



THE
Quarryman's
BRIDE

TRACIE
PETERSON

LAND of SHINING WATER



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Chapter 1



ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA
APRIL 1886

Seventeen-year-old Emmalyne Knox tried to suck in air but found it impossible to breathe. Her throat constricted, and air couldn't seem to get past her mouth and into her lungs. Blackness edged her vision.

She reached out and gripped Tavin MacLachlan's hand, not caring if anyone thought it inappropriate. They were, after all, engaged to be married in less than two months. His presence strengthened her, and at last she found she could draw in a shuddering breath.

"Let us pray," Reverend Campbell announced in sober tones. "Father, we commit these bodies to the ground and these spirits to you. May your comfort be upon those who have suffered these losses. Amen."

"Amen," Emmalyne whispered along with the rest. She looked up to meet Tavin's sorrowful expression.

"Are you all right?" he asked softly.

"As well as I can be." She looked to her left, where her mother, clad in black, stood pale-faced and rigid. Rowena Knox's eyes were dry at the moment but swollen from long hours of weeping. Emmalyne's young brother, Angus, stood on the other side of their mother. Barely twelve years old, he favored his mother in appearance with his dark brown hair and green eyes. Their mother's Scottish and Welsh ancestry made her a handsome, albeit petite woman, while Angus already stood inches taller than Emmalyne. He would surely soon surpass even his father.

Luthias Knox might have been short of stature, but there was no doubt that he was a man of strength. Even now, Emmalyne's father showed no emotion. His ancestry, beginning with his origins in the highlands of Scotland, was proven in his red hair and fierce blue eyes. His brogue and hesitance to spare a coin for anything even remotely frivolous left no doubt.

"I'm so sorry for your loss," Emmalyne heard Tavin's mother say softly, coming up to them with her hand outstretched. Emmalyne nodded, seeing Tavin's younger brother, Gillam, and sister, Fenella, standing just behind their mother. Fenella and Emmalyne were the best of friends.

Emmalyne looked into the warm gaze of the woman she would soon call mother-in-law. "I can scarcely believe they're gone." She let her glance return to the two open graves where her younger sisters, Doreen and Lorna, had just been laid to rest.

"The tornado took so many lives," Morna MacLachlan said, nodding her sympathy.

It hadn't yet been a week since a massive storm ripped through St. Cloud and Sauk Rapids. The devastation had taken lives in both cities, but Sauk Rapids had borne far more of its destruction. Emmalyne's family was just one of hundreds that had suffered the tornado's wrath. The house they had lived in was now merely a pile of wood.

"God's wrath," her father had said with an angry fist raised to the heavens. The memory made

Emmalyne shudder even now.

“Dory was just fourteen,” Emmalyne murmured, forcing her thoughts away from her father’s near blasphemous anger. “Lorna only ten. How can they be . . . gone forever?” Her eyes welled with new tears.

Morna embraced Emmalyne. “’Tis a hard truth to bear. I dinnae see your older sisters. Were they unable to come?”

Emmalyne nodded, returning the embrace. “They live too far away and couldn’t afford the trip. They have their own families to worry about now, so Mother didn’t really expect they would come.”

“Still, they would have offered her comfort,” Morna replied.

Fenella stepped closer to join in the hug. “Oh, Emmy, I’m so very sorry. You know I loved them so.” She, too, began to cry.

“I know you loved them,” Emmalyne whispered. “They loved you, too.” She relaxed in the warmth of the three-way embrace, relishing their comfort and support.

“At least I needn’t bear this pain alone,” Emmalyne said, finally pulling back. “You have been so good to my family. Mother said she would never have made it through those first few nights without your kind intercession and invitation into your home.”

“Letting you stay with us was the least we could do,” Morna replied. “You’re soon to be family in every way, and there was no need to delay welcoming you into our numbers.”

“And I have always wanted a sister,” Fenella assured her. “Soon that very wish shall come true.” She smiled, but the sorrow of the occasion kept it from lasting too long.

“Yes, but I know that our presence in your home hasn’t been easy. My father . . .” Emmalyne let the words trail off as she cast a quick glance to see if he’d overheard. But he was busy scowling at something the pastor was telling him.

“He can be most difficult.” Emmalyne let out a long breath, as if the truth had been pent up inside her for quite a while.

“He’s grieving the loss of his children, Emmalyne. You’ll need to be patient with him. Come, Fenella. We must offer our condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Knox.”

Morna’s excuse for Emmalyne’s father was gracious, but Emmalyne knew there was no good reason for her father’s unyielding temper and harsh words. She’d never witnessed or received gentleness or kindness from her father, and she seriously doubted he was capable of either. Emmalyne had grown up to fear and venerate him, to never question his decisions or commands. Perhaps that was why she always cherished Tavin’s tenderness toward her.

Emmalyne felt a gentle squeeze on her shoulder and turned to find Tavin there, his green eyes showing concern. She felt a rush of comfort from the love she found there. “I’d best speak my condolences, as well,” he told her. “I wouldn’t want your father to think me rude.”

“Father won’t think anything,” Emmalyne muttered, “except how much this is costing him.” She was glad Morna had already moved away to speak with her mother.

“Try not to fret, love,” Tavin said close to her ear. “’Tis but a few short weeks, and you’ll no longer have to worry about what he thinks.” He drew her along with him and walked over to her father and mother.

Extending his hand, Tavin met Mr. Knox’s hard-fixed stare. “May the peace of God be upon you. I’m heartily sorry for your loss, sir.”

Father refused to take Tavin’s hand, and Emmalyne’s heart sunk at the sight. Her father could at least receive the sympathies of others without being uncivil. Tavin appeared unconcerned, however, and moved to give Emmalyne’s mother a hug.

“Mother Knox, you have my deepest sympathy. I was very fond of Doreen and Lorna.”

Mother nodded, her expression one of disbelief and shock. She had cried herself out in the previous

days and now seemed at a loss as to what she should say or do. She looked down and shook her head. "I . . . I . . ." There were no words.

Tavin patted her arm, then turned to speak to his own mother. "I'm going to walk Emmalyne back to the house."

"Nay." Emmalyne's father suddenly interrupted the conversation. "Ye'll not be doin' that."

