

CHAPTER ONE

From Maggie's Journal, 16 April 1861

The changes that have occurred over the past year for my country and my family have been great. In the spring of 1860, I would not have been able, nor would have dared, to imagine that which has transpired.

I was so delighted when the Presiding Elder came to me and asked if my boarding house could find a room for the new minister. At last, I thought, perhaps the people of Blaineton will afford me and my establishment some respect. This past year has taught me some hard lessons, indeed.

It was a blue-skied, warm day on the 13th of April. Maggie would have liked to have had her house composed and organized. But she had been given a scant four days to prepare for their new boarder, and Grandpa O'Reilly had caught a cold and someone needed to care for him. Maggie had given this job to her eldest daughter, Lydia, so now she lacked an extra pair of hands. The eighteen-year old had just returned to the kitchen to report that Grandpa was feeling much better and that she was going to make a pot of tea for her patient.

In the confines of the kitchen, Lydia, Maggie, and Emily the cook danced deftly around one another: Lydia pouring steaming water into a teapot, Emily energetically mixing a bowl of butter, powdered sugar, and milk, Maggie mixing biscuits. The rhythm of their work was interrupted by a loud clomping on the stairs. The women braced themselves as Frankie, Maggie's youngest daughter burst into the kitchen, declaring, "I hate corsets and crinolines!"

Lydia calmly set the teapot on a tray. She turned, smiled indulgently and tugged the material around the fourteen-year-old's waist so that her dress hung straight. "Don't be such a silly goose," she gently scolded, tucking wisps of unruly red hair behind her sister's ear. "You're fourteen. You're not a little girl anymore. This is what women wear. Besides, you want to look good for Mr. Madison, don't you?"

Frankie sniffed with no small amount of disdain.

Maggie looked up from kneading. "And, Frankie, what you want at this time is of no real importance. Mr. Madison is our new minister. He deserves our respect."

But Frankie continued to pout. "I don't know why he has to stay here. No one seems to like our place, anyway."

Maggie had to remind herself that her daughter was not yet an adult. She took a deep breath and prayed for patience. "What others think of us also is of no real importance." How she wished that were true! "We live as we do because it is right. Our boarders have nowhere else to go and have become our friends. I believe everyone is deserving of respect. As for Mr. Madison, the other rooming houses are full, so he too has nowhere else to go. I for one am pleased that our Presiding Elder has confidence that we will provide Mr. Madison with a pleasant and comfortable chamber."

Emily Johnson stopped mixing the icing and turned to fetch the molasses cake. "I just wish they'd given us more time. We only finished getting the room ready yesterday. I scrubbed myself last night 'til I was raw. Nate says I still have paint in my hair!"

Maggie laughed. "He was teasing you. Your hair is clean as usual."

"Mm, hm. And just as nappy."

"We are as God made us," Frankie said, doing her best imitation of her mother.

Maggie ignored her daughter and opened a cupboard to retrieve her best china plates. “I know we were asked at the last moment, Emily. But surely the African Methodist Episcopal Church does much the same thing.” She passed the stack of plates to Frankie, who frowned, grunted, and galumphed out of the kitchen to set the dining table. “The Newark Annual Conference meets, new appointments are announced, and the ministers move. It all happens within the space of a few days.”

“My church does the same,” Emily responded. “But I still believe that it works only if you like surprises every couple of years. And I still don’t know why they asked us to board your new minister. I’m sure your brother would’ve been only too happy to give Mr. Madison a room. His place is certainly big enough.”

“And I’m sure Samuel would have liked that.” Maggie felt the back of her neck tense up at the mention of her brother’s name. “But he’s a prominent member of the congregation. Perhaps the Presiding Elder is afraid that living in such close quarters would subject a minister to undue pressure and influence. Our little rooming house is neither powerful nor prominent. Thus,” she added, with a wry smile, “all we have to give is a clean room and good food.”

Frankie, who had returned to the kitchen, awkwardly arranged her hoops and plopped down on a chair. “Besides, we can use the money.”

“Frankie!” the other women chorused.

She gave them a defiant look. “Well, we *could*.”

Maggie could feel the exasperation rising again. “Yes, well, it isn’t proper to talk about such things.”

“Why not? It’s the truth.”

In their hearts both women knew that Frankie was right. She was completely improper, but right.

Frankie poked a finger into Emily's bowl of white frosting. "What do you think Mr. Madison will make of the boarders?"

