

Chapter 5: Confrontation

21 June 1864

When breakfast was over, and the dishes were cleaned and put away, Maggie and Emily took the Brooks sisters to Madame Louisa's dry goods store to get material for their new dresses. The evening before they had learned that the sisters could neither read nor write, nor could they do sums. Since the girls were in their early teens, getting them educated was crucial and they planned to stop at the Blaineton School to enroll them for the fall session.

Like Emily, Maggie had created a sling out of a shawl to hold her baby daughter close as they walked. Jarena was secured horizontally next to Emily's breasts, while Faith sat on Maggie's hip.

"This will be lovely excursion for all of us," Maggie enthused as they walked along.

Mary added, "I ain't had a new dress in a dog's age!"

Addie was every bit as thrilled but attempted to be a bit more mature. "Whatever you find'll be fine with us, Mrs. Smith."

"Oh, we think you should have some say about that," Emily teased. "After all, you're young ladies now. You're also the ones who will have to wear those dresses."

They visited the school first, having arrived during morning recess. After waving at the young assisting teacher, who was supervising the children, the little party from Greybeal House went inside. They entered the small office where Miss Benny, the school's head teacher, was located and explained that they wished to enroll the Brooks sisters,

Miss Benny's expression fell. "Oh, dear..."

"Is something wrong?" Maggie asked.

Miss Benny glanced at the girls. "Perhaps it would be best if the young ladies waited outside."

Maggie quickly took Faith out of her sling and handed her over to Addie.

"Fine idea, Miss Benny," she said, doing the best to cover the concern in her voice. "We most likely will have tiresome details to discuss. And it's such a fine day I imagine you girls would rather take Faith and play outside with her. Here is her teething ring and..." Maggie fished around in the sling. "Her rag dolly." She held the well-loved doll out.

As soon as the girls left the room, Emily braced herself. "There's a problem, isn't there?"

"Yes. I'm afraid there is."

"Please tell us."

The young schoolteacher sighed. "Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Smith, we have not had a colored child in this school since Matilda Strong's daughter was here over

a year ago. Up until then no colored children ever had been enrolled at this school.”

Maggie frowned. “But there was no problem when we brought Chloe Strong to you.”

“That’s true. We had a different school board then, and they made a special dispensation for Chloe. Under other circumstances, they would have had her attend the colored school on Water Street. But she was exceptionally bright, and the Board felt she would do better here.”

“These girls are no less bright than Chloe,” Maggie argued. “It’s true they can’t read or write, but I believe they will learn in short order.”

Emily interjected, “There’s something more, isn’t there, Miss Benny? I hear it in your voice. It’s not about their ability to learn, is it?”

The head teacher lowered her eyes as a flush crept up her pale cheeks. “Indeed, Mrs. Johnson. As you know, when the war began, many of our colored families moved away. They were fearful due to the...” She paused, seeking the appropriate words. “Due to the unpleasant behavior and attitudes of some of the more vociferous people in our community. These people feared that a flood of freed slaves would inundate our town. I’m sad to say it was their behavior that chased many of our colored citizens away.”

Maggie wasn’t sure what to think. “Why did the other people in town permit such an attitude to prevail?”

“Because they were afraid of those with the most hatred, the most money, the most power, the greater numbers. And perhaps not a few of the town council secretly agreed with the position. I wish it were otherwise. I sincerely do. Last November, we had a school board election and it put three new men in. The current School Board now supports the stance of separate schools for white and colored children.”

“Do you know anything of the colored school?”

“Officially, it no longer exists. The Board felt that since there were so few children, there was no need to spend money on a second school.”

“Then who is teaching the remaining children?”

“Parents, friends. Or so the Board claims.”

Emily harrumphed. “Just another scheme to keep us uneducated and in the gutter!”

“However...” Miss Benny lowered her voice. “I’ve heard it said that a few children still gather for lessons. Rumor has it they meet in a sad little building across from the old barn. I believe only three or four children are enrolled at the moment. And their teacher is paid nothing for her work.”

Maggie exclaimed, “But that is wrong!”

“I agree with you, wholeheartedly. But what am I to do?”

“I’m glad we live outside town,” Emily fumed. “I’ll teach Natey myself if I have to! I will not stand for enforced ignorance!”

Maggie put an arm supportively around her friend. Emily’s body relaxed.

Still holding her friend, Maggie said, “Please understand, Miss Benny, we bear *you* no ill will. It is clear you do not approve of the Board’s decision.”