Shocked expressions fixed upon Luthias Knox. Emmalyne couldn't imagine what had gotten into him, but from the look on his face, she knew it didn't bode well for any of them.

"If you need us to stay, Father . . ." she began, but her words quickly trailed off.

By now the few attendees of the funeral were making their way back to their carriages, as the gravediggers began shoveling dirt atop the small caskets they'd recently lowered into the ground. Emmalyne hated the sound of the dirt hitting the wooden lids.

"Ye and Rabbie have been most good to us," Father finally said, looking with a grim nod to Robert MacLachlan, Tavin's father. "I'm sorry to say I cannae stay and repay ye just now."

"There's nothing to repay," Robert MacLachlan declared. "You would've done the same for me and mine."

Father nodded once, and Emmalyne thought she saw just a hint of softening in his expression. He fixed her with a gaze just then that almost seemed regretful, something she'd never witnessed in her father's countenance before.

"We're movin' to Minneapolis," Father declared in his abrupt manner.

"But surely nae until after the wedding," Morna interjected. "'Tis but a few weeks away—"

"There will be no weddin'."

Emmalyne's heart began to pound, and her jaw dropped open. She held her breath and thought to do the unthinkable and contradict her father.

Tavin spoke up. "What are you saying, sir?"

"I'm sayin' the weddin' is off. Emmalyne has a responsibility to her own family. With her younger sisters dead and her older sisters married, it falls to her to remain and care for her mother and me."

An icy chill settled over Emmalyne. *The tradition!* She'd forgotten all about it. Having been the third oldest and far from the last daughter in the Knox family line, she had seldom given the tradition much thought. Now, however, she was the youngest daughter, and in the Knox family lineage that made her responsible to give up a life of her own to care for her aging parents. It had been done that way for generations.

"You gave your blessing. The wedding has been planned," Tavin protested.

Emmalyne looked at her father. His ire was up, and there was fire in his eyes. "Ye'd do well not to question me, boy. The wedding is nae gonna take place, and that's ma final word."

"But, Luthias—"

Father waved Robert off. "We have our way of doin' things, Rabbie. You know that as well as any man."

"For sure I do, but—"

"There's nothing more to discuss. I've just buried two of ma daughters, and we have a long trip ahead of us."

"Surely you can stay one more day," Morna argued.

"Please, Luthias. I don't feel at all well," Mother inserted, seeming to wilt before their eyes.

Emmalyne watched her father wrestle with the moment. He finally took hold of his wife's arm. "I suppose ye'll just be faintin' on the way if I try to see ma plans through. We'll stay one more night, but on the morrow we take our leave."

Emmalyne fought back a wave of nausea as everything she'd planned for crumbled to dust around her. The tornado had not only taken the lives of her sisters and destroyed their home; it had cost



Sleep refused to come that night. Tavin's sister, Fenella, tossed just as restlessly as Emmalyne, and given the narrow bed, when one moved, they both did.

"I can't sleep," Fenella finally declared, turning over once more, this time onto her back. "I can't believe your father is doing this, Emmalyne. You must not allow it."

Emmalyne stared into the darkness. "What choice do I have, Fenella? I must respect his wishes. The Bible makes clear that I owe him honor and obedience."

"But you love Tavin."

"Aye. I do love him."

Fenella leaned up on one elbow. "And he loves you. You cannot go and leave him like this."

Emmalyne wished with all her heart there might be another way. "I don't *want* to leave him. You know I don't."

"Then don't. Go to him. Elope tonight." Fenella got up from the bed. "I'll go get him right now. You two can leave before anyone wakes up."

"I know you mean well," Emmalyne whispered through trembling lips. "But, no. I cannot. It would be a dishonor, and my father and mother would never speak to me again."

Fenella was already pulling on her robe. "Just talk to Tavin about it. Maybe he'll have some idea of how to make it all work. Your mother and father won't reject you. You'll see." She hurried to the door, pulled it open, and gave a little shriek.

Emmalyne sat straight up in bed. "What's wrong?"

"It's Tavin," Fenella said, stepping back. "He must've had the same idea."

Tavin stepped into the room and stopped at the foot of the bed. "I won't lose you, Emmalyne. You're to be my wife."

"Tavin, you can't ask me to go against my father and mother," she said, clutching the blankets around her. "It wouldn't be right. I love you, but we must give them time. Perhaps Father will see the pain he's causing and change his mind. I plan to speak with him in the morning."

"Let's just leave tonight and be married," he begged. "Once it's done . . ."

"That's what I suggested," Fenella put in as she lit a candle.

The warm glow barely punctured the darkness of the small room, but it was still enough to see the desperation on Tavin's face. Emmalyne wished she could offer him some comfort, but she needed it herself. She knew her father's mind was set, and she had never known him to back down once he had determined his course of action.

"Once we're married, they won't be able to undo it," Tavin said, trying again. "We can show them that we still intend to see to their well-being. I want your parents to be assured that they would have care in their old age."

Emmalyne shook her head miserably. "Father says that marriage divides the heart and mind. He doesn't think a woman can be both answerable to her husband and to her parents. He believes the tradition—"

"Curse the tradition," Tavin spat out. "It's ridiculous to put such a demand on someone's offspring. Your parents are being totally unreasonable in their expectations."

"But they're still my parents, Tavin." Tears were filling her eyes, and she blinked them away. "We both believe in the one God and that the Bible is His Holy Word. The Bible says that I am to honor my mother and father, that my days may be long. Don't ask me to defy the Word of God."

“I’m not asking you to defy God. I just don’t want you to throw away our happiness together. The Bible also talks about a man and woman leaving their parents and cleaving to one another.”

“Tavin, don’t you see? We could never be happy . . . not with my father’s curse upon us, and that’s what it would be. He would never forgive me.”

Tavin’s expression changed from one of loving desperation to an expression Emmalyne had never seen in him before. “And that’s your final word? You choose to worry more about your father’s forgiveness than my love?” His implied accusation made her stomach clench.

“I choose to honor God, Tavin, as best I know how,” she finally said, “and do as He would have me do.”

“Right. So that your ‘days may be long.’ Well, have it your way. Your days will be long . . . and no doubt very lonely.” He stormed out without another word.

Emmalyne felt a single tear trickle down her cheek. *So that’s the way it is to be*, she mourned, pulling her knees up and leaning her head on them while a new flood of grief escaped.