Emily promptly slapped her on the wrist. "He's a minister. He's probably seen it all."

"Yes," Frankie said, licking her finger, "but has he lived with it?"

Once again, the girl was right. While Maggie ran what she considered to be a proper rooming house, it did have an eccentric collection of boarders. She knew all too well what people said about her. She took in strays. She opened her doors a bit too freely than was proper. She flew in the face of convention.

Maggie took a deep breath. "If I can see that each person is a child of God, then surely a minister can. I cannot turn someone away just because they aren't of my class or color."

"Mm," Emily commented thoughtfully, "I hope he can see past class and color."

The boarding house on Second Street was large. Located on Blaineton Square, it had originally been a two-story home built on the standard plan during the federal era – front and back parlor, kitchen and dining room separated by a hallway and stairs. The second floor accommodated four bedrooms. But somewhere in the 1840s, an expansion had been built to allow for six more bedrooms, obviously for children and servants. The newer wing was accessible through a door in the kitchen. Maggie and her girls had occupied the two large downstairs rooms. Emily and her husband Nate were ensconced on the second floor. Maggie provided Emily with free room and board, as well as with a small salary for doing the cooking and helping with other housekeeping chores. Nate ran a carpenter shop in the small community of black residents located on Water Street, but lent a hand when things needed to be repaired. At

Maggie's insistence, Nate and Emily had two of the upstairs rooms, one for sleeping and one for sitting. This housing arrangement was convenient to all, and over the years the Johnson and Blaine families had become close friends.

"When the town finds out the girls have moved upstairs near our room, tongues will be wagging," Emily warned. "You know how people are."

"But where else should I put them?" Maggie countered. "I cannot fit the both of them in my room. And their old room in the front is pleasant and quiet – perfect for a clergyman. The move is practical. I don't care what the town thinks. And if our new pastor doesn't like you and Nate, well, then he can just leave." Personal experience had taught Maggie some hard lessons, the primary one being that people could be amazingly cruel to one another. Clergyman or not, the minister was sure to come with his own set of prejudices, and she was ready. "At any rate, I won't stand for bigotry. Not in my house."

Lydia chuckled, "Oh, now, that would certainly make us the talk of the town if Mr. Madison left our rooming house. We would then have to leave the *church!*"

"Good!" Frankie chirped. "Church is dull."

Maggie stared her younger girl down. "Dull or not, it's good for you."

"Just like medicine," she muttered. "Mama, why does medicine have to taste bad to do good? I should like to have a more lively religion. We could go to Emily and Nate's church!"

"And that would start the town talking, too!" Emily chuckled.

Frankie's hazel eyes widened. "Or we could just *not go*, like Mr. Smith!"

On cue, the door to the back porch creaked opened. As if he knew that he was about to become the next topic of conversation, Elijah Smith, owner and editor of the Blaineton *Gazette* ambled in.

“Mr. Smith!” Frankie cried. “Tell Mama that it’s not necessary to go to church.”

He laughed, brown eyes sparkling behind his wire-rim glasses. “No, thank you! Your mother and I have had plenty of spirited discussions about *that* already.”

Maggie flashed a smile at Eli. His suit was rumpled, but he had made the attempt to dress for dinner and that pleased her. He had even taken the time to shave. Unlike many men, he bucked fashion and sported neither beard nor mustache.

Frankie got to her feet and examined his face. “You cut yourself,” she commented, with a critical frown. “On the chin.”

“Let’s see *you* try shaving with a straight razor, my dear,” he retorted.

“Besides which, you’re being rude again, Frankie.” Maggie turned to Eli. “You look quite nice, Mr. Smith.”

He grinned and stuffed his hands into his pockets. “Yes, well, just wanted to get ready for the new minister.”

Frankie rolled her eyes. “Argh! That’s all we ever talk about!”

“Yes, and you’d just better remember your manners when he gets here,” Emily warned.

The girl whirled about. “Of course, I will! I’m not a child.” Once again, she moved to dip a finger into the bowl of frosting.

Quick as lightning, Emily’s hand shot out and gave the girl another smack on the wrist. “If you want this cake, girl, then you’ll keep your fingers out of my icing.”

Eli chuckled. He was used to the family’s feeble attempts to rein in Frankie’s ill-mannered exuberance. He took a hearty – and appreciative – sniff of the kitchen’s many aromas.

“Mm. Is that beef stew?”

“Mm, hm,” Emily replied.

“You, Mrs. Johnson, are a genius in the kitchen.”

