

HOME TO *A* MANA

A
SIMPLE CHANGE

JUDITH MILLER



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To Wendy Lawton

Thank you for your godly wisdom,
creative spirit, boundless encouragement,
and unfailing friendship.

A man's heart deviseth his way:
but the Lord directeth his steps.
—Proverbs 16:9

 CHAPTER 1 

February 1881
Kansas City, Missouri

I lifted the lid of the gaily decorated story-day box sitting beside me and glanced about the semicircle of children surrounding my chair. Their eyes sparkled with anticipation as they looked at the box and then peered at me. When I didn't immediately remove anything from the box, the youngsters—six boys and four girls, ranging in age from five to ten years—craned their necks forward, hoping to catch a glimpse of what might be inside. Before they could meet with any success, I placed the lid back on the box. Ten little chests deflated, and a unified moan escaped their lips.

None of them had developed any patience, at least not when it pertained to the story-day box. For the orphans who lived and attended my classes in the Kansas City Charity Home, the weekly

story-day event had become an enchanting time that rivaled even recess.

Nettie stretched her arm and pointed her index finger toward the box. “What did you bring, Miss Jancey?”

Matthew folded his body forward and turned his head to face Nettie. “Mr. Ludwig said we’re supposed to call her Miss Rhoder, not Miss Jancey. He said ‘Miss Jancey’ wasn’t proper for a school-teacher, didn’t he, Miss Rhoder?” The nine-year-old sat up and brushed the dark strands of hair off his forehead.

“He did, Matthew. I believe Nettie merely forgot the new rule.”

The six-year-old towheaded girl tucked her chin against her chest. “I’m sorry, Miss Rhoder.”

“It’s quite all right, Nettie. Now that we have a different director, we all must learn the new rules.”

Although I thought this particular regulation a bit silly, I’d been silent about the change when Mr. Ludwig, the new director, made the announcement. My decision had been strategic. Except for insisting the children address teachers and other staff by surnames, Mr. Ludwig’s regulations were less strident than those of the previous director. This particular rule didn’t warrant making waves in the rather calm sea of change we’d experienced since his arrival. Besides, in the three years I’d been working at the orphanage, I’d learned that challenges were best saved for important issues—ones that most affected the children’s care and education.

Matthew scooted to the edge of his chair and squared his shoulders. “I already know all of the rules.”

Caroline lifted her arm and waved in my direction. Once I nodded for her to speak, Caroline turned toward Matthew. “You don’t know all the rules, Matthew Turner, or you would have raised

your hand before speaking.” After directing a smirk at Matthew, Caroline patted Nettie’s arm and whispered in the girl’s ear.

John raised his hand. “Are you going to tell us a story, Miss Rhoder?”

“I am, but first we’re going to do something different. Instead of bringing a lot of my belongings from home, I thought it would be fun to make some of the things we need to help us act out our story today.”

My idea met with mixed emotions. The girls appeared pleased by the idea of participating in the activity, while the boys wanted to begin the storytelling.

Matthew folded his arms across his chest. “What’s the story and what do we have to make?”

“Today we’re going to combine history with storytelling. We’re going to reenact George Washington crossing the Delaware with his troops.” I looked at Matthew and the other boys. Their frowns turned to smiles at the mention of George Washington and his troops.

While reaching into the story-box, I looked around the group. “Who can think of something we might want to make for our journey across the river?”

“I know. I know!” Charlie shouted. “We need boats.”

Matthew jabbed the younger boy with his elbow. “We can’t build boats, Charlie.”

I stood and motioned to Charlie. “I think we can form some pretend boats with chairs. Would you like to take charge of the boats for us, Charlie?”

He bobbed his head and smiled. “Want to help, Matthew?”

Though I hadn’t expected him to agree, Matthew jumped to his feet and pulled a chair to the far side of the room. “Let’s do it over here.”

Once the boys were busy arranging chairs, I pulled a sheaf of newspapers from the story-box. “We can make tricorne hats out of the newspaper, and I brought some butcher paper we can paint blue for the water.” I tapped my chin. “I don’t know what we can use to create make-believe ice in the water. Any ideas?” I glanced around the room.