The schoolteacher straightened her shoulders. "That is correct, Mrs. Smith. But inasmuch as I am employed by the town, and the town levies taxes in support of the school, I must abide by their rules. If I were teaching in a private school, I would welcome Addie and Mary with open arms." She turned to Emily. "Mrs. Johnson, please accept my deepest apologies for the thoughtlessness of others."

Emily gave Miss Benny a dignified nod.

Seconds later, the two women were walking down the little hallway toward the two-room school's front door.

"Well, that's a fine thing," Emily murmured angrily. "What'll we tell the girls?"

Maggie heaved a sigh. "We'll tell them the truth. It's painful, but they must learn to face it."

"Then we'll also teach them to stand strong, if they haven't learned that lesson already."

As they stepped outside, they spotted Addie and Mary sitting on the lawn and laughing as Faith pulled blades of grass out of the earth. The two women strode toward them,

Emily took a breath and called, "Girls!"

Mary leapt to her feet. Addie paused to bend and pick up Faith, who squawked in protest at having her fun interrupted.

"Hush, now," Addie whispered as she returned Faith to her mother's arms.

Cuddling her daughter, Maggie steeled herself for what was to follow.

"I'm afraid the school can't take you right now. They passed a new law while we were away." Emily's amber eyes flashed with anger. "You see, they feel it's wrong for colored children to learn side by side with white children."

The two girls' expressions fell, and Mary became teary-eyed.

"Now, don't you go doing that," Emily gently scolded. "A rule like that is plain wrong. There's nothing we can do about it right now. But we *will* find a way. Don't you fear."

"It's fine, Aunt Emily," Addie said stoically. "We've seen worse than this."

Mary nodded. "Ain't nothing gonna scare us. Ain't nothing gonna *stop* us, neither."

Emily held her arms out. "Come here, babies." She gathered them to her on either side and kissed their faces. "We're gonna make this a better world for you, Natey, and little Jarry." She looked down at the baby sleeping against her breasts. "Don't you worry one bit."

Across the square, Maggie could see the lot where her boarding house once had stood. An imposing three-story building now sat in its place. A sign in front proclaimed: "The Norton Arms Hotel." Something began to burn in her stomach, and yet she wanted to weep, too. "This is not the town we left, Emily."

Then Maggie remembered how, when she and her family had returned to Blaineton earlier in the year, Abigail had said, "There is a very real possibility that you soon may possess a great deal of moral suasion over our little town. And we desperately need someone with a good heart to show us the way in these dark times."

Maggie recalled how she wondered what kind of moral suasion she possibly could possess. And then she remembered the angel's words to Mary: "...with God nothing shall be impossible."¹

Abruptly, she turned to Emily. "Will you please take Addie and Mary to Madame Louisa's shop? I need to talk to someone."

Emily stifled a smile. "Mm, hm. I see that look in your eye, Maggie. Would that person's name start with an 'E'?"

"I need clarity, Emily. Eli's Quaker sensibility lends itself to that."

"Then you go right along. Addie, Mary, Jarena, and I will visit Madam Louisa."

#

"Andy!"

No answer.

Eli bellowed again. "Annnn-drew!!"

The young teen appeared at the door to the editor-in-chief's office. "Yessir?"

Eli was scribbling furiously on a piece of paper. "I've got the editorial ready for Mr. Larsen." He finished with a flourish and held the page out.

Andy took it and squinted at Eli's crabbed penmanship. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Smith, but I'm not sure Mr. Larsen can read this."

"Of course, he can read it. He scarcely *speaks* English, but he knows how to *read* it."

"But, sir, your handwriting..."

With a sigh, Eli signaled for Andy to return the paper. "That bad, huh?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir."

Eli scanned the page. "Well..." he admitted, "it might be a *little* hard to decipher. Tell you what. I'll re-write it."

"Very good, Mr. Smith."

Once Andy had left the office, Eli blew out a long breath, opened one of his desk drawers, and produced a clean page as he muttered, "Poor handwriting... bunkum!" Dipping his pen in the inkwell, Eli glanced at the original page and began writing it over. "I'll show that young pup. Get ready for some *fine* handwriting, Andy, my boy!"

A light knock on the lintel to his office interrupted him.

Eli grumbled, "What now?" And he looked up.

Maggie was standing in the doorway. Faith was propped on her hip.