She smiled. “Thank you. But this is Maggie’s doing. She made that stew.”

“Well, then, I really *am* looking forward to the meal.”

Maggie felt her cheeks flush.

Eli cleared his throat, and somewhat clumsily added, “You know, *you* look rather nice, too. In fact, you look most – becoming in green.”

Maggie could almost feel the knowing smile spreading across Emily’s face. Everyone seemed to know what was going on – she and Eli had been behaving as if they were moonstruck for too many months. And yet neither had addressed the issue with the other.

Maggie worked hard to sound casual. “By the way, thank you for offering to fetch the new minister at the station.”

“Oh, it is nothing. My pleasure.”

Lydia and Frankie watched the exchange with complete amusement, while Maggie desperately wished she could turn a color other than pink. It was all so unbecoming. A woman of nine and thirty should have better control of herself. The trouble was her composure of late had completely disappeared.

“Still,” she managed to say, “you didn’t have to rent the horse and carriage. I could have done it. You must allow me to pay you.”

“Oh, no, I wouldn’t think of it. Anyway, you’re busy with the house. And I’m always happy to help out, Mrs. Blaine. You know that. And, well, I had the time.”

Frankie smiled slyly. “Of course you did, Mr. Smith. These days, when it comes to Mama, you *always* have more than enough time.”

Eli began to look like a rat caught in an awkward trap. Fortunately, Emily came to his rescue by raising her spatula and waving it at Frankie. “Scat, you little trouble maker!”

Chortling, Frankie danced out of the kitchen.

The room was suddenly very warm and Maggie’s corset way too tight. “I apologize for her behavior, Mr. Smith.”

“Oh, no,” He stammered. “It’s all right. Frankie’s a young girl. And she’s probably noticed that we’re – um – friends.”

“We’ve *all* noticed that you and Mama are – um – friends, Mr. Smith,” Lydia teased. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go see to Frankie and make sure she’s civilized for the new minister.”

As the eighteen-year-old left the room, Maggie heaved a sigh. “Again, I’m so sorry.”

“No, no. Nothing to be sorry about.” But Eli was still stammering. “I mean, they’re young, aren’t they? They say things.” He took a breath, noticed Emily’s cake on the table, and eagerly changed the subject. “Oh, hey, is that cake for tonight?”

No one could ever claim that Eli Smith disliked food. He was too portly for that. More friendly-looking than handsome, he had an easy-going manner that hid a deeper side – a seriousness and passion for justice. But right now he focused – more than a bit gratefully – on the cake.

Emily glared at him. “Yes. The cake is for tonight. *Tonight*. Understand?”

“Completely. Just curious.” He glanced toward the hallway, and then lowered his voice. “Have our visitors left?”

“Mm, hm,” Emily replied as her husband Nate, arms loaded with wood for the stove, came in the back door. “We sent them off to the next stop this morning,”

“Two brothers,” Maggie added. “Do you know that one of them had his wife and children sold off? He doesn’t even know where they are. It breaks my heart no matter how many times I hear stories like that. What’s the world coming to?”

Eli sighed. “War, I’m afraid.”

“There’s got to be another way to resolve this.”

“I don’t think there is. The situation’s too far gone. It’s been too far gone for years. It’s just a matter of time now. If Mr. Lincoln gets elected, it’s clear the South will secede. And if the South secedes, there’s going to be war.”

Nate dusted his hands. “Well, if there’s a war, I’m joining up. If they’ll let me.”

“Think that’s a good idea?” Eli asked. “What if you end up getting taken prisoner? You could lose your freedom.”

“I’d risk it.” His black eyes were fierce. “Those folk down South are my brothers and sisters. My heart won’t let me stay out of this fight.”

Emily quietly kept her eyes on her work. Her hand moved deliberately from the bowl to the cake, methodically spreading the icing in circles, then going back for more. Maggie also was quiet, turning her attention to the stew.

From Maggie’s Journal, 13 April 1860

Talk of secession and war is steadily increasing. The men bat the idea about with a strange and serious eagerness that is most unsettling. It is as if they cannot wait to get a rifle in their hands and commence killing one another.