Bertie waved toward the dining room. “We can lump up some of the towels and napkins.”

The other girls applauded her suggestion, and soon the children were hard at work creating the mock scene. Once the scene was completed, I related the story of how General Washington had rallied his men, and how, in the freezing weather, they’d successfully crossed the frigid waters.

When I finished explaining the history, I looked at the group of boys, all of them eager to participate in acting out the story. “Who would like to play George Washington?”

To my surprise, Matthew motioned to Charlie. “I think it should be Charlie. He’s the one who figured out how to make the chairs into boats.”

My heart swelled at Matthew’s suggestion. He’d suggested Charlie instead of himself for the major role. Such a thing wouldn’t have happened a year ago, but throughout the past year, with a bit of coaching and encouragement, Matthew had made strides in the right direction.

Moments later, I pulled him aside. “I’m proud of you, Matthew.”

His cheeks flamed red from the praise, and he ducked his head. “He deserved it.”

I squeezed his shoulder. “Why don’t you take charge of the second boat?”

Nodding, Matthew hurried forward and motioned for several

of the children to join him. These slight modifications in the children's behavior had become a measuring stick for me. When I saw changes for the good, it confirmed that this orphanage was where I was meant to teach.

At the time I'd accepted the job, my parents had expressed concern. They'd anticipated that upon completion of my education, I would accept a position at a finishing school for a year or two and then marry. Instead, I'd returned home, accepted a post at the orphanage school, and remained single—at least for the present.

If Nathan Woodward had his way, we'd already be married. Nathan had proved to be the persistent sort. My father said that was a good thing, but I wasn't so sure. At times, I thought him too impatient, too eager, a bit too sure of himself, and a bit too sure of me, as well. He never seemed to doubt that we would one day marry, but I remained uncertain. I had yet to sense the stomach flips and heart flutters my girlfriends spoke of experiencing when they'd fallen in love.

"How does this look, Miss Rhoder?" Bertie had scrunched frayed white napkins into clumps and placed them on the blue butcher paper. "Henry says they don't look like ice, but I told him he's supposed to use his imagination." She inched closer to my side and peered at me with eyes nearly the same shade of blue as my own. "The chairs don't look like boats, either. How come Henry didn't say that to Charlie or Matthew?"

"Let's overlook what he said for today. I don't think he meant to hurt your feelings." Although Bertie didn't appear convinced, she agreed. "Everyone put on your hats and gather at the shoreline."

Henry perched his small hands on his hips and shook his head. "There weren't any girls on the boats, Miss Rhoder."

Bertie jutted her chin. “There weren’t any boys, either, so if we can’t get in the boats, neither can you, Henry.”

After a few minutes of explanation and arbitration, the children gathered to listen while Charlie gave a speech and rallied the troops. The children rowed with brooms and mops, pushing aside the clumped-up napkins while pretending to shiver from the freezing temperatures.

I pretended to wave from shore. “What month and year is it?”

Matthew raised his hand and I nodded at him. “December 1776.”

“Excellent! And what war are we fighting?”

Bertie didn’t wait for me to signal. Instead she cupped her hands to her lips. “The Revolting War against the Bristish.”

Henry shook his head. “It’s the Revolutionary War and it’s British not ‘Bristish.’”

Bertie’s lip quivered, and I turned to Henry. “She may have mispronounced the words, Henry, but Bertie’s answers were correct.” I stepped through the make-believe water and stooped down beside Henry. “What is our rule about correcting other students?”

“We let the teacher do it,” he mumbled.

I nodded and returned to the imaginary shoreline. “I’m glad I didn’t sink and drown while I was out by the boats.”

The children giggled, and I soon continued questioning them about their history lesson. I knew when these questions appeared on their next test, they would all remember the answers. Story time and play acting had become my most effective teaching method, a technique I enjoyed as much as the children. And while Miss Manchester, who taught the older children, thought my system a silly waste of time, she did admit my children retained much of what they’d been taught during these sessions.

I hadn't learned this method in college, but rather during my childhood, as my mother entertained me with stories on rainy days or on evenings when my father worked late. Those times remained some of my favorite memories. I hoped our story times in school would give these children many fond memories to carry throughout their lifetimes, for I was certain that my memories of these children would always be important to me.