He burst into a wide grin. "What a pleasant surprise. Come on in, sweetheart." He struggled to his feet, neglecting his cane, and limped over to give her a peck on the cheek. "I didn't know you two would be in town."

"We hadn't planned on it, but we wanted to get material for the Brooks girls' dresses. We also learned that they needed an education."

Eli received his daughter from his wife. Giving Faith a loud kiss on the cheek, he enthused, "You are such a beautiful baby!"

¹ Luke 1:37

Faith gurgled happily and grabbed his nose.

“Elijah,” Maggie blurted, “do you know our school no longer will take colored students?”

He frowned. “No. That’s news to me.” He limped back to his chair, sat down, and arranged Faith on his lap.

Maggie sank onto the chair nearest his desk. “When Emily and I tried to enroll the girls, Miss Benny told us that the School Board recently made such a ruling.”

Faith grabbed at Eli’s cravat and succeeded in loosening it enough to put an end of it in her mouth.

“Would you like us to do a story about the school?”

“No. I would like to speak to the School Board.”

“You sure about that?”

Maggie nodded. “I thought you might know who currently is sitting on it.”

Eli held up a finger. Juggling his daughter on one knee, he reached into the lowest drawer of his desk and rummaged around. Finally, he plopped a page onto the desk’s top. After moving the paper away from Faith’s ever-inquisitive hands, he scanned the list. His dark eyebrows shot up. “Huh!”

“What is it?”

“Abraham Opdyke, Louis Beal, and...” He glanced up at her. “Josiah Norton.”

“Formidable opponents, all,” she said.

“You mean, dedicated bigots.” Eli sat back and offered Faith his right index finger. She grasped it and drew it toward her mouth.

“Eli, don’t! You’ll poison her. You’ve ink all over that finger.”

He pulled the offending digit away and offered the baby his clean pinkie instead. Faith promptly began to suck and gnaw on it.

Satisfied that his baby would be busy for a few moments, Eli continued the conversation. “D’you really want to face that delightful trio of men? I mean, Abraham Opdyke...”

“He did not attack me, Elijah. His son Lemuel did.”

“What about Norton?”

“He doesn’t care for you, but I don’t believe he harbors any ill feelings toward me.”

“Still, he’s Norton.”

She sighed. “Oh, Eli, I *must* do this! It may be that I will change no one’s mind, but at least I’ll have made my opinion known.”

“If that’s the way you feel.” His eyes landed on the paper once more. “According to this list, Norton is the Board’s chairman. I’ve been told he spends a great deal of time at the hotel now that it’s open. He has a personal secretary, too, who most likely is there, regardless of where Norton is. Why don’t you walk over and make an appointment to speak with the Board at their next meeting?”

“Yes. I think shall.”

Eli lifted Faith, turned her to face him, and stood her on her little legs. “Go on, sweetheart. I’ll care for Fay. Your chat shouldn’t take more than a few minutes, anyway.”

Feeling that she now had a plan, Maggie arose. "Thank you, my love."

#

The Norton Arms was an imposing structure made of brick. It took up nearly all of Maggie's old lot, which once had held her boarding house, a backyard with a garden, trees, a chicken coop, and various outbuildings, including the small two-story edifice in which Eli's *Gazette* had been located. Maggie noted that the Norton Arms' broad veranda was lined with white wooden rocking chairs. It was a comfortable place to observe the life of the town – but she knew all too well that other parts of the town's life were well-hidden from casual visitors.

Maggie started climbing the steps, wondering if the first floor was as wonderful as it had been described: a registration desk, offices, a restaurant, and a ballroom. She could only imagine what the rooms' interiors were like. They would certainly be opulent beyond her imagining.

It's all so different, she thought. It's as if my place never existed.

Taking a deep breath, she chased the melancholy thought away, steeled herself, walked across the porch, and entered the hotel.

The reception room was comfortably cool. Its walls were painted a soothing shade of green. Fresh flowers adorned small, round tables scattered here and there. Sofas and chairs, arranged in compact groupings, hosted a few men and women, all of whom were speaking to one another in properly hushed tones.

Maggie wandered in, feeling out of place in her plain dress. She momentarily hesitated in the entry. Then she straightened her spine and strode toward the front desk.

A young man, dressed in a dark brown frock coat, cravat tied in a bow, brown vest with yellow stripes, and fawn-colored pantaloons greeted her. "May I help you, ma'am?"

"Yes," Maggie said. "Would you please direct me to the office of Mr. Norton's secretary?"