Her father’s anger and God’s judgment . . . or her beloved’s wrath and deep disappointment. Somewhere in the midst of it all were the shattered remains of her heart.

Chapter 2



ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA

ELEVEN YEARS LATER, JUNE 1897

Emmalyne had just finished brushing her mother's long dark hair as her father entered the hotel room. He cast a quick glance in their direction, then motioned to Angus.

"Go bring the wagon around," he ordered his son.

At twenty-three, Angus was a little taller than their father and just as muscular. He finished securing his boots and stood to stretch. "Aye, I'll see to it." He left without further comment, and Emmalyne quickly turned her attention back to her task.

She twisted her mother's dark brown hair into a serviceable knot at the nape of her neck. Rowena Knox was still a fine-looking woman, though the hardships she'd endured had taken their toll. Her spirit seemed broken, and she no longer showed any interest in what was happening around her. Emmalyne feared that her mother's melancholy had robbed her of any pleasure, for nothing seemed to please the woman.

"So we'll be going to inspect the house MacLachlan secured for us," Father announced. "There will nae doubt be a fair amount of cleanin' to do."

"I haven't the strength," Mother protested, her voice weak and lifeless. She lifted her eyes in supplication to Emmalyne. "I'm afraid you'll have to see to it without me." Her voice was missing the heavy Scottish brogue revealing her early upbringing in the south of Wales.

"'Tis all right, Mother. I can tend to it."

For Emmalyne, the last decade was consumed by a routine that did not vary. Her mother's sadness left her with little energy or will, and hence the bulk of responsibility, as expected, fell to Emmalyne. Emmalyne, now twenty-eight, accepted her lot in life with as good an attitude as she could muster. Yet her broken heart had never really healed, no matter the amount of time she spent in prayer or reading God's Word. She kept searching for some sort of sign that would indicate God's blessing was upon her for her obedience. But misery and suffering were her only companions.

"We'll take a broom and mop. Soap and towels, too," her father said. "At the price we're payin', I'm sure we can borrow from the hotel. If we have need of more, I'll return to town. Rabbie said there's a good-sized pot out there for heating water outdoors and a working well."

Emmalyne finished assisting her mother and went immediately to her trunk. They had left Minneapolis only days before, and she hadn't wanted to return to St. Cloud for fear of running across Tavin again. But she couldn't help but wonder how he was and if he'd married yet. Eleven long years had passed . . . and for eleven years that unanswered question had whirled through her mind.

She'd exchanged a few letters with Fenella after their move to Minneapolis, but even those had stopped after a time. Fenella was no doubt married with wee ones, and taking time to write to an old friend was probably difficult to spare.

Pulling a heavy work apron from the trunk, Emmalyne nodded to her father. "I'm ready."

“Oh, I wish you wouldn’t leave me alone,” Mother begged, taking hold of Emmalyne’s hand as she passed. ~~“A doctor is supposed to come today, and I would rather not be here by myself.”~~

“Hush, woman,” Father demanded. “There’s no need for Emmalyne to remain. She’ll have work to do to set the house right. I’m not gonna spend a single dollar more on a hotel room than I have to.”

Mother looked properly chastised and bowed her head. “Aye, Luthias, of course you are right. I pray you won’t be long.”

Emmalyne saw her father give a brief nod, but in no other way did he acknowledge his wife. It seemed sad that two people who had shared so much should be so distant. Emmalyne couldn’t help but wonder if her father had ever shown love to his wife. If so, Emmalyne had certainly never witnessed it, and her mother was unwilling to speak on such matters.

Making their way downstairs, Emmalyne longed for a cup of strong tea and something to eat. She glanced toward the dining room. “Father, might I have a bit of breakfast first? The day will no doubt be long.”

He looked at her with a scowl and gave an exasperated sigh. “Bring along something ye can eat in the wagon.”

“What of you and Angus?” she asked, trying her best to sound sweet.

“We were up long before ye and ate at a decent hour.”

Emmalyne nodded. “I won’t be but a minute.” She hurried into the hotel dining room and motioned to one of the serving girls.

“Yes, ma’am. How may I help you?” The waitress didn’t look that much younger than Emmalyne, and it seemed strange to be called “ma’am.”

“I find myself in need of breakfast that I can take with me. I wonder if you have some biscuits and cheese, perhaps?”

“Let me see what I can find for you. I’m sure we can prepare something.”

Emmalyne nodded and added, “Please hurry. My father is waiting.”

The waitress scurried from the room, ignoring one man waving his cup for more coffee. Emmalyne glanced toward the door, where her father waited. He would no doubt be angry that she had delayed their departure; however, she’d been up quite late with Mother. When Rowena had one of her spells of sadness, it was best that she keep company with someone—and that someone was most generally Emmalyne.

When the waitress returned with a small wrapped bundle, Emmalyne put aside thoughts of the night. “Thank you so much.”

“I put in an apple, as well,” the girl said. “Should I charge this to your room or will you pay now?”

Emmalyne dug out a few coins and handed them to the girl. “Will this cover it?”

“Yes,” the girl replied. “If you wait here, I’ll bring you your change.”

“That’s all right,” Emmalyne said, taking the food. “You keep it. I appreciate your quick help.”

She made her way to where her father stood. “I’m ready. They were quite kind to prepare this in a hurry.”

“I’m thinkin’ the cost will be outrageous,” Father grunted.

“I paid for it with my own money, Father.” She hoped that might put an end to his grumbling, but of course it did not.

“The sooner we are out of this hotel, the better. Everything costs so much. Why, they charge more than any man has a right to.”

“But we have a clean room, and you and Mother a good bed,” Emmalyne offered. She didn’t bother to remind him that at least he had slept in one—she and Angus made do with the floor. “With Mother feeling so poorly, it’s best for her to be close to a physician, Father. Didn’t you say that this house we’ll live in is outside of town?”

“Aye. MacLachlan said it was the best he could get us for the price I could afford. I’m sure ye can make it suitable. Your mother will just need to get better.”