"We need to pick up all of our materials and put the chairs back in place. We have only a few more minutes until end of class."

The chorus of *aws* that filled the room caused me to smile. "You all did a wonderful job of learning today. I'm very proud of you."

"Can you bring the story-box again tomorrow, Miss Rhoder?" Charlie stood beside the row of chairs he'd helped carry across the room.

"Tomorrow is reading and arithmetic, but perhaps if you do well with those subjects tomorrow, we can do a story the following day." The children clapped their approval while I placed materials back inside the box. "Maybe you should help each other with your reading and math homework this evening just to be sure you do well tomorrow."

A ringing bell in the main hallway signaled the end of the school day. The children lined up in a snaky row and bid me good-bye before heading off to the dining room, where they would each be served a slice of buttered bread to curb their hunger until suppertime. Like most orphanages, this one operated on a meager budget. And though the children received three meals a day, the food was simple fare and the servings scant. Soon after I accepted the position at the orphanage, I found going home to a table laden with well-prepared food a mixed blessing.

As I waited for the horse-drawn trolley, a chill whipped at my skirt

and tugged strands of my ash-blond hair loose from the spiral bun I'd carefully pinned in place early this morning. Tucking the hair behind my ear, I watched in earnest as the horses plodded down the street at a slow yet steady pace. After waiting in the chill February wind, I looked forward to the warmth of a blazing fire and a hot meal.

I boarded the trolley and rubbed my hands together. Even my gloves couldn't ward off the surprising chill in the air. Tonight I wouldn't feel a twinge of guilt that my father had employed a cook and a housekeeper to tend the preparation of meals and the household duties. I'd struggled with the idea when my mother had first taken ill, and I still wondered if my parents thought it would be better for me to quit my teaching position and help at home. Though they both professed otherwise, I knew Mother sometimes felt uncomfortable having Mrs. Oelwine prepare meals and clean the house, but with her failing health, there had been no choice. Either I quit my job or we hire a housekeeper. Understanding how important the children had become to me, Mother decided Mrs. Oelwine would be a fine choice. And she had proved to be a perfect fit. Not only could she cook and clean to perfection, but Mrs. Oelwine also enjoyed conversing in German and sharing stories of her family with my mother.

Reaching my destination, I stepped off the trolley and walked the short distance to our home, a large house with a sweeping front porch and giant columns—a stark contrast to the small spaces allocated to the children in the orphanage. This house was far more magnificent than any home my parents had ever expected to own. God had been gracious to them—at least that was my father's opinion. Even though I believed my father deserved some of the credit, he vehemently disagreed.

When I attempted to argue, my father would always say the

same thing: “Many men are industrious, but most have not been rewarded with so many blessings. God has blessed us: There is no other explanation.”

Sometimes I wondered what he truly thought about Mother’s illness. If he considered his financial success a reward from God, did he believe her poor health a punishment? Only once did I broach the subject with him. He’d opened his Bible to John chapter sixteen, pointed to verses twenty through twenty-three, and told me to read the passage.

When I finished, he looked at me over his wire-rimmed spectacles. His words remain etched in my mind. *“We are not promised a life without suffering. That verse reveals that we will suffer. But we can remain filled with joy because we have a Savior who has overcome the world. It is suffering that makes us grow and cling to the Lord. It reveals our need for Him. When life is easy, we tend to forget how much we need the Lord. Do you understand?”*

Although I’d nodded my head in agreement, I hadn’t totally understood. And I still don’t. My mother was a good and faithful woman who deserved good health and happiness. Surely God knew that. How could she be filled with joy when she experienced such pain? My father said I should simply accept the ways of the Lord, but late at night I continue to question Him.

“Is that you, Jancey?” My father’s voice drifted toward me as I stepped into the hallway.

“Yes, it’s me, Father.” My stomach tightened. Why was he home so early? His days never ended until six o’clock—sometimes later. “Is something wrong?” Quickly removing my brocaded velvet cloak, I rushed up the stairs and down the hallway toward the upstairs sitting room. Still feeling the winter chill, I rubbed my arms as I entered the room.