"Certainly. He is behind the second door on the left."

"Thank you."

As Maggie prepared to leave, the man added, "You're in luck. We haven't filled the senior maid position yet."

Surprised, she turned. "I'm sorry. I am not here to apply for a position. I'm here to make an appointment with Mr. Norton."

"Oh. Well, whom shall I say is calling?"

"I'm Mrs. Elijah Smith. My husband is editor-in-chief of *The Register*."

The young fellow's face went pale. "Oh, dear! I do beg your pardon, Mrs. Smith. I didn't mean to –"

She waved his apology away. "It's quite all right. I know I'm not dressed for the occasion. This was a last-minute decision on my part."

The receptionist made a move to accompany her.

“Thank you for your offer, but you needn’t do that,” Maggie said. “Please stay at your station. I’m perfectly capable for finding the office and announcing myself.”

A few minutes later, she was standing before another young man in a frock coat.

“I’d like to make an appointment to speak to the Board of Education when it meets next.”

The young fellow gave her a skeptical look. “What business would you like to take up with them?”

“I would like to discuss – ”

She was interrupted by a familiar voice. “Why, is that Mrs. Smith?”

Maggie turned around. “It is, indeed, Mr. Norton.”

The tall, slim man with the brown eyes strode toward her. Maggie dipped a curtsey. He bowed.

“What brings you here?”

“I wish to schedule an appointment with you and the others on the School Board.”

Josiah turned to his secretary. “When is the next meeting, Richard?”

The younger man pulled a green-covered book toward him and flipped through the pages. “July first, sir.”

“Will you make a note that Mrs. Smith will speak with us?”

“Yes, sir.”

Josiah turned to Maggie. “We meet at 6 o’clock in the evening.”

She nodded, graciously. “Thank you, Mr. Norton.”

Before she could leave, he said, “Would you like to see the hotel? I don’t believe you’ve been here before.”

Maggie did a quick calculation: Faith would not need to nurse for another couple of hours and, frankly, she was curious about the new, sumptuous building now standing on her old property. “Yes, thank you. I would like that very much.”

#

It amazed Eli how women simultaneously managed to tend babies amid their many other duties. He was trying to re-write his editorial in more legible handwriting while keeping an eye on Faith, whom he had set on the floor and who now was crawling around his office. He knew this was not good baby care, as she threatened to get into everything that happened to be within grabbing distance of her little hands. However, Eli was confident that he had moved everything away that was possibly dangerous or even mildly questionable within her reach. At the same time, Eli had been a father long enough to know that babies had a way of turning anything into mischief. And so he had one eye on his paper and the other on his daughter.

The door abruptly opened, and Carson entered. “I say, Elijah, would you mind if –”

Upon hearing the familiar voice, Faith began scooting energetically in his direction.

“Stop that baby,” Eli cried as he stumbled to his feet. “She’s trying to make an escape!”

His friend quickly scooped Faith up, but quickly grimaced as he put a hand on the baby’s diapered bottom to support her. “Oh, my dear Aunt Betsy! Elijah, this child is soaking wet. And she stinks!”

“Does she?” Eli pulled open a drawer and retrieved a diaper, something he had learned to keep on hand. Pushing aside the numerous papers littering the surface of his desk, he said, “Lay her down, if you please, Carson.”

Carson deposited the baby and then produced a handkerchief, with which he proceeded to wipe his palm. “This is absolutely disgusting. When will she learn to use the backhouse²?”

Eli laid the baby on her back. “When she’s two or three years old. I think. Anyway, we’ve got a while to go before that happens. She’s only seven months old.”

Carson heaved a sigh. “Babies are such barbarians.”

“Wrong. Barbarians are better behaved.” But as Eli looked back down at Faith’s face, his daughter grinned at him, which melted her father’s heart. Eli tickled the baby’s cheek. “Look at you! You’re Papa’s little barbarian, aren’t you? You should have told me you were wet and had shitty-pants, you little rascal.”

The baby gurgled and waved her arms.

“Where’s your wife?”

Eli glanced up at his friend. “At the hotel.”

Carson frowned. “Why on earth would she be there?”

Eli was untying the tabs on Faith’s diaper. “She’s making an appointment to visit with the School Board. Josiah Norton heads the thing.” He wrinkled his nose as he opened the diaper. “Good God, Fay! You’ve made a prodigious mess!” He pulled a hankie out of his pocket and dampened it with water from the jug that sat on his desk. “Come to think of it, where *is* your mother?” he muttered. “She should have been back an hour ago.”