Emmalyne tried not to grimace at another reminder that the MacLachlans were once again going to be an intricate part of their lives. Why her father had decided to uproot his family and move back to St. Cloud was beyond her. Father trusted only a few people, and among those was Robert MacLachlan. But given the past between them, Emmalyne thought it strange they would return to the very place where they’d known such pain. Mr. MacLachlan must surely have offered Father a most lucrative deal, because as far as Emmalyne knew, money was the only thing capable of enticing her father these days.

She climbed into the back of the wagon and sat on the edge, dangling her legs as she ate her biscuits and cheese. Beside her were the various cleaning items her father had somehow secured. The bulk of their household goods were due to arrive by train that afternoon.

Biting into a biscuit, Emmalyne again thought of Tavin. Fenella had told her in a letter that Tavin had packed a few belongings and left shortly after the Knoxes’ departure. What little communication she’d had from Fenella after that only mentioned Tavin briefly, stating that he had gone east in search of quarry work. He had planned to make his way to Maine, where he had heard the work was plentiful. His anger was all that seemed to guide him, and Fenella had been quite worried about him.

Are you still in Maine, Tavin? Her mind churned with questions, finally ending with the one that haunted her constantly: *Do you think about me as much as I think about you?*

St. Cloud had grown considerably since Emmalyne had left. When they had previously lived in the area, they had resided in a small house located between the city and Sauk Rapids, just to the north and east. Now, however, her father informed them they were to live southwest of St. Cloud, closer to the MacLachlans’ home and quarry. Emmalyne prayed fervently that Tavin would stay away. She feared she’d never be able to put him from her thoughts otherwise.

She tried her best not to be bitter. God had command of her life, didn’t He? At least that’s what she had always been told and believed. Even after her father abandoned his faith, she had continued to trust God for wisdom and guidance. But her father had little tolerance for attending Sunday services, and that extended to his wife and children. Emmalyne knew her mother missed attending services; she missed them, as well, though as the years passed, Emmalyne had found occasion to slip away to church. Sometimes she’d even convinced Angus to escort her. He never complained, but neither did he seem overly interested. Emmalyne sometimes wondered about her brother’s beliefs. He said little, most likely because he knew Father wouldn’t tolerate such talk around the table. There was very little occasion for conversation at other times.

Trying a taste of the cheese from her perch at the end of the wagon, Emmalyne glanced around at the town of St. Cloud. There were banks, churches, and a bevy of storefronts that offered nearly anything a person could think of—jewelers, clockmakers, dress designers, stores selling ready-made clothing, barbers, and grocers. The town was nowhere near the size of Minneapolis, but it certainly had increased its offerings since Emmalyne had last been there.

“Looks like they’ve had fair weather,” Angus said from the wagon seat beside Father.

“Yes,” Emmalyne agreed. “Everything is so green and pretty.” The sun had already warmed the morning and felt good against Emmalyne’s face.

“Hope there’s still time to get in a gairden,” Father commented. “Rabbie said there are plum trees on the property.”

Emmalyne finished one of the biscuits and put the other aside for later. “We can make jelly and jam. That will be good.” She noted the busy streets were less congested as they made their way west. Here residences began to dot the landscape and businesses were fewer. A church rose up before them and Emmalyne noted well-tended flower gardens gracing the property. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad

living here. After all, she'd simply go on caring for her mother and father—Angus, too. At least until Angus found a wife and married. The thought brought a pang to her heart. That wasn't to be for her. She gave her head a small shake and went back to her inspection of the town.

She saw more trees as the wagon lumbered along away from the city proper. Emmalyne noted elm, maples, black walnut, and cottonwood among their numbers. She recalled that her father had mentioned there being a small stream on the property—a burn, her father called it—and a pond, if she remembered correctly. It gave her hope that there might also be willows, her favorite tree. As a child she had loved to hide beneath their sweeping branches and imagine herself in a castle.

The town eventually gave way to farmland and fewer houses. Emmalyne found herself enjoying the ride, imagining a simple outing to see the countryside with no work awaiting her. The sounds of birds and the rustling of the grass complemented her daydreams. How wonderful it would be to merely lie upon a blanket and stare up at the sky. Emmalyne smiled to herself and drew in a deep breath. The scents of the country filled her. Perhaps she had missed it more than she'd realized.

Several miles from town, Father turned onto a much narrower dirt road. The farmlands were now edged with forest and rocky outcroppings that bespoke the wealth of granite available to those who cared to try their hand at the difficult labor of quarrying it. Emmalyne's family had always been involved in quarry endeavors. Her father had at one time worked with the stone itself, but over the last twenty years he had contented himself with managerial tasks in the business. He was good with figures, and this made him an asset for invoicing and keeping accounts in order. In Minneapolis he had worked for a small factory doing just such work.

"How much further?" she asked, hoping her question wouldn't upset her father.

"Jest a ways," he replied, seeming to be deep in thought.

After years of living in the large city of Minneapolis, Emmalyne now could only wonder at life in the country. She was used to having things readily available to her. If there was a need, she could simply walk a short distance to obtain whatever was desired. It would be more than a short walk to St. Cloud, and since they had no extra horses or wagons, Emmalyne knew those trips would be few and far between. There would also be no electricity or indoor plumbing, both of which she would miss dearly.

Father turned the wagon down yet another even narrower road that dipped in and out of thickly treed grounds. Emmalyne looked upward at their shade and hoped their property might also be filled with such beautiful foliage. It might make for some very pleasant evenings outdoors, if the flies and mosquitoes would leave them be.

She tried to imagine their home. Father had said it was a wood-frame structure that had two large bedrooms on the first floor and a third upstairs. Emmalyne had already chosen the upper floor for her room—not that she'd really been given a choice. She imagined the privacy and ability to get away from the arguments her father was bound to have with Mother. It seemed the two were always quarreling over one thing or another—usually related to expenses.

Perhaps she would be allowed to paper her room. She would, of course, have to buy the materials herself. Her father would never pay for such a frivolous thing. Emmalyne still had some money of her own she'd received from sewing, but it was dwindling fast. She couldn't help but wonder if she might be able to take in some sewing here. Of course, with their home so far removed from town, it would probably be difficult to find customers.

The wagon slowed, and Emmalyne craned around to see if they had arrived. Her father urged the horses right. Emmalyne gasped, unable to silence her shock. The driveway was little more than a grass-grown path with ruts, but it served to bring them alongside a well-weathered house—if the place could even be called that. Signs of neglect were everywhere. Thick, high weeds had taken over what might have once been an attractive little yard. The walkway that led to the broken-down porch was

obscured by an overgrowth of vegetation and debris.