My parents sat side by side, my mother's dainty fingers secured between my father's callused hands. She appeared to be doing well. I inhaled a deep breath and released the tenseness that pinched my muscles.

"I was afraid your health had taken a downward turn." I smiled at my mother and stepped closer to the fire burning in the heating stove. "What brings you home so early, Father?"

Deep creases that I hadn't initially noticed lined his forehead. "For a while now, your mother and I have been considering a change." The two of them exchanged a quick glance, and I saw the worried look in my father's blue eyes that were a clear match of my own. "Come and sit down, Jancey."

My earlier apprehension returned in an unexpected rush. I stepped forward and settled beside him. "What sort of change?"

We'd already made a number of changes to the house in order to accommodate Mother's declining health. The current sitting room had once been a guest bedroom, and we'd even moved the dining table to one end of the room in order to take our meals together when Mother couldn't navigate the stairs. There didn't seem to be any other changes we could make.

My father massaged his forehead, but the deep creases remained. "We are planning to move away from Kansas City. To Iowa. Back to the Amana Colonies."

My mouth turned dry and I stared at him. Surely I'd misunderstood.

CHAPTER 2

I attempted to make sense of what I'd just heard, but I simply couldn't. My father's announcement made no sense. My clenched fingers ached and turned chalky as I waited for further explanation.

My father patted my hands. "I know this comes as a bit of a surprise, but we didn't want to say anything until we'd made a final decision. Of course, we haven't received permission yet, so there is a possibility we won't be able to return. But your mother thought we should tell you so that you would have time to make your own plans."

My mind spun like a whirling top. "I don't understand." At the moment, I couldn't even think of an intelligent question.

"Of course you don't." My mother touched my father's sleeve. "You must start at the beginning, Jurgen."

My father frowned. "I'm not so sure where the beginning is,

but I will do my best.” He leaned back and inhaled a deep breath. “I suppose this all began with the onset of your mother’s illness.”

I nodded and urged him to continue.

“The doctor was here again today. Over the past few weeks, he has told us that your mother’s condition has worsened, and there is nothing that can be done for her.”

Fear and anger collided like a raging storm within me. “Then we should find another doctor. I don’t believe him.”

My mother shook her head. “You don’t want to believe him, but what he says is true. I have no desire to be probed and checked by any more doctors. Each one has told us the same thing.” Her gaze rested on my clenched hands. “Becoming angry at the doctor or my illness won’t change my condition.”

How could she remain so calm? And why were they thinking of returning to Iowa? Neither of them had mentioned the Amana Colonies in years—unless they’d been privately talking about the past. That must be it. Making such a drastic decision couldn’t have been something they’d decided in the past few hours. Though they hadn’t included me, there was little doubt they’d been making plans for some time now. I’d usually been included when my parents considered matters of importance, especially those that would affect all of us. I wanted to ignore the feeling of betrayal, but a pang of resentment had already taken hold.

“If you are as ill as the doctor says, you should be here where you can receive proper medical care. Why would you even consider traveling? To move at this time would create a tremendous hardship on both of you.”

My father tapped his index finger against his lips. “If you will let me talk, I will tell you.”

I curled my lips inward, determined to remain silent, and nodded for him to speak.

“Your mother longs to spend her final days in the familiar surroundings of the colonies. We still have friends living there, and it would give her joy to reunite with them. There is a simple life in Amana that she longs to experience once again.” My father stood and crossed the room. He stared out the window for a moment and then turned to face me. “The move will not be difficult. We won’t take much. I’ll have some of the furniture shipped, but our needs will be supplied once we are there. Unless you want to remain in the house, we’ll sell it. My lawyer can handle the details.”

My throat caught at his casual mention of selling the house, and I shuddered at the idea. All our family memories were in this house. “You plan to sell it?”

My father arched his brows. “Not if you wish to remain here.”

I didn’t know a great deal about the Amana Colonies. My parents had told me bits and pieces, but I’d never questioned them about their life in Iowa. It had never seemed particularly important to me. Until now. Question after question raced through my mind, yet my lips wouldn’t move.

My father’s eyebrows settled low on his forehead as he waited for me to respond. “Do you think you would like to remain in the house, Jancey?”

