.

"Are you all right?" he whispered.

"I am. Thanks for asking."

Maggie seated herself. "Eli," she said, "would you please say grace?"

Eli stifled a weary sigh. He had done it just the other day but knew it no good to argue with his wife. Still, he wondered why Carson and Nate only had to pray once a week. Clearly, Maggie wanted him to take the role of the household's spiritual leader. But, really... he was not exactly a paragon of piety.

Despite this, Eli cleared his throat and began: "Dear God, thank you for the friends and family gathered here, for this food, and for those who prepared it. And may our meal strengthen us to do your will in the world. Amen."

Everyone looked up and immediately began to pass dishes filled with cooked greens, fried potatoes, fresh vegetables, biscuits, and fried fish. Eli exhaled in relief. Once again, he had managed not to call down fire and brimstone upon them. Satisfied, he took a biscuit, and buttered it, as a lively chatter began to build around the table.

While everyone else was occupied, Rosa whispered, "Mr. Caldwell, have you noticed? There are *eight* colored people at this table and only *six* white people."

Edward grinned. "That's because Mrs. Smith's daughters aren't here, and her son Bob took his dinner to school today. And, to be completely accurate, three of these white people are *Irish*."

"Still, that would make eight colored and nine white people, six of them American and three Irish." She leaned close. "I don't understand. What kind of a place is this?"

Edward chuckled. "It's Greybeal House, that's what."

Rosa sat back in her chair. After a pause, she said, "Know what?"

"What?"

"I think I'm gonna like living here."

"Are you?" Edward came to attention. "I mean, are you *going* to live here?"

She nodded.

"That's splendid!" He lowered his voice. "If you wish to see the town, Miss Hamilton, I would be happy to give you a tour this evening."

She hesitated, and then smiled. "I'd like that very much, Mr. Caldwell."

#

After dinner, Rosa was shown to her room on the second floor of the old building. The Brennan sisters were situated in the room beside hers, and the Brooks girls were across the way. Maggie told Rosa that the empty room down the hall belonged to Frankie and Lydia.

Relieved to be in a safe place and with a full belly, the young woman lay down on the bed and quickly fell asleep listening to the birds singing outside the open window.

She awoke about an hour and a half later. It was quiet on the floor. Not wanting to be alone, she got up, washed her face at the bowl on the bureau, and dried it with a fresh, sweet-smelling towel.

Then she went to the wardrobe where she had hung her two other dresses. Taking the cleanest one off a peg, Rosa changed, reminding herself to wash her clothing the next morning.

Feeling refreshed, she walked briskly to the winder stairway and bounced into the kitchen, where she found the Brennan and Brooks sisters polishing silver. Faith was seated at the table in her highchair and happily banging a wooden spoon on a pan. Nearby, Natey was playing with his blocks.

"Hello," Birgit said. "Did you have a nice rest?"

"Yes, thank you." She looked around the room and frowned. "Where did Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Smith go?"

Mary held up a candlestick, polished so brightly that nearly shone. "They've gone to visit with Mrs. Smith's sister-in-law."

Addy pointed to the chair beside her. "Have a seat."

"Mrs. Smith said you were with the army," Birgit commented.

Rosa sank onto a chair across the table from the two Irish maids. "In a way. I went to work as a laundress with the New Jersey Fifteenth."

Moira's eyes widened. "What was that like?"

Rosa smiled faintly. "Boring mostly. But sometimes, it was scary. Especially when we were close to the fighting."

"Didn't you stay with the soldiers, then?"

"No! It wouldn't help anyone if we got killed. People like the cooks, the laundresses, the medical people, and the..." Rosa's voice softened. "And the blacksmiths stayed at a camp some distance from the fighting. But one time..." She swallowed hard. "One time, a shell landed near the blacksmiths." She took a breath. "My brother was a blacksmith. He was killed by the shrapnel."

There was silence. The other girls stopped what they were doing.

"I'm sorry, Rosa," Birgit said. "We didn't know."

"I wouldn't expect you to. I only told Mrs. Smith and I know she's not the type to gossip."

Teary-eyed, Addie whispered, "Your brother is as much a hero as any soldier."

"I think so, too." Rosa took a rag from the center of the table. "But I'd rather have him here than a hero." She glanced at Moira. "How about passing me the polish and that platter over there?"

Moira obliged.

Rosa took the oval-shaped silver plate and went to work. After a bit, she said, "This is silver! From the way Frankie talked about her family, I didn't think they had any money at all."