They say the dispute is over states rights. The South claims it should be able to keep its traditions and practices, with no interference from Washington. But in my heart I know the

truth. Slavery is wicked, and the very idea that this inhumane institution will spread if unchecked grieves me. So I am an abolitionist. I cannot help but be so. My dear friends are colored. I fear every time I hear there is a bounty hunter in the area. Emily was smuggled out of Maryland when she was an infant. She bears the imprint of the wickedness of slavery: her skin is lighter than Nate's, and her eyes are amber, rather than deep brown. I fear for her even now, should her former owner or his successors wish to send bounty hunters to reclaim her.

Shall I tell you a secret, dear Journal? I am breaking the law. Nate and Emily serve the Underground Railroad. When they shared this with Eli and me one night four months ago, we did the sensible thing – we joined them in their endeavor. When word comes through, Eli hangs a lantern by his print shop. Nate shepherds the escaped slaves through the darkness and into the shop. We have constructed a hiding place for them. We feed them, clothe them, and then send them on their way. With God's grace they will make it to Canada.

If our conspiracy is uncovered there will be serious repercussions. The Fugitive Slave Act demands a \$1,000 fine, which none of us can pay, and six months imprisonment. There will be no trial, nor will we have any lawyers. There simply will be a sentence – and an unpleasant one, at that. But we do what we must. Even more importantly, we do what is right.

I do not mind fighting this battle. But all the talk about going to war, that is something else. No matter how noble and just one believes a war might be, every woman cringes at the thought of sending the men in her life into battle. I simply do not understand the male need to fight. Why must talking consistently disintegrate into arguing and arguing into violence? It seems the men actually *want* to fight.

“Would *you* go?” Nate asked Eli. “To war?”

Eli glanced down at his pot belly. “Look at me, Nate. Do I look like a soldier? Anyway, the Quaker in me won’t permit it. So, no – no fighting for me. If I do anything, I’ll cover the war as a correspondent. Folks need to know what’s going on.”

Nate’s gaze did not waver. “War correspondents get killed, too.”

“Yes, I know,” Eli murmured.

Maggie found herself studying Emily’s hand as she frosted the cake. She wondered why women felt as if they had to be silent when men spoke of war. She wondered why women listened to men talk of dying in battle. Why was war *their* business only? Women were the ones left behind and bereaved. Women were the ones who had to struggle on. Why, Maggie asked herself, do we keep silent?

After an uneasy pause, Eli took a deep breath. “Look, I’d better go to the station. The timetable said the train is due in from Morristown in fifteen minutes.” He turned to leave.

Impulsively, Maggie called, “Mr. Smith!”

He looked over his shoulder.

She realized what she was doing. She did not want him to leave, not after all that talk of war and death. Feeling completely awkward, she blurted, “Thank you, once again.”

“You’re welcome, Mrs. Blaine.”

Their clumsy exchanges complete, he left.

“Mm, hm,” Emily said. “That’s right, Maggie. Thank him. Nice man like that should settle down. And you know what I mean.”

Maggie blushed, “Emily, please . . .” She hurried to the range and pretended to busy herself with the stew.

That did not stop Emily. “Mm, hm. That’s the trouble with you white folks. You spend too much time being polite to each other. You’ve known Mr. Smith for years, and finally – *finally* the both of you have started paying attention to each other – about time, too, if you ask me. But what do you go and do? You stammer and stutter and dance around each other like you’re afraid or something. Now, me – I saw a good, hard-working man and I got him. Reliable, strong, and handsome to boot. Ain’t I a lucky gal?”

Nate plopped down in a chair. “I think so. And I’m a lucky man!”

“That’s right. I’m the best woman you’ll ever have. I just hope I’m teaching *her* a thing of two.”

Nate made a move to say something to Maggie, but she stopped him with a stern look.

He held up his hands in self-defense. “Don’t look at me. I just brought in the wood.”

And Emily said, “Mm, hm.”

Fortunately, Maggie remembered that she still had to dust the new minister’s room one more time. Relieved, she hurried off to her task. A short while later, as she was tidying up the front parlor, Maggie heard a horse and carriage coming up Second Street. Looking quickly out the window, she saw Eli pulling up in front of the rooming house. A man in a black suit was seated on the bench next to him. Maggie hurried removed her apron and scurried to the kitchen to let Emily know that their new border had arrived.

From Maggie’s Journal, 13 April 1860

I have seen a great many ministers in my time, but I did not expect this. The Reverend Mr. Jeremiah Madison is handsome. No. Not merely handsome. He is beautiful, but in the way that men are beautiful – young, tall and lithe, chestnut hair glittering in the late afternoon sun.