“Yes. No. I mean, I don’t know what I want. This is so unexpected. The two of you have had time to weigh your decisions, but this is all so . . . so . . . unbelievable.” I turned to my mother and looked deep into her gray eyes. “This is what you desire? To live the remainder of your life in Amana? To leave everything behind?”

In a period of only a few minutes, my life had been turned upside down. In spite of the warmth from the blazing fireplace, a

chill settled over my bones. In that moment I was certain nothing would ever again be the same for us. I wanted to run from the room and return to yesterday and the day before. I didn't want to continue down this path to an unknown world filled with strangers and a different life.

My mother bowed her head. "I know this is hard for you, Jancey, and I will understand if you decide to remain in Kansas City. This is the only home you've ever known. Adjusting to a different way of living is very difficult, and unless you truly want to come, it is better that you remain here."

"But why, Mother? Why do you want to go there after all these years? I don't understand." My voice cracked with emotion.

She looked up, tears glistening in her eyes. "I wish I could explain this need that has come over me." She patted her hand on her chest. "It is a feeling deep inside that tells me I should return home to Middle Amana. I have tried to ignore the urgency that's come over me, but it's been impossible. Your father and I agree that such strong conviction should not be ignored. By us." My mother added the final two words as she glanced at my father. "And though I would prefer to have you come along, your father and I agree that you should pray and decide what is best for you."

I couldn't imagine God sending me an answer to the many questions that now deluged my mind. "I'd have to leave the children at the orphanage. And there's Nathan." I twisted around and looked at my father. "What about the construction company? Are you going to sell the business as well as the house? What will happen to those men who depend upon you for their jobs?" My attempt to speak in a calm manner failed. Instead, my voice tremored in an eerie pitch that exposed my chaotic emotions.

Father returned to the couch and sat beside me. "I can see your

distress. I think we should have waited to tell you until after we received word from the elders. If we don't receive permission to return, we will have caused you great worry for nothing." He peered over my shoulder toward my mother. "Your mother and I debated about when was the best time to tell you, but I fear we came to the wrong conclusion."

I shook my head with enough vigor to send one of my hairpins flying onto the Axminster carpet. "I disagree. You should have told me much earlier. Had I known from the beginning, I could have digested the news in small doses. Instead, I must swallow it all in one giant gulp." I touched my throat. "And it isn't going down very well."

My father reached down, retrieved the hairpin, and handed it to me. "It wasn't our intention to hurt you. We were trying to protect you."

The sadness in his voice tugged at my heart. My parents would never intentionally hurt me. Yet how did my father think he had protected me? To argue against what they had done would change nothing for the better. Already I could see my mother flagging under the strain.

I clasped her hand. "You need to rest. Let me take you to your room."

She didn't disagree and willingly permitted me to help her to bed. When I returned to the sitting room, I expected my father to postpone further discussion until later, but he motioned me forward.

"Your mother is very tired today. Between the doctor's visit and her worry over telling you our plans, she's exhausted." He glanced toward the hallway. "Would you prefer to stay up here, or shall we go downstairs and finish our talk?"

“We can go downstairs and I’ll make a pot of coffee.” His smile was enough to tell me I’d given the answer he desired. “But I have many questions.”

He nodded. “And I will answer them as best I can.”

The expectation of a warm meal waiting at home had disappeared while I was upstairs with my parents, but once I neared the kitchen and smelled the aroma of a hearty stew, my mouth watered in anticipation.

I glanced over my shoulder at my father. “Mrs. Oelwine has already gone home?”

“Yes. Your mother explained that we would be eating late and asked her to prepare something that would remain warm.” He raised his nose and sniffed the air. “Smells like soup or beef stew.”

Although Mrs. Oelwine could prepare fancy dishes, extravagant meals weren’t served unless we entertained. Neither of my parents enjoyed the social gatherings that had been thrust upon them when my father had become the owner of Forsythe Construction Company, and he’d done his best to expand the business without the trappings of elaborate parties and other social functions attended by business owners in the community.

After grinding coffee beans and filling the pot with water, I sat down at the kitchen table opposite my father. “I’m not certain what I want to ask first.”