“Indeed?” That caught Carson’s interest.

Eli grunted, “Yes. Indeed.” He gently began to clean his daughter. Once Faith was respectable again, he wadded the hankie up and put the fresh diaper on her, making sure to tie the tabs securely so she wouldn’t slip out of it.

“What are you going to do with the handkerchief and filthy nappy³?”

Eli shrugged. “If I were home, I’d put them in the bucket to be washed. But we don’t have that amenity here. Guess I’ll ask Danny to take everything outside and bury it.”

“Oh, honestly, Elijah. Again? The boy vomited the last time you forced him to do that.”

² Outhouse. Carson is being polite.

³ British for “diaper.” Carson is such a snob! Plus I’m not completely sure “diaper” was in common usage in the United States at that time.

“Well, I’m not about to carry this piss-soaked, shit-filled rag home in my pocket, am I?”

Carson gave him a piercing look. “Be reasonable, old chap. *Your* baby made that mess, so it’s *your* job to dispose of it.”

Eli sighed. “Fine. You hold Fay while I do the dirty work.”

As he left, Carson heard him mumble, “Where the hell is Maggie, anyway?”

#

Maggie was having tea with Josiah Norton.

The hotel tour had been enlightening. They visited the administrative rooms, two private dining rooms, and an enormous ballroom. Now she was seated in the public dining room. Everything she saw had been well-designed and beautifully decorated – a far cry from her humble boarding house.

Josiah poured a cup of tea for her. “So, what do you think of my little hotel, Mrs. Smith?”

“Little?” She chuckled. “Mr. Norton, it is quite large! Larger than anything we’ve ever had in Blaineton.”

“I assure you it shortly will become well known as such even beyond our town.” He smiled at her. “Our lodgings are every bit as comfortable and well-appointed as the best hotels found in large cities. You and your husband ought to stay here some time.”

“Mr. Norton, we live only a mile or so away. I hardly think we would have need to stay here. But I’ll take your word that the rooms are as you say. And I certainly shall recommend it, should anyone ask.”

Satisfied, Josiah sat back in his chair and observed her, causing Maggie to feel uneasy. She didn’t like what she thought she saw in his eyes.

“Mrs. Smith, about what do you wish to address the School Board?”

She decided to forge ahead, praying, *God, give me the words*. “We have received two girls into our household. They are orphaned and... well, Mrs. Johnson took a liking to them, as have I. But they also are illiterate. When we went to school to register them for the next term, Miss Benny told us that it was impossible. They are colored, you see.”

“That is correct, Mrs. Smith. We do not accept colored children at the Blaineton School.”

Maggie leaned toward him. “But, Mr. Norton, why not?”

“Many of our families have let us know that they do not wish to have their children associating with colored children.”

Maggie frowned. “Why should they feel that way?”

“Oh, come now, Mrs. Smith. I should think that were obvious. Everyone knows the colored race is inferior. They are of lesser intelligence and lower morals. To have them sitting next to white children would only serve to slow our pupils down.”

“I disagree. Many colored people are quite intelligent and well-read. And as for morals, I have met far too many white people who are selfish and badly behaved. I don’t think color enters into morality at all.” Frowning, she sat back

in her chair. "And I must say that this situation strikes me as rather odd. Most of the people in Blaineton claim to be Christian, yet they conveniently ignore Saint Paul's words: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'."

He smiled condescendingly at her. "But Saint Paul says nothing of race."

"Mr. Norton, were not Jews and Greeks considered races back in Saint Paul's day?"

"But he does not make a specific mention of *color*. The majority in town believe that white and black children should not be put together, and with good reason. Remember the story of the children of Ham!"

Maggie had to use all her self-control not to snap at him. She took a sip of tea as she decided what to say next.

"You do know that story, don't you?"

The nearly mocking expression on his face irked her.

"Of course, I know it," she fumed. "Ham was the son who saw his father Noah unclothed. But nowhere does the Bible say that Ham was cursed. Noah cursed Ham's youngest son, *Canaan*. And nowhere does the Bible say that either Ham or Canaan had dark skin." She took another sip of tea. Her hand would have trembled, had she not kept it still by an act of sheer will power.