His voice is a pleasant tenor. He has a strong, yet fine-featured face set off by a neat mustache and striking blue eyes. I must confess that his gaze is mesmerizing – but not nearly to the degree that Lydia and Frankie were mesmerized. They seemed to be struck immobile, gaping rather stupidly at our new boarder.

I briefly introduced myself to our new arrival. He smiled and he thrust out his hand toward me. Now that was a surprise. Genteel men usually bow to women, and genteel women usually curtsy back. But this man wanted to shake hands with me as if I were another man. It is contrary to all social convention. But, my dear journal, I liked it very much. We met as equals. His grip was firm and his palm warm and dry. I do believe that I will like Mr. Madison.

Jeremiah Madison stepped into the hallway. He was carrying a carpet bag in one hand and a larger case in the other. As Maggie introduced her two daughters – who had been rendered speechless by the minister’s appearance – she heard a loud grunt from outside. Peering around Jeremiah, she spotted Eli lugging a large wooden box onto the porch. He paused, sweating profusely, and then looked up at her and wheezed, “Books.”

Fortunately for Eli’s back, Nate and Emily were coming down the hall and Nate immediately went to his aid.

Now came the moment, the test. Taking a deep breath, Maggie braced herself for the tension. The new minister had been unconventional enough to shake her hand, but how would he react to living in the same house with colored people? “Mr. Madison,” she said, “may I also introduce Nathaniel and Emily Johnson? Nate owns a carpenter shop, and Emily works here as a cook. They live on the second floor.”

Jeremiah could have stiffened, made a very bad excuse, and fled (never to return). But instead, he smiled. “I’m delighted to meet you and your husband, Mrs. Johnson.” Once again he extended his hand.

Emily paused, and then – with an absolutely beautiful smile – took his hand in hers.

Once pleasantries had been exchanged, Emily escorted Jeremiah down the hall through the kitchen and into the “new” wing. Lydia and Frankie trailed hungrily behind. Maggie stayed, waiting as Nate and Eli wrestled the crate through the front door.

Eli was muttering, “This Madison fellow reads more than I do.”

“Well, I’ve got a suggestion for him,” Nate grunted. “Try the lending library.”

“I’ve got a better suggestion. Start one.”

With a sigh, Maggie scooted past their complaints and went on to the wing. The minister’s room was freshly clean. Large and located in the front of the house, it afforded an excellent view of Second Street. Outside the window, trees were unfolding their new leaves. The curtains billowed in the warm, light breeze, and whispered of the promise of spring. Newly cut daffodils on the bureau added a splash of yellow to the large, light-filled room. A pleasant aroma of beeswax on wood permeated the air.

Jeremiah happily surveyed his new chamber. “How very pleasant this is, Mrs. Blaine!” he exclaimed. “I’m sure I shall be quite happy here!”

Maggie thanked him for his kindness. Her girls were still gaping at him as if they were complete ninnies. Oh, well, there was nothing she could do about that right now, so she pressed on. “The custom of our house is to have supper at six.”

“Yes,” Frankie said, lamely adding, “that’s when we . . . eat.”

Lydia kicked her sister’s ankle.

“Ow!” Frankie squeaked. “Stop it!”

“You stop it,” Lydia hissed out of the corner of her mouth.

Maggie made an effort to ignore them. The Reverend, however, was amused.

Fortunately, the arrival of Nate, Eli and the crate of books made a ready distraction, and Maggie continued her speech, “I’m sure the other boarders will stop in to visit with you. But, regardless, we’ll all get to know each other at table.”

Mr. Madison grinned winningly. “Ah, yes! There’s nothing like table fellowship!”

“Yes . . .” Frankie agreed. “It’s so . . . fellowshippy.”

Emily smiled graciously at Jeremiah, then took a girl with each hand and hauled them out of the room. Nate nodded at the new boarder and followed them out. That left Eli, who was mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

Social convention was not prominent in a house that opened its doors to the lost and lonely, as well as to people with some color to their skin. Maggie wondered what Jeremiah Madison was really thinking. She also knew that her daughters, particularly Frankie, were headstrong. She worried that Mr. Madison might consider them a pack of heathens and lodge a complaint with the church. If he did so, what then? Maggie had to struggle to push away the anxiety of battling even more gossip and scandal. .

But Mr. Madison’s smile was warm. “You have two lively – and completely delightful – daughters, Mrs. Blaine.”

She tried not to look too relieved.

“If you don’t mind my asking, are you by any chance connected to the founders of this community? I can’t help but notice that you and the town share the same name.”