"Oh, they didn't," was Birgit's reply. "Barely a penny to their name when they came back to New Jersey. But once Mr. Smith started his job at the newspaper and Mr. Johnson got his carpentry shop going, things got better. Frankie and Lydia contribute to the household. And some of the others pay rent, like Mr. Carson, Mr. O'Reilly, and Mr. Caldwell."

Rosa's interest was piqued. "Huh. And you all are maids?"

"Well...Moira and I are. They pay us good wages now that they can afford it." Birgit grinned. "They're grand people."

Mary piped up. "Mr. and Mrs. Johnson treat Addie and me like daughters. And we're going to go to school soon,"

Rosa worked polish over the face of the platter. "Think they need any teachers at that school? I always wanted to be a teacher."

Addie got excited. "I'd ask about it, if I were you. I'd like it if you were our teacher. You can be like a big sister."

Birgit laughed. "Rosa's going to have to queue up, I'm afraid. Frankie's the oldest here."

"No. Lydia's the oldest!"

"Ah, but she's all grown, married, and a doctor, as well. So, she doesn't count."

Rosa's eyebrows shot up. "She's a doctor?"

"Oh, aye." Birgit dabbed her rag in the polish. "Works at the hospital, she does."

Rosa was impressed. "I never heard of a woman doctor before."

"Well, now you have."

"Where is Frankie, by the way?"

Moira replied, "At the hospital, too. She helps the Methodist pastor. Does prayer groups and such for the ladies."

"Huh. Seems girls get to do some real good stuff around here." She dabbed her rag into the polish. "Looks like we've got distinct lack of boys in this house, though."

"Well, there is Andy and Danny," Addy offered.

"Bah! Mere children!"

Birgit grinned. "Well, then, tell me, Miss Hamilton, what do you think of our Mr. Caldwell? I noticed him talking to you at dinnertime."

Embarrassed, Rosa focused on her work. "He seems nice enough."

"He's a bright fella, you know," Moira added.

And Mary said, "I think he's handsome."

Rosa kept her eyes on the platter, polishing it until it was as shiny as a mirror.

"He'd make a good friend, if you ask me," Birgit chattered. "Perhaps more than a friend. But, of course, that would have to be a lass older than us."

Mary giggled. "A lass like you, Rosa!"

"Ooo!" Rosa playfully threw her rag at the other girl. "You can stop that talk right now."

The other girls giggled as Mary tossed the rag back at her.

Rosa caught it with one hand. "All he did was ask if he could show me around Blaineton this evening."

The others chortled as Birgit teased, "Aye. That's how it all starts, isn't it?"

"Oh, no!" Rosa grinned. "Ain't nothing gonna start. Trust me."

#

When Frankie returned from the hospital, she spotted a strange girl tending the family's vegetable garden. She stopped in her tracks, frowned, and thought for a moment. Even though the other girl had her back to her, she looked terribly familiar. Then Frankie suddenly realized who that other person looked like. She blinked her eyes to be sure of what she was seeing, and then she said cautiously, "Rosa? Is that you?"

Rosa turned, saw her old friend, and burst into a grin. "Frankie!"

They bolted toward each other and met in a joyous dance that was half-hug and half polka.

"I can't believe it's you," Frankie burred.

"It is! It's me! And you're you! And we're here!"

After a bit they stopped dancing around. Between puffs for air, Frankie said, "Tell me how you got here."

"Your mama gave me her name and the name of your town. So I took a train here using the last of my money." She added with a bit of embarrassment, "I got over-heated on the train and was half-starved when I got off. I didn't know where to start. Then I saw *The Register's* office and decided it might be a good place to ask for directions. So, I went inside. And I fainted in the reception room before I could even say a word!"

“You didn’t!”

“I did! But everyone was so kind. They gave me water and got me a sandwich. Real nice folks there.” She paused. “You know, it was good seeing a colored man all gussied up and working in a newspaper office.”

Frankie laughed. “He came to us all gussied up.”

“He must be well-educated.”

“I think he got most of his education himself. But who cares how he did it, as long as it’s there.” Frankie reached for her friend’s hand again. “Rosa,” she said, voice serious, “why are you talking about Mr. Caldwell and not telling me what brought you here?”

The other young woman bit her lip and, unbidden, tears came to her eyes. “My brother...”

Frankie immediately grasped her meaning. “Oh, no. Oh, Rosa, I’m terribly sorry.”

“Thank you.” Rosa retrieved a handkerchief from her bodice and wiped her eyes. “We were set back from the lines, but stray artillery fire hit the blacksmiths’ encampment.” Deep sorrow etched her face. “Oh, Frankie, it’s terrible. I’m all alone now.”

