

"I'm so confused," Frankie Blaine sighed as she and her pastor, Rev. George Lowry, sat at a table at Miss Amelia's Tea Shop. It was bad enough that there was a war and her beau, Patrick McCoy, was serving as a medical assistant in the Sixth Corps. She worried about Patrick every day. Her stepfather was Editor-in-Chief of the town's newspaper and had told her that the Sixth Corps now was fighting in the Virginia Wilderness. Although Patrick worked in a field hospital rather than with the ambulance corps, she still fretted. After all, he had suffered a minor wound once already. She was confused about how she felt: worried one day, angry the next, hopeful two days later...

But the new thing. This was even more perplexing.

George Lowry put a lump of sugar into his tea and stirred it around. The spoon cheerfully clinked against the sides of the cup. "I'm here to listen. What is confusing you?"

Frankie lifted her head, green eyes meeting his blue. "I want to be a minister."

George stopped stirring. "You do?"

"But I know I can't be ordained."

He sighed. "Well, no, not in the Methodist Episcopal Church."

Frankie flopped back in her chair. "There aren't many other churches that ordain women and I can't see myself going to another denomination."

"Ah."

She frowned. "I wish you'd say something a bit more helpful."

George laughed. "I wish I could, too."

Frankie offered up an apologetic smile.

"I know you want clear direction, and I wish I had an answer for you." Picking up the plate between them, he offered her a sugar cookie, which Frankie eagerly took. He liked the eighteen-year-old redhead. She was outspoken, earnest, and good-hearted. But what to say to a young woman who wanted to lead a congregation? "Have you spoken to anyone in your family about your interest?"

She nodded. "My stepfather."

"What did he say?"

"He said go out and do it." Rolling her eyes, Frankie added cream to her tea. "That's hardly any help. I mean, I know he loves me, but..." She heaved a sigh. "For heaven's sake, Mr. Lowry, he used to be a Quaker! Women may speak freely in Meeting, so his answer is to let the Spirit guide me. The trouble is the Spirit doesn't write the rules for either the Methodist Episcopal Church or its seminaries."

"More's the pity." George took a sugar cookie for himself. "If people really listened more carefully perhaps they'd hear the Spirit saying something different."

"Yes!" Frankie's mouth was full of cookie, but she didn't care if it was impolite to speak. "You said you knew women who'd be good pastors."

"I did." He smiled directly at her. "I *do*."

Shocked, she swallowed the cookie in a huge gulp. When she recovered, she stammered, "You mean me?"

George nodded.

Now she was frustrated. Someone beside her stepfather had recognized her call. How could she answer it? She would face a difficult, if not impossible task. And yet, she couldn't ignore it any longer. "But how can I become a minister when no one will let me?"

"Go west."

"West?"

"Yes. Things are freer out there. Although, I feel compelled to add that they also are much wilder and dangerous."

Frankie took a moment to mull his words over. Going west would mean leaving her family and she loved her family. How would she be able to live without them? And did going west mean going with Patrick or – and this was a troubling idea – going all by herself? She didn't know many women who had struck out on their own, except for woman soldier and the regimental laundresses she had met in the Fifteenth New Jersey Volunteer regiment. "What would be the benefit of my going west?"

"Well, the further west you go, the less civilization there is. That means they obviously need preachers."

"And I would be ordained out there."

George smiled gently at her. "I didn't say anything about ordination, Miss Blaine. I said you could be a minister."

"You mean, I could go out there and just start a church?"

"Why not?"

"Uh... well... I don't know if it's ever been done. Do you?"

He shook his head, no.

"But you still think I ought to do it."

"Oh, yes."

What he was proposing was a radical – her stepfather was sure to applaud it and her mother discourage it. At least, it seemed likely to Frankie that her mother would not approve. Maggie Blaine Smith was Methodist through and through. To have her daughter become a preacher unconnected to a Methodist Episcopal Church Conference would surely disturb her.

Frankie narrowed her eyes at George and smiled wryly. "Does the Bishop of the Newark Conference know you're running around saying things like that to impressionable young women?"

George chuckled and took a sip of tea. "Of course not. I keep my... revolutionary side to myself."

"I don't know about your suggestion," Frankie demurred. "I mean, the west... I just don't know."

George smiled gently. "You don't know what? Don't know how to get there, don't know whether you want to go, or don't know how to gather a congregation?"

"I just *don't know*." She blew out a heavy breath. "I suppose I must pray about it before I do another thing."

"That is exactly what you need to do."

“Thank you for your help, Mr. Lowry.” Giving him a naughty smile, she added, “Now please tell *me* something. How are you and Miss Lenora Taub getting along?”

Her words caused George’s face to go scarlet all the way to his blond hairline.

Frankie picked up her cup of tea. “I thought as much. I daresay a wedding is in your future!”

“Miss Blaine!” Chuckling nervously, George whispered, “Do please keep your voice down.”

“But I’m curious,” she whispered back. “Are you thinking of asking her to marry you?”

“Miss Taub and I are getting along quite well but as for a wedding…” He paused, thought a moment, and then grinned. “I’m afraid you’re just going to have to wait and see like everyone else!”

Frankie grinned saucily. “But I so dislike waiting!”

“As do I!”

“Then ask her,” she challenged.

“Only if you seriously consider my suggestion about the west.”

Frankie reached out across the table. “Deal! Shake.”

George met her hand and they shook heartily – much to the confusion of the others in the tea shop.