“What hath God wrought?” she finally murmured.

Chapter 3



Alighting from the wagon, Emmalyne stared at the sight. Were they really to live here? The porch roof sagged at an odd angle and clearly needed support. The wooden steps to the porch were . . . well, missing, with the exception of a partial frame showing where they once had been. The structure itself was in great need of paint and repair. Two of the windows were broken, and the tail of a tattered curtain blew out of one as if shooing them away from the abomination.

“Well, donnae stand around like a stookie,” her father declared, his Scottish brogue thick with irritation.

A stookie, an idle person, would not be a correct description of Emmalyne. There would be no rest for her in the weeks to come.

“Ye be a-cleanin’ the bedrooms and kitchen first,” her father ordered. “We’ll be stayin’ here on the morrow.”

“But this place will take weeks to put in order,” Emmalyne protested. “Unless, of course, you want to hire someone to help me.”

“Wheesht! Be quiet! Ye know I donnae have the coin to spare. Ye can manage jest fine. Yer mither can help ye.”

“But Mother has been sick,” Emmalyne countered. “This wouldn’t be a good place to bring her. She should be close to a doctor.”

Her father turned a fierce scowl on her. “Ye need to be mindin’ yer mouth, lass. Now leave us go in and see to matters there.”

Emmalyne felt herself grow red at the rebuke, but she nodded, knowing that inside would probably be no better. It turned out she was right. The former owners had abandoned the place, it seemed, without thought to putting anything to rights. Several broken chairs were overturned atop a tattered rug. Beneath that, very worn boards made up the floor. They were so scarred and damaged, Emmalyne wondered if they could ever be properly sanded and stained.

She moved as if in a daze through the downstairs. The front room where the curtain flapped from the window was mostly empty. A thick layer of dust covered everything, and the fireplace looked like it hadn’t ever been cleaned. Animal tracks and their droppings were easy to spot, and there was a strange collection of leaves in one corner.

“The frame seems solid enough,” Angus offered hopefully.

Emmalyne looked at him in disbelief. “If it is, then I’m Queen Victoria.”

He grinned at his sister and gave her a wink. “Well, Ye Olde Vic, you’d best not let our father hear you say so.”

“Where is Father?” she asked, looking around in surprise. “He was right here a minute ago.”

“Said he wanted to see the rest of the property. There’s supposed to be a barn in the back for the horses.”

“I can’t believe the state of this place.” Emmalyne wouldn’t have dared to grumble so in her father’s presence. “I suppose there’s nothing to be done about it.” She grabbed the scarf she’d tied

around her neck and arranged it on her head to keep her hair protected from the dirt and dust.

“I’ll fetch the mop and bucket.”

“I’d rather you find the big wash pot Father said was here. I’ll need that carted outside.”

Angus nodded. “I can manage that well enough. Anything else?”

“A fire. I’ll need a fire to heat the water.”

Again he nodded. “Would you like me to chop some wood, as well? I doubt you’ll get by with just one pot of hot water for this place.”

“Aye.” Emmalyne headed for the door. “We’ll need plenty of wood, water, and soap to make this house livable.”

She heard a scratching noise and looked over in time to see a large mouse scurry across the floor toward the kitchen stove. If mice were the only current residents, she’d count herself lucky.

“Angus, we need to be on our way,” her father called as she stepped out onto the porch.

“Where are you going? I thought you were going to help me.” Knowing she’d once more overstepped her bounds, Emmalyne tried to soften her voice. “I mean, I thought we could get more done together.”

“I cannae. We’re to meet with Rabbie and his men,” Father said, surprising her with an actual explanation. “Ye get to work, and we’ll be back by and by.”

Angus came around the side of the house. “Your kettle is out back, Emmy. There’s gonna be no moving it. I’ll bet it weighs three hundred pounds. It’s well positioned for a fire. I’ll get you some wood.”

“Nae.” Her father shook his head. “We must be on our way. Yer sister knows well enough how to set a fire and chop wood.”

He made his way to the wagon and took out the supplies from the back. He placed everything on the ground and then motioned to Angus. “Come along.” Looking back at Emmalyne, he nodded toward the house. “Set it to rights, lass. We’ll be back in a few hours to see what ye’ve managed.”

With no further comment, he climbed into the wagon and waited only long enough for Angus to join him before flicking the reins. In all her twenty-eight years, Emmalyne had never known her father to show the slightest concern for her welfare. It never seemed to cross his mind that it might be dangerous to leave his daughter alone or that the work might be beyond her strength to accomplish alone.

Emmalyne sighed, gathered as many of the cleaning supplies as she could carry, and made her way into the house. She was glad she’d tucked her apron and remaining food into the bucket. At least she’d have something to eat if her father delayed in returning.

Inside, she pulled on the apron. Getting the water heating was of primary importance. She walked through the sad little kitchen and found an even sadder back door hanging from a single hinge. Though rickety, the stairs were still in place here and led to a nice clearing. The dirt was so hard-packed that it very nearly made a smooth surface on which to work. Not far from the caldron a rusty-looking pump gave her hope of easily accessible water.

Emmalyne inspected the caldron and found it to be serviceable. It would have to be scoured before it would provide an adequate receptacle for clean water, however. She quickly went to work gathering downed limbs and branches for kindling. She was happy to uncover a small collection of logs near the side of the house. A growth of new weeds among the old, along with dried vegetation from a previous summer, had hidden the wood from cursory glances. Fearing the possibility of snakes, Emmalyne gingerly gathered the pieces and looked around for an axe. To her dismay, there didn’t appear to be one anywhere. She did, however, find an old handmade hammer. That and a wedge served her well enough, and soon the wood was split and a fire burned bright.

Next she turned her attention to the pump. Priming it, she prayed that God would let the water flow

Her prayers were answered. Water began to sputter through the pipe and fall onto the hard-packed dirt. Taking up a bucket, she put just enough water into the caldron to clean it.

Using water, shaved soap, and her mop, Emmalyne managed to scrub the iron pot. It wasn't perfect but she felt satisfied for today. She knew it would take a great many cleanings before things were in the kind of order they would need. They would just have to abide the situation.