Maggie continued, "In addition, Mr. Norton, those obscure Bible verses have nothing to do with enslaving people with dark skin. And what evil possibly could come of putting children together? By way of illustration, allow me to say that I share a household with colored people of all ages: Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, Mr. Edward Caldwell, Miss Rosa Hamilton, and now Addie and Mary Brooks. And Mrs. Matilda Strong and her daughter stayed with us for several years before moving to Canada. Neither my household nor my life has been hurt by having these friends and acquaintances. On the contrary, we live in peace and our lives have been all the richer for it."

"The way you live is considered quite eccentric by most of the town. You no doubt are aware of that."

"Please don't be insulting, Mr. Norton. Of course, I know what people think. But let us return to the problem at hand. I am concerned about the current situation. What is happening to the colored children who live on Water Street? Do you know who is educating them?"

"Their families, I presume. There are so few of them, it is not economical to have another school."

"That is a rather cold thing to say, don't you think? Are you indeed dismissing children's futures in favor of saving a bit of money?"

He sat back in his chair and gazed at her in a manner that was common to haughty men who held the opinion that women were stupid. "Mrs. Smith, you are a woman, and naturally you have a woman's heart. However, you lack the rational capabilities of a man. These greater issues are beyond your comprehension. You should be content with keeping house."

Speechless and indignant, Maggie blinked at him. There was a pause as she thought what to do next. Tearing his head off simply would not do. They were

in a restaurant and it was too public – not to mention far too messy. The sheer audacity of her thought amused her momentarily.

But Maggie’s humor faded away as she returned to herself and realized that engaging Josiah Norton any further would get her nowhere.

Shake the dust off your feet.

That was a good Bible verse, and excellent advice from Jesus. If you’re not welcomed or listened to, then move on.

Strengthened, Maggie folded her napkin and placed it on her plate. “I thank you for your hospitality, Mr. Norton. However, I am afraid I must leave. My husband is watching our baby and it is time I returned to ‘keeping house,’ as you say.”

She stood, but before she could walk away, Josiah said, “I don’t believe you need to address the School Board now, do you, Mrs. Smith?”

Turning, Maggie met his eyes. “No?”

“Now that you know how things are, I mean.”

She barely could contain her fury. “Yes, I know exactly how things are. Thank you for the tea.”

Mustering all the dignity she could, Maggie marched out of the hotel.

#

His editorial now safely in the hands of Mr. Larsen, Eli was free to play peek-a-boo with his daughter. However, the game abruptly ended when Maggie swept into his office. Eli looked up a smile on his face, to greet her. Then he froze. The angry expression on his wife’s face was like none he had ever seen.

Maggie’s countenance reminded Eli of the time she had vented her fury at him because he had left her behind to travel as a war correspondent. But the rage on her face then had been mingled with deep hurt. They had stopped communicating honestly as husband and wife. Worse, yet, Maggie had faced an invasion, a battle, and a personal attack on her own, while he been off chasing a dream. In effect, he had abandoned her both physically and emotionally.

To his relief, Eli realized that the expression on her face today had not been caused by anything he had done. He was, in fact, being a good father and a loving husband. So, what else would cause his wife to look like a thundercloud?

“What’s wrong?” he stammered.

“Josiah Norton, that’s what,” she hissed.

Eli struggled to his feet with Faith in tow. “Excuse me. I... the baby... she needs... excuse me...”

Daughter hanging from one arm, he grabbed his cane and limped his way out and across the hall to Carson’s office.

Carson was working on an article and, annoyed at the interruption, glared at him.

“Here.” Eli deposited Faith onto his lap. “Take the baby.”

“What on earth for?”

“Just take the baby!”

“Elijah, for pity’s sake!”

Eli gestured toward his office. "My wife is furious! Something about Norton. Just watch the baby, please!"

Carson grunted, but assented.

In seconds, Eli was back in his office. Maggie was standing with her back to him. Shutting the door, he took a deep breath.

"All right, Maggie. What's that son of a bitch done now?"

"Elijah!" Maggie whirled about. "Language, please."

"Language, my ass! What's he done? Did he lay a hand on you? 'Cause if he did, so help me God, I'm gonna get a gun and –"

"Don't be ridiculous," Maggie interrupted. "You're a pacifist."

"So? I'll make an exception."

"Well, you needn't worry. He didn't touch me. All he did was insult me by suggesting I keep my nose out of the School Board's business and keep it modestly inside the house like a good wife."

Then it dawned on Maggie that she had better moderate her tone. It was obvious that her agitation and outrage were causing Eli to react in anger. And she neither wanted nor needed that.