My father’s eyes radiated understanding. “Upstairs you appeared surprised I would sell the house, so let me explain. Your mother and I agreed that if you decided to come with us, it would be preferable to place the house for sale, as we would no longer have the necessary income to pay taxes or insure the property. In addition, if no one lived here, the house would fall into a state of disrepair. We also considered the possibility of renting it, but that

poses an additional set of problems. The rental moneys would not be ours to keep. I would be obligated to donate those funds to the community. In addition, we would still be responsible for taxes, insurance, and maintenance of the property. However, if you decide to remain here, we will deed the house to you.”

My stomach churned at the thought of such monumental decisions. I stood and walked to the cabinet and removed two cups and saucers. “But then I must worry about all of those expenses you’ve mentioned, and with no salary from the orphanage, I couldn’t possibly manage the upkeep on the house.”

He nodded. “So now you more clearly understand why I said we would sell the house?”

While placing the cups and saucers on the table, I halfheartedly admitted my understanding, though I wanted to argue that if they would remain in Kansas City, our lives could continue as usual. Rather than ask God for guidance, perhaps I should pray that the elders deny my parents’ request. A sudden pang of guilt caused me to push the thought aside.

“You also asked me about the business, and that is an even greater dilemma to solve. With Simon Hartzfeld’s help, I am working on a plan.”

My father’s lawyer had provided Father with capable guidance for many years, so I was sure Mr. Hartzfeld had developed an excellent plan.

“What sort of plan, Father? Do the workers already know about this?”

A slight gleam shone in my father’s blue eyes. “Are you asking because you are concerned about the workers, or because you wonder if Nathan has been keeping secrets from you?”

“Both.” My one-word response sounded more austere than I’d

intended, and I hurried to expand my answer. “Most of the men are married and have families. For them to suddenly hear the news I have just learned would be devastating. How could all of them expect to find work?” Without giving him an opportunity to answer, I continued. “Forsythe Construction is known throughout Kansas City as a flourishing company. I’m certain your employees believe their jobs are secure. You will be dealing a terrible blow to men who have been loyal to you and your business. As for Nathan keeping secrets, I can say it would cause me unease.”

“Nathan knows nothing of this, so you can lay aside those worries.” My father folded his hands atop the table. “I appreciate your concern for those who work at the construction company. Other than the impact this move would cause for you, those men and their families have been at the forefront of my mind. That is why I’ve been working with Simon. He believes that by the time our current construction contracts have been completed, a qualified buyer will step forward to purchase the business. As part of that contract, we will insist that the workers be retained for a period of one year.”

Soon the aroma of coffee filled the room, and I pushed away from the table. Wrapping a towel around the handle of the pot, I carried it to the table.

“And what happens to them after the year has passed?” I inhaled the fragrant aroma as I poured the hot coffee into my father’s cup. “Do you think the new owner will retain them?”

“Of course. Once the owner observes their abilities, he’d be a fool to let even one of my men go.” He chuckled. “Well, there may be one or two who need to work a little harder, but I think a change in ownership will be just the thing to light a fire under them.”

After pouring coffee into my own cup, I returned the pot to the stove. “It does sound as though you’ve been giving this a great deal of thought. When do you think you will hear from the elders in Amana?”

My father shrugged his shoulders. “I can’t say. It could be weeks or months, or it could be tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” I inhaled a sharp breath and dropped into the chair.

“I don’t think we will hear as soon as tomorrow, but you should give the matter much thought and prayer so that you can be at ease when the time arrives.” My father took a sip of his coffee. “I plan to make an announcement at work tomorrow. Simon doesn’t think it’s wise to wait any longer. We need to be fair to the workers. If any of them are fearful about the prospect of a new owner, they will be free to seek other employment. Though I hope that doesn’t happen, there may be some who are unwilling to risk the possibility of change.” His shoulders slumped as he leaned back in his chair. “Of course, I’ve been curious about what course of action Nathan might want to take once he hears the news.”

Leaving the children would be more difficult for me than leaving Nathan, but I didn’t say that to my father. I doubted he would understand. From his earlier comment, I concluded that he and my mother expected Nathan would propose marriage once he heard the news. Did they believe I