With the caldron finally in acceptable shape, Emmalyne filled it with bucket after bucket of water. She surmised from her trips back and forth that the kettle held about forty gallons. It was a good amount of water to get her started. Hopefully by the time she needed more, her father would have returned, and she could tell him of their need for an axe and maybe a saw.

With the water heating, Emmalyne went back into the house to figure out what to do first. Her father had said the bedrooms and kitchen were to be her priority, and she had to agree. However, Emmalyne had been cleaning house long enough to know that it was always best to assess the entire situation before actually starting.

On her way upstairs, she noted the steep and uneven steps. Near the top, Emmalyne tripped on the lip of one step and nearly fell headlong onto the floor. Righting herself, she frowned. "A ladder might have been easier . . . and safer."

In her room, sunlight filtered in not only from the single dirty window, but from a hole in the roof. The room wasn't large by any means, but it would be big enough for her. There was space for a bed and a dresser, but not much else. She would have to see if Angus could climb atop the roof to patch the hole—especially before the next rain.

Going back downstairs was just as perilous as it had been going up. This time, however, Emmalyne was more cautious, and she reached the bottom without further problems. She immediately inspected the other two bedrooms. They weren't much larger than the one upstairs. She determined that the bedroom on the front of the house was a tad smaller and figured that would be Angus's room. With this in mind, she started in on the other bedroom, knowing her mother and father would expect to take residence there. The room held a collection of odds and ends discarded from the previous tenants. Emmalyne took the castoffs outside and sorted them into stacks. There was always a chance she might find some useful items. Then she checked the water and found it still too cool. It didn't matter; there was plenty to do before she'd have a chance to wash anything.

If there had been a single bad thing about being left alone, it was that it gave Emmalyne too much time to think. As always, her thoughts drifted to Tavin and the life they might have known together had she not acquiesced to her father. Fenella had written, begging Emmalyne to change her mind, certain that if Emmalyne gave the word, Tavin would come to the city and rescue her. But Emmalyne had given no such instruction. Then it wasn't long before Fenella had told her that Tavin had left. No one knew exactly where he was bound or when he might return.

A part of Emmalyne had been relieved. With Tavin's location unknown to her, she could better fight the urge to give up her promise to her parents. If no one knew where he was, there was no sense in her setting out to find him. At least that's what Emmalyne told herself. She also tried to convince herself that it was foolish to go on thinking of him—that he was forever out of her life. Unfortunately her heart told her otherwise.

Looking about, Emmalyne couldn't help but wonder how close they were to the MacLachlans' property. She went on to reason that they must surely be within a short walk. Maybe once she'd arranged the house and Mother had adjusted to her new quarters, Emmalyne could make a visit and reestablish her acquaintance with Morna MacLachlan. That is, if Tavin was still gone from the area.

Emmalyne frowned and wrestled with her thoughts. It would be a blessing to see Tavin's mother again. Maybe Fenella lived nearby, as well. Renewing her friendship with Fenella might make the move back to St. Cloud bearable. The two girls had once been the best of friends, and Emmalyne

missed their closeness. But as she imagined the two of them chatting about the years gone by and all they had experienced, Emmalyne suddenly felt less inclined to see her friend again. As little more than a glorified maid to her parents, her life had been dismal and boring at best. She could tell Fenell about books she'd read and a musical performance or two that she'd once attended with Mother, but life in Minneapolis had not left her with a wealth of pleasant memories. And what if Tavin decided to come home for a visit? Or for good? She shuddered. That would be sheer misery.

Emmalyne turned her focus back on the work to be done. By late afternoon, she was filthy and exhausted. She had eaten the last of her breakfast and had cleared out the two main-floor bedrooms and the front room, as well. The walls cried out for paint and paper, but she doubted Father would spare the coins required for either. A little whitewash would go a long way toward cheering up the little place, however. Perhaps she could spend some of her own precious money for that.

She had just started work in the kitchen when she heard the wagon pull into the yard. Rushing to the door, she was surprised to see the conveyance full of furniture and trunks. Her father appeared from around the side and began to untie a rope.

"Our things came in early," he explained.

Emmalyne nodded, pleased. "We can just put everything in the front room. I have it cleared out, and that would make a good place to organize it."

Her father glanced at her. "And what of the bedrooms?"

"Yours and Angus's are clean. I didn't worry about mine just yet. There's a hole in the roof, and I figure Angus will need to climb atop to patch it up."

"You figured that, did you, sister?" Angus teased from his side of the wagon. "I suppose for some your good shepherd's pie, I might be persuaded."

"And I suppose I might be willing to make that for your supper tomorrow," she said with a smile. Emmalyne cherished her brother's good nature, especially in light of her father's harsh spirit.

Her father grunted and lowered a huge trunk from the back of the wagon. Hoisting it onto his back as though it weighed very little, he trudged toward the house. Angus picked up a couple of chairs and handed them to Emmalyne.

"I'll see to the roof momentarily," he told her.

"And the steps to the porch, perhaps?" she asked hesitantly, her voice low. "It's quite difficult climbing up and down without them."

He glanced that way, hand shading his eyes. "Aye. I'll see to it. I spied a couple of good-sized stones, large and flat, near the barn that might suffice for now. Most likely cut for some similar purpose. I'll see what I can do about bringing them around."

"Thank you." She trudged to the porch and settled the chairs on the rough floor before hiking her skirts to make the high step up. Her father burst out the front door, nearly knocking her aside, and without so much as a "by your leave," made his way to the wagon for more goods.



Back at the hotel that evening, they found their mother asleep. Emmalyne wanted nothing so much as a hot bath and something to eat. She was famished, but she knew she could never settle down to enjoy a meal in her current condition.

"I'm going to have a bath," she announced.

"There'll be a charge for that," her father said, frowning.

"Aye, but I cannot go to supper in this condition," she said, looking down at herself. "Please don't feel you have to wait on me. I can eat alone."

“We can bring your food to you,” Angus offered.

Emmalyne thought on the offer momentarily. “That would be good. That way you can go and enjoy your meal without delay.”

“And ye won’t be needin’ to spend good money on a bath,” her father declared.