The details were too long and tiresome to relate, so Maggie gave him the short story.

“My late husband, John, was a Blaine. He was their only son. I’m a Beatty.”

“Of the Beatty Carriage Manufactory?”

She nodded.

“Then you are also related to Samuel Beatty?”

Maggie braced herself and explained, “He’s my brother, but the difficulty, indeed the tragedy, lies in the fact that when John Blaine and I decided to marry, both of our families did not take kindly to our decision. So you see, although I appear to have connections, I have been rather thoroughly un-connected.”

“I’m terribly sorry.”

Eli cleared his throat.

Maggie pretended not to hear. “Thank you, Mr. Madison. But I am not bereaved, really. I have found that life is infinitely better – and richer – with love. My husband meant the world to me. I don’t regret a thing. And my beautiful daughters *are* the world to me. With their love and the love of God, what more do I need?”

Jeremiah nodded approvingly. “Indeed, what more?”

Eli cleared his throat again. “I think we ought to leave Mr. Madison so he may unpack.” He closed his hand round Maggie’s upper arm. “Nice meeting you, Reverend. See you in an hour.” With that, he propelled Maggie out the door and into the hall. “What on earth is going on?” he hissed. “You, Lydia, and Frankie are acting like mooncalves!”

Maggie stopped in the middle of the hall and laughed. “Are you blind, Elijah Smith? The new minister is considerate, kind, and beautiful!”

“Huh,” he grunted. “All *I* know is he owns a ton of books.”

Maggie's rooming house had four boarders, not counting Jeremiah Madison. All four men occupied the rooms on the second floor of the old house. Edgar Lape, a young man of 22, was struggling to start his first law practice. He worked as a lawyer's assistant and spent most of his time at the county courthouse, which sat at one end of the Blaineton green opposite the Presbyterian Church. Earnest and determined, Edgar most often was found with his nose in a legal book. Despite this tendency, he and Lydia had managed to catch each other's eye, begun to court, and (Maggie hoped) would someday soon announce their engagement.

The home's resident writer was the white-haired, white-bearded, very dapper Chester Carson. He had sold a few novels in his youth, but now in his later years, he made what money he could from writing for magazines and newspapers, including Eli's *Gazette*. Lately, he had begun to experiment with photography and was taking portraits.

The oldest boarder was Jim O'Reilly, an Irishman who used to do odd jobs around town, but had been curtailed by arthritis. Unlike Chester Carson, Jim rarely had money enough to pay room and board. Maggie had no intention of turning him out, though. She had long decided that was no way to treat an elder. So over the past seven years, he had become Lydia and Frankie's "grandfather," and they all referred to him as "Grandpa O'Reilly."

Finally, there was Patrick McCoy. Only seventeen years of age, he worked as the undertaker's apprentice. Despite his grim occupation, Patrick was full of energy and life. He was a handsome boy – dark haired, green eyes framed by long dark lashes – yet he was shy around girls. He was also very kind-hearted. Maggie hoped that someday he would find a wife. He was the sort of decent, dependable young man who would make an excellent husband.

The members of Maggie's household gathered around the dining table at six. Conversations were almost always lively – sometimes a bit too lively when opinions clashed. But everyone managed to get along, nonetheless. The motto was “everyone has a right to his (or her) opinion.”

As soon as the food was blessed and the plates were being filled, Grandpa O'Reilly, who was now feeling well enough to join the others at table, cleared his throat. “Tell me now, Father.”

“No, please.” Jeremiah corrected. “Mr. Madison will do.”

“Yes. Now where have you come from?”

“The Warren Charge,” the minister answered. “That is, I served three small congregations and more recently two congregations in the Morristown District. And before that, Mr. O'Reilly, I was a colporteur.”

Frankie frowned. “A col . . .”

“Colporteur,” Eli interjected. “That means Mr. Madison sold books for a living.”

“Yes, exactly! When I first sensed my call, I worked selling Bibles and books of religion door to door.”

“Yep,” Eli muttered to Nate, just loud enough for Maggie to hear. “That explains the crate.”

Lydia was impressed. “Door to door? You must be very brave, Mr. Madison! I'd never be able to speak to strange people day in and day out.”

“Actually, the experience was quite interesting. I learned a great deal about people and their lives – so many fascinating details, but so much tragedy and sorrow, as well. My heart went out to them. Then, one night as I was praying for the people I had met that day, everything

became clear. It was as if a voice said to me, ‘Jeremiah, *you* help them. *You* preach my Word.’ The feeling was so strong that I knew it had to be from our Lord. And that, to make a long story short, is how I came to the ministry.”