Frankie brought her friend into her arms. “No. You’re not alone. You have us – all of us here at Greybeal House. Just like I had you, Becky, and Lily at Suds Row.”

“No one can ever replace my brother,” Rosa whispered against her friend’s shoulder.

“We don’t aim to. Just know that you have a home with us here until you sort things out.”

#

The paper had gone to print, so Eli left early. On his way back to the house, he thought he’d stop by the boys’ fort and see how it looked. What he found amazed him. Apparently, they had raided Nate’s shop for used crates and pieces of wood. These they had augmented with piles of rocks and what appeared to be mud chinking¹. It was crude, but ingenious work for two little boys. Eli suspected that Bob was the main engineer, as Natey was still rather young. Pride swelled his heart and he wondered if perhaps Bob might grow up to be an architect.

Natey shouted, “Uncle Eli!”

“Hello, boys,” he replied. “I see your fort is coming along nicely.”

“Come here, Papa,” Bob said. “The Johnnies are coming.”

Ah. He had interrupted a battle.

Eli gimped his way through the leaves littering the little patch of trees and flopped down behind the battlements. He drew his good leg up, while he let his bad leg stay straight.

The boys were aiming sticks as if they were muskets.

¹ Material used to fill spaces in walls or a log cabin.

“Don’t worry,” Bob said. “We’ll protect you. Did you come through enemy lines?”

Eli played along. “Oh, yes. I managed to deliver a message to General Grant.”

Natey peered over the top of their fort. “I see ‘em! They’re coming.”

Bob sprang into action. “Ready, aim, fire!”

Both boys began shouting, “Bang, bang, bang!” Over and over and over. And suddenly something hit Eli in the gut as surely as if he actually were in battle. His memories of gun and artillery fire, the sound of a shell landing near him, and the sensation of being thrown into the air, followed by the impact of hitting the ground – all of it rushed upon him at once with the power of a crashing wave.

Heart pounding, Eli gasped for air and, instinctively seeking cover, scooted against the battlements.

Bob noticed something was wrong. “Papa?”

Eli fought the feelings. *This isn’t real*, he told himself. *It’s your mind. The boys were only shouting.*

“Papa?”

Take a breath. Deep breaths. In through the nose, out through the mouth.

He drew in a long breath to fill his lungs. Then he exhaled as if to push the panic out of his body.

“Papa! What’s wrong?”

The rising fear in his son’s voice brought Eli back. He took one more breath and let it out. “I’m all right, Bobby.”

By now, Natey had stopped shouting, too. Eli could see the boy watching him with large brown eyes. The fear his son was feeling was clear to him.

Eli’s father instinct kicked in. “I’m fine,” he insisted. He was. Kind of.

Eli patted the ground. “Come sit down next to me, Bobby.” Once Bob was beside him, he added, “You, too, Natey, sit down over here.”

Both boys settled on either side. Eli put his arms around them. “I need to tell you fellas something. Remember when Mr. Carson and I were covering the war for our newspaper? Well, I saw battle. I watched people fire muskets and cannon, and I saw people die. And...” He couldn’t tell them about the horror of being in a field hospital, of watching Lydia’s first husband Edgar die, or of searching bodies for identification in the dead tent on the Gettysburg battlefield. They were just boys. Just boys.

Eli continued, “Sometimes sounds or sights make me remember what I saw. It’s like a nightmare, but I don’t see anything – I just get scared.”

“I didn’t mean to make you scared, Papa.” Bob looked as if he might cry.

Eli reassuringly kissed his son’s head. “It’s not your fault.” He kissed Natey’s head, too. “Or yours either, Nathaniel. I never know when it’s going to happen. But I’m getting better.” At least, he prayed he was getting better. His nightmares had decreased. His daytime panics were irregular, but most of the time he found a way to deal with them. “I get these things. They don’t really hurt me. And I’m able to push them away. Understand?”

Although both boys nodded, Bob cautiously asked, "Are you a madman, Papa?"

His son's honesty touched him. There was no beating around the bush, no delicate turns of phrase. Just a heartfelt concern.

"No," Eli said. "I'm not a madman. Men who have been to the war sometimes get this kind of thing. No one quite knows what it is or why it happens, but I hear that talking to someone can help. Or at least it helps me. I talk to Dr. Stanley at the hospital."

"We won't play war around you anymore, Papa," Bob promised. "Just in case."