"I was making the appointment with the secretary when Mr. Norton came in," she said. "We set a date and then Mr. Norton invited me on a tour of the hotel."

"Tour of the hotel? Why, that no-account cad!"

Maggie rolled her eyes. "I accepted, Eli. And he did nothing untoward to me, I promise. Then, after the tour, he invited me to have tea with him in the public dining room."

"You had tea with him??" he half-screamed.

"In the *public* dining room," she repeated. "Eli, please let me tell my story and save your outrage for the facts."

He grunted and waved at her to continue.

"The white people of this town do not wish to have their children associating with colored children, and the men on the School Board agree with them."

"What a load of coots!⁴"

"Yes, perhaps so. And now there is no school for colored children because, as Mr. Norton explained, it would be a waste of money to have a separate building and a teacher for so few children."

"Who the hell's supposed to teach them, then?"

"Their parents."

"Damn!"

"Elijah, you simply must get your language under control."

He rolled his eyes. "I'll try."

"Please do more than try."

Eli sent a prayer heavenward. *God, seal my lips for the next few minutes.*

Maggie took a deep breath. "On the other hand, perhaps fighting the School Board isn't the right approach, given the national and local mood."

⁴ Idiots.

Abruptly, she realized how tired she felt. Her body sagged. “Perhaps I went through all that for naught.”

Now Eli knew exactly what to do. He opened his arms. “Come here, my love.”

She walked into his embrace.

He held her with such tenderness that her pounding heart slowed and her muscles relaxed. For all his foibles Eli Smith was a good man and he loved her.

“I’ll support whatever you decide to do,” he whispered.

Maggie relaxed further, resting her head on his shoulder. “Thank you. I love you so.”

“I love you, too.” He nuzzled his face against the side of her head. “What are you going to do about the Brooks sisters?”

She looked up and gazed into his eyes. “I suppose we must teach them ourselves, mustn’t we?”

“I suppose you must.” Eli brushed his lips over hers. “And I suppose you shall.”

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Maggie’s Journal, 21 June 1864

Oh, Journal! How disappointed and angry I am! I had hoped that my feelings would abate after feeding dear little Faith and rocking her to sleep; but after holding my sleeping child and smelling her sweet scent, my heart still remains in turmoil. Thus, I am pouring it all into your pages.

I am sure that in years hence, I shall look back and shake my head at my foolishness. However, I must vent now and vent I shall.

Here is my difficulty: I simply do not understand how someone can look at another person and determine who they are and what they can be based upon the color of their skin.

Surely, God does not see us that way. The Bible says that God sees us only as His children. I have searched the Scriptures and marked a few of passages that clearly say this. In particular, 1 Samuel 16. When the prophet Samuel was choosing a king from among Jesse’s sons, the Lord told him not to choose based on appearance or height. Samuel was told that “the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”⁵ God then had the prophet pass by the tall, strong brothers and choose instead the youngest brother, David. A

There are many other passages with similar message. This, however, is the one that speaks to me tonight. If God makes determinations based

⁵ [1 Samuel 16:7](#)

upon what is in one's heart and not upon one's appearance, then should we not do the same?

How can Mr. Norton, who calls himself a Christian, spew those dreadful lies about colored people? People with dark skin are not innately stupid or immoral. And they certainly are not cursed by God.

They are in fact no different than white people: some are intelligent, some are not; some are virtuous, some lie and steal. Color matters not. What matters is the heart. What matters, too, is that we are all God's beloved children.

I know I need to forgive Josiah Norton, Journal, but it will be difficult. I have managed to let go of my anger over what he did to the Western New Jersey Hospital for the Insane and for the way his foolish behavior precipitated Eli's stabbing injury.

But this! To know that he embraces the same nonsense as so many others - that he hates people based only on their appearance! Oh, I had hoped better of him. And I am disappointed.

Perhaps I should not have hoped anything at all. Just because a man has money and appears successful and can speak well does not mean his heart is in the right place. For those are all outward appearances. As our Lord said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits."⁶

What is in our hearts directs what we produce. And it grieves me to think that all Mr. Norton has produced is misery, money, and a luxurious hotel. I don't like feeling that way about him and his fruit. Further, I am ashamed to say that I would be quite content if I never saw Mr. Norton again.

Dear, merciful God - help me to forgive him. Help me release my resentment and live free again.

⁶ Matthew 7:15-16a.