Eli grunted, but Patrick exclaimed, “A voice from God! I’d sure like to hear that!”

The young minister grinned. “Perhaps you will. All you have to do is pray.”

“I do. But I’ve never heard *God’s* voice!”

Frankie frowned. “I don’t think Mr. Madison means an actual voice from heaven, Patrick. I think he means a – a kind of feeling.”

“Yes, Frances, that’s right – it’s a feeling, but more than that. It’s something deep inside that you know is right and true. If you’re attentive, God is always there.”

Edgar Lape interjected, “Oh, I’d have to have more proof than that, if I were to be assured that the feeling was from God.”

Jeremiah rested his fork and knife, and leaned toward the young lawyer. “May I ask you a question, sir? What made you choose to go into law?”

“I want to help people.”

“And where did that desire come from?”

The young man shrugged. “I don’t know, exactly.”

“Allow me to suggest,” Jeremiah said, “that it came from God, and that, even as you knew your calling was to law, so I knew mine was to ministry.”

Eli grunted again.

“Indeed!” Mr. Carson interjected. “You simply must allow me to write your story down, Reverend. I have a keen interest in supernaturalism and collect stories of conversions and calls.

I find that such subject matter makes fascinating reading. It has as much to say about people as it does about God.”

The supper conversation was going very well and Maggie was extremely pleased. The only resistant element was Eli Smith, who did not seem to be taking to the new minister. The grunting was a dead give-away.

Jeremiah, fortunately, did not seem to notice Eli’s dissent. “You know, Mr. Carson, in three months, there will be a district camp meeting. I intend to encourage as many from the Methodist congregation as will go. I hope you’ll go, too, so you may write about what you see and experience.” He paused and then added, “You know, my greatest desire would be to see a revival in this town.”

Eli had grunted one time too many, and Maggie’s annoyance finally spilled over. “Mr. Smith, do you have something to say?”

“Oh, no,” he replied, brown eyes all innocence. “I was just clearing my throat.” He harrumphed loudly to prove his point. “There. Much better. Would anyone like more potatoes?”

Maggie eyed him, but turned back to Jeremiah. “You were saying about revival?”

“It seems to me that with the help of the camp meeting, we have an excellent opportunity for the town to be revived spiritually. Not, of course, that I come to this pulpit with the predisposition that Blaineton is spiritually stagnated.”

“Of course not,” Eli commented, with an undertone of sarcasm.

“It’s just that the first few months of a pastorate offer a fresh start for everyone. And I believe that all of us can do with reviving. A good revival never hinders, it can only help.”

“Amen!” Emily concurred.

“Oh, yes!” Frankie gushed. “Amen!”

Eli rolled his eyes. “Amen. Please pass the biscuits.”

After supper, the men retired to the back parlor to smoke their pipes. Emily, Lydia, and Frankie took care of cleaning the kitchen. Maggie meanwhile lit a lamp and went down the wooden stairs into the cellar. The thick stone walls of the foundation kept the area cool even during the warmest months. She was grateful for the change in temperature – she was flushed and still quite peeved at Eli. The chill quiet enveloped her like a welcome cloud.

One side of the cellar held shelves stacked with crocks of salted pork and beef as well as Mason jars filled with canned fruit and vegetables. The other side was lined with bins of potatoes, onions and other roots. Maggie picked a basket off a shelf, continued to the very back of the cellar, and paused in front of an old wardrobe. Reaching into the collar of her dress, she fished out a chain fastened around her neck. On the end was a key, and she used this to open the wardrobe’s lock. Creaking, the door swung open. She lifted a small latch, barely discernable on the back wall of the wardrobe, and then pushed on the back wall, which proved to be a door. A dark, narrow corridor lay beyond.

Maggie entered the corridor and carefully pushed the door shut behind her. The passageway’s ceiling and walls were made of brick. The floor was earth, like that of the cellar. It had taken Eli and Nate a good two months to dig the tunnel and create the little room situated between Eli’s shop and the rooming house.

The corridor led to another door, which opened into that room. It was no more than twelve by ten feet. Its furnishings were spare – a table with two lamps and four stools, two

narrow beds with rope springs and straw mattresses, four blankets, a chamber pot, and a few dishes.

Maggie set the basket on the table and began to stack the dirty dishes into it. Then she moved to the beds and started folding the blankets. She had just finished this task, when she heard the wardrobe door creak. Turning, she saw a lantern coming down the tunnel. She was not surprised when Eli finally stepped into the room. She was, however, terribly upset with him. Maggie had found his behavior to be unacceptable.

“You needn’t have followed me. I do not require help down here,” she said rather tartly.

But he stayed where he was. “I need to tell you something.”

When she tried to push by him, he took hold of her arm. “I *apologize*, Mrs. Blaine. I’m sorry. I mean it.”

But this only exasperated her all the more. “Why do you not like Mr. Madison?”

Eli looked down and scuffed a foot over the dirt floor. “I don’t know. I don’t care for the way Madison conducts himself. Just seems, well, a bit self-important.”

“Self-important or not, Jeremiah Madison will be living in here for the next one or two years.”

Eli shoved his hands into his pockets and heaved a large sigh. “I know. I guess I might as well admit that I’m a little jealous. You look at him as if he’s the most interesting person you’ve ever met.” And then he added something that took Maggie by complete surprise. “I guess your daughters, Emily and Nate, and nearly everyone we know are right.”

She frowned. “Right? What do you mean by right?”

Eli threw his arms into the air. “Mrs. Blaine, you cannot tell me that you’re blind to this!” And he began to tick examples off on his fingers. “One, we spend a great deal of time

together. Two, we have more than a few things in common. Like abolition. And *this* – we help escaped slaves make it to Canada. And three, we talk all the time. And four, we have good discussions. No, we have *excellent* discussions!” He paused to take a long, deep breath. “*And*, seeing as how we’ve known each other for four years and seeing as how we get along . . .”

“Mr. Smith, precisely what are you trying to say?”

“I want to know, Mrs. Blaine, if it would be all right – that is, would you like it if we – if we – oh, blast!” He took a huge breath and finished all in a rush, “Would you like it if we kept company?”

Everything stopped for Maggie. She was stunned. “Are you saying you want to court me?”

“Yes!!” Eli straightened his shoulders and pushed his spectacles up his nose. “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying. I know I’m not doing a good job of it. I haven’t gone courting since Martha. That’s been eleven years and . . .” He shoved his hands back into his pockets. “Oh, I just don’t know how to say it.”

The two of them had been skirting around their feelings for the past few months as if they were afraid to acknowledge the change. It was a relief to hear everything finally confirmed by Eli’s own words, no matter how clumsily said. Maggie’s heart began to flutter as if she were a schoolgirl. She had a suitor! Better yet, a suitor of whom she thought a great deal. “It’s all right, Mr. Smith. You said it, and you said it just right.”

His brown eyes grew round.

“That is, I’d be honored to have you court me, Mr. Smith.”

“Oh.” It took him awhile to comprehend what she had said. “Oh!”

They stood looking at each other for a long moment. Finally they began to laugh.

“Well,” he chuckled, “I guess under the circumstances I should ask you to call me Eli.”

“And you should call me Maggie.”

There was another long, awkward pause, but this time they grinned at each other with no small degree of satisfaction. At length, Maggie cleared her throat and broke the silence. “I think I had better get these dishes upstairs – and you can join the men on the – ”

“Maggie, wait.”

From Maggie's Journal, 13 April 1860

I knew what he wanted. We needed to seal the agreement, so to speak. If I were a younger woman, I would have continued to leave. I would not wish to engage in any sort of behavior that might be considered unladylike. But I am no longer a young woman. And according to some people I am not much of a lady. No matter. I was happily married once upon a time. I know all about men and women. And I like dark-eyed, dark-haired Elijah Smith. I like him a great deal. So I turned around.

And then, dear Journal, we kissed.

The kiss was complete and passionate and tender. In fact, it fairly took my breath away. I must confess that when it was over, my knees were weak for it had been a very long time since I had been kissed like that. My cheeks were burning and my heart pounding. More could have followed – but, perhaps I am not that much of a rebel.

I picked up the basket and my lamp and made ready to go.

Mr. Smith, who is every inch the gentleman, made a half-hearted comment about joining the men on the porch.

I spoke of washing the dishes.

And so we went our separate ways.

But I am so very happy tonight! I did not expect that I would ever be this happy again.

Thanks be to God, for I have been blessed indeed. I am surrounded by good people, two beautiful daughters, dear friends... and now Mr. Smith, my Eli.