Eli hugged both boys. "Thank you. That's very considerate." He struggled to his feet. "Well, I think I'll go say hello to Mama."

"We'll come with you." Bob stood and took his hand.

The look in his son's eyes told Eli that Bob was feeling protective. He accepted the boy's concern with a nod. "I'd like that. Let's go."

#

"What are you doing, missy?" Maggie bent and took a painted wooden block out of Faith's hands. "Oh, my! You shouldn't be chewing on this. It's got paint on it."

Deprived of the object of her interest, Faith's face crumpled, and she began to wail.

"Oh, now..." Maggie scooped her angry daughter up. "You needn't do that. It isn't the end of the world."

Birgit promptly appeared at her side. "Perhaps Faith would be happy to chew on this, ma'am. It's yesterday's hard biscuit."

"Thank you." Maggie took the treat and offered it to Faith, who petulantly turned her head away and continued to wail. "Now, now," Maggie cooed. "It's not as bad as all that." She offered the biscuit to her daughter again, this time brushing it against her lips.

"D'you think she'll take it?" Birgit wanted to know.

"She's her father's daughter. She likes food." Maggie brushed the baby's lips with the biscuit once more. "Take it, little one. Go on."

The flavor registered on Faith's tongue. Intrigued, she opened her mouth for more. Maggie let her taste it. The tears quickly stopped, and a pudgy little hand reached for the teething treat. Mollified, Faith began to suck and gnaw on the biscuit.

"There!" Grinning, Maggie glanced at Birgit. "All it took was a little teamwork!"

Birgit laughed. "Oh, aye, two grown women to stop a wee babe crying."

Hearing the kitchen door open, they turned to find Eli and his escorts entering.

"Well! You're home early again," Maggie said.

"We just went to print."

Bob added, "Papa got scared. We were having a battle. But when we saw him, we helped him feel better."

Maggie tipped her head and locked eyes with Eli.

He quickly glanced away as if there was something he needed to see near the fireplace. Then he cleared his throat.

Reading their signals, Birgit reached for the baby. "May I, Mrs. Smith?"

Maggie abruptly shifted focus. "Oh! Yes, of course, Birgit. Thank you."

Gathering Faith up, Birgit turned to the boys. "I'd say it's time for some bread and jam, don't you? And perhaps a cuppa tea with cream? Just enough so it'll whet your appetite, but not spoil it."

Once the maid had led the children away, Maggie and Eli migrated to the fireplace.

"What happened?"

"Oh," he replied with a fatigued sigh, "they were pretending to shoot at the enemy, and it sort of..." He sought the proper phrasing. "It sort of brought on a panic. But I breathed through it, Maggie. I'm fine now."

She continued to gaze deeply into his eyes as if she didn't believe him.

"I'm fine now," Eli insisted, getting a bit testy.

The expression on her face softened.

"I mean it," he added in a gentle voice. "I'm fine." He kissed her tenderly on the cheek.

Maggie managed a small smile. "Eli, if you need to talk to Dr. Stanley –"

"I will talk to him, Maggie," he interrupted. "I promise. But I know what causes the panic and I know how to ease it." He leaned close and whispered in her ear. "I also know I'm not mad." With a wink, he added, "How about partaking of a little tea with the boys, Mrs. Smith?"

Maggie took her husband's arm. "I would enjoy that very much."

#

"Would you like to take a walk to Blaineton with me this evening?" Edward Caldwell asked before supper.

Rosa smiled prettily. "I would, but I only just met you. I think propriety demands I take someone with us, don't you?" She glanced in Frankie's direction. "I believe Miss Blaine over there would be an excellent choice."

Edward heaved a disappointed sigh. "I suppose so."

"Fine. I'll ask her to come with us."

As Rosa flounced off to speak with Frankie, Edward sighed again. He looked like a love-sick puppy.

Having overheard their conversation, Eli stepped over to the young man and said in low tones, "Don't worry. You'll be taking walks with Rosa and only Rosa very soon."

Edward turned a pair of anxious eyes to his editor-in-chief. "How do you know?"

"Just between you and me, I'm pretty sure she likes you."

"Then why does she want a chaperone?"

“Young ladies don’t want to seem overly eager.” Eli glanced at his wife, recalling how long it took them to start courting. “Patience is a virtue when it comes to love, young man. Especially if it’s the right woman.”

Edward’s expression betrayed the depth of his feelings. “I would wait forever for Rosa.”

With a husky laugh, Eli slapped Edward on the back. “Caldwell, you are love-sick – and it looks damn good on you.”