“Father, please.” Emmalyne pointed to her filthy attire. “I must have a bath.”

“Ye’ll only get jest as dirty on the morrow.”

“It’s but a wee expense,” Mother offered quietly from her place on the bed.

Father glared. “And a wee expense here and a wee expense there is takin’ ma coin much more quickly than ye’d know.”

“I’ll pay for it myself,” Emmalyne said under her breath, knowing better than to prolong the argument. She gathered clean clothing and her hairbrush without another word.

On the way down the hall to the bathroom, she couldn’t wait to lock the bathroom door and isolate herself from the rest of the world. Especially from her father.

Chapter 4



Emmalyne sat in the back of the wagon beside her mother. The rest of their things, including newly purchased groceries, were stacked around them. While Father squared the bill with the hotel proprietor, Mother questioned Emmalyne about the new house.

“Is it very big?”

“No,” Emmalyne said slowly, scrambling to find positive things to say. “But it has some lovely grounds. Of course, there’s weeding and planting to be done. There’s been no one on the property for some time.”

“But the house is in good condition?” Mother looked so hopeful, but Emmalyne knew she couldn’t lie.

“It was very dirty. Parts of it still are. There are repairs to make, but I think we can set it to good order in the days to come. I’m hoping perhaps to purchase some whitewash so we can at least freshen up the inside walls.”

“And what of our things?”

“Father and Angus brought everything by yesterday. We stored it all in the front room, and today as I get more of the house in order, I will see to helping you arrange them.”

“Oh, I’m hardly well enough for that.” Her mother put a hand to her forehead and sighed. “I’m quite weak. I shall need to go straightway to bed.” She sighed again and slumped against the side of the wagon. “I feel so tired.”

“Well, Angus and I will need to set up your bed before you can rest properly,” Emmalyne told her. She wasn’t at all sure where she’d get stuffing for the mattress. Seeing her father approaching from the hotel, she figured it would be best to question him now, before they left town.

“Father, what are we to use for mattress stuffing?”

He looked at her and narrowed his eyes. “What do ye suppose?”

“Well, some fresh straw would work well enough for a time. I thought it might do us well to purchase some bales before heading too far from town.”

“Always somethin’ to spend more of ma hard-earned dollars on.”

“I was hoping, too, that we might purchase some whitewash for the walls. They’re in very poor shape, and painting would help—”

Her father’s sputtered oath stopped her comment. He shook his head. “Mebbe ye’d like to be buyin’ eiderdown instead of straw, as well.” He climbed into the wagon seat and grabbed up the reins. “I swear, wimen cannae leave a man his coin.” He continued to mutter after putting the horses in motion.

Emmalyne said nothing further. It was best to let him rant and vent his anger. For whatever reason, her father was of the mind that the entire world had one purpose: to rob him of his cash.

They drove away from the heart of St. Cloud, and Emmalyne tried her best not to worry about the matter. Her father would relent on the straw; after all, he would have to sleep somewhere, too, and she knew he wasn’t about to make his bed on the floor. He might even give in on the whitewash, because she knew he expected a tidy and well-managed house.

Lord, she finally prayed, you know our needs. It does little good for me to fret over them. Please provide for us. She caught sight of her mother dabbing a handkerchief to her face. And please help Mother to feel better. Amen.

They were well to the west side of town before Father slowed the wagon and stopped in front of a hardware and feed store. He motioned to Angus and came around to the back of the wagon.

“Ye’ll need to arrange things here to make room for the straw,” he told Emmalyne.

“Aye, Father. I’ll see to it now.”

She wasted no time as her father and brother disappeared into the store, almost fearful that if she delayed, Father might change his mind. The wagon now held only the things they’d traveled with from Minneapolis and some crates of food items her father had purchased earlier. Emmalyne quickly stacked the three small trunks atop each other and pushed the crates together toward the front of the wagon.

It wasn’t long before her father and brother reappeared. “We’re to drive around back,” her father announced abruptly.

Emmalyne didn’t dare to ask about the whitewash, but she continued to pray that God would influence her father’s choices. Her father might be of a mind to ignore God, but Emmalyne was quite certain that God wasn’t likely to ignore Luthias Knox.

Her father parked the wagon near an open barn behind the store and climbed down once again. Angus went with him to where two men were standing. Emmalyne saw her father produce the bill of sale, and the men sauntered off to retrieve the goods.

To her surprise, her father had purchased ten bales of straw. It was most generous, given his earlier comments, and Emmalyne felt very fortunate. Ten bales would go a long way to making their beds comfortable.

As they continued to bring bale after bale, Emmalyne had to assist Mother from her perch on the wagon bed and exchange it for a seat on one of the bales.

“This should prove more comfortable, anyway,” she told her mother with a grin. “You can lean back against the trunks.”

Once the bales were loaded, Father stepped toward the front of the wagon. Angus, however, turned and went back to the barn. In a moment, one of the workers appeared with four tins of whitewash, two in each hand. Emmalyne watched in silence as Angus took the cans and hoisted them into the back of the wagon. He threw Emmalyne a wink, then lifted her into the back, as well. Before he left her there he pulled a broad paintbrush from his back pocket and handed it to her.

God had heard her prayers.

Once Father had the horses move out, Mother began to again question Emmalyne.

“Is there a good fireplace?” Her voice was low.

“I believe it will be suitable. I did a bit of cleaning on it, but of course we’ll need to check the chimney. As long as it has sat idle, there are bound to be nesting birds within.”

Her mother frowned. “Is it still terribly dirty?”

Emmalyne couldn’t very well lie to her mother. After all, she would see for herself the extent of the situation soon enough. “It is, but I’ll be hard at work to set it right. Your bedroom is clean enough, and Angus will set the bed up while I find the ticks and stuff them. That way you can rest right away.”

“Is there a fireplace in the bedroom?”

“No.”

“What of a stove?” Mother asked.

“No, but I’m sure if the bedroom doors are left open the warmth from the kitchen and fireplace will provide enough heat.”

“But what of the winter?”

Emmalyne shrugged. "Maybe Father will buy a stove before then." She didn't believe he would, but it was better than telling her mother they'd simply have to pile on additional quilts.

Mother seemed uncertain. "Perhaps we should have stayed in town," she murmured as she looked around. Their journey was taking them farther and farther into the less populated countryside.

"I would have liked that, too," Emmalyne admitted, "but Father felt it necessary to leave the hotel and save money. At least we have the whitewash and other supplies. I'm sure we can make a nice home. There are repairs that will need to be made, of course, but you mustn't let that cause you worry. Angus and I will see to it."

Her mother gave a heavy sigh and lowered her voice even more. "This place reminds me of . . . your sisters." She wiped a tear from her eye. "When I think on them, I can't help but wonder what kind of women they might have become."

"I know, Mother. I think about that sometimes, as well." She patted her mother's hand.

"And ye think of him."

The matter-of-fact statement surprised Emmalyne. She didn't have time to mask her emotions as an image of Tavin filled her mind. "Aye. I do now and then."

Her mother nodded. "I sometimes think on him, as well. I wonder what kind of life you might have had with . . . Tavin." She barely breathed the name.

They said little else for the remainder of the trip. Emmalyne felt a growing sense of sorrow deep within . . . the loss of her sisters, the loss of her friendship with Fenella, the loss of Tavin. She fought against the feelings, however. They would serve her no good purpose. If she allowed herself to become melancholy like her mother, neither of them would be of any use. It wasn't easy to hold back her sadness, but Emmalyne had learned over the years that if she forced it down long enough, it would retreat, rather like an admonished pup.

When they finally arrived at the house, Emmalyne waited for her mother's reaction. The older woman looked at the house and then at Emmalyne. She seemed to want Emmalyne to confirm—or more likely, deny—that this was indeed to be their home.

"Father and Angus are going to shore up the porch roof, and then you'll have a nice place to sit in the evenings," she offered, scooting from the straw bale and off the wagon. "The kitchen isn't ready, but I plan to tackle that while you rest. I have the rocking chair set aside for you so you can sit there while Angus and I see to your bed."

She continued chattering on, knowing her mother's fears were great and many. "Of course, now that we have the nice whitewash, we won't want to place too many things before we have a chance to dress up the walls. Oh, and I think the rugs we brought from Minneapolis will work well in the front room."

Angus lifted his mother from the wagon while their father stepped down and considered the house for a moment. "As soon as we unload," he told Angus, "we'll be headin' over to the MacLachlans."

Emmalyne frowned. Once again her father intended to leave her to see to all the things that must be done in the house. She decided to risk his ire. "Father, there are a great many repairs to be made. If you want to sit down to a meal this evening, I will have to have Angus's help."

Her father said nothing for a moment, but then nodded. "As ye say." He went to the back of the wagon. "Where do ye want the straw?"

Emmalyne was surprised he even bothered to ask. "The porch would be good." Despite the sagging roof, she felt it was the most convenient place to stuff the mattresses.

It took little time until the wagon was emptied of its contents. Meanwhile, Emmalyne helped Mother into the house. She could see her mother's immediate dismay, so decided to direct her attention elsewhere.

"If you sit here, you can see what's going on." Emmalyne helped her mother to the rocker in the front room. "Maybe if you feel up to it, you could peel some potatoes for me."

"This place is worse than I imagined," her mother said in a whisper.

"Aye, it has many problems, and a great deal of work is yet to be done." She tried to make the statement sound casual and unimportant, but Emmalyne knew exactly how her mother felt.

"Oh, this is terrible." Mother buried her face in her hands.

"It will be better soon," Emmalyne assured her, trying to hide her own dismay.

She left her mother sitting in the rocker and went to search for the mattress ticks. She found them quickly and immediately went to work. Stuffing mattresses was a tedious task; having rolled up her sleeves for the hot work, Emmalyne suffered countless scratches to her skin by the prickly pieces of straw. But there really wasn't an alternative. If she put her sleeves down, the straw would merely work its way through, and then she would have the added task of later picking it out of her clothing.

Once she had her parents' tick stuffed, Emmalyne and Angus carried it to the bed.

"I have the sheets and quilts ready," she told him. "I'll get the bed made, and you can help Mother. She's taking this rather hard."

"I know," Angus said, nodding. "City living was easier for her."

"Aye. More convenient and orderly," Emmalyne said.

Their mother hadn't wanted to make this move, but she had known it would happen with or without her approval. She had instructed Emmalyne in the packing and because of that, items that were necessary to everyday life were arranged at the top of the crate, while others used less often were settled below. The bedding, which had been freshly washed and ironed, had been carefully secured in cloth sacks before being put in the crates. Mother had hoped this would protect them from dirt and soot during the trip.

Emmalyne unfolded her mother's quilts and sheets and smiled. It looked like the trick had worked. "They seem to have fared quite well." To her surprise, Angus helped her make the bed, and the process went faster with the two of them working together.

"As soon as Mother is in bed, I'm going to go upstairs and see about that hole in the roof," Angus told Emmalyne as they returned to the front room.

"There's a hole in the roof?" their mother asked, shaking her head in disbelief. "Is there nothing good in this place?"

"There will be only good once we set it to rights, Mother," Emmalyne declared. "As you've often said, sometimes the only good to be had is what you bring with you." She smiled. "Now we have your bed ready, and you can have a little rest."

She was glad to get her mother settled in the back bedroom before turning to the massive endeavor of cleaning the kitchen. She'd managed a portion of the work the day before, but the room was nowhere near ready to prepare a meal. No doubt her mother would fret and fuss if she were to see the true state of that most essential room.

Emmalyne lost track of the time as she prepared hot water for cleaning. From time to time she heard hammering and smiled to herself. Angus would see that she had a solid roof overhead before nightfall.

For now she tore through the cabinets in the kitchen and scoured them thoroughly. She wasn't about to unpack her mother's good dishes until she could be assured that they would be safely stored.

Goodness, but what was Father thinking? This is no house in which to bring a sick woman.

The heat of the day was well upon them, and sweat trickled down Emmalyne's face and neck. She pulled the scarf from her head and wiped at the dampness, then got back to work. She was battling cobwebs near the corner of the room where the cabinets ended when the sound of an approaching wagon filled her with dread. Had Father returned already? She wasn't nearly finished. . . .

Climbing down from her perch on an overturned box, Emmalyne went to the door. To her surprise and horror, however, she saw a smartly dressed man climbing down from a small buggy. He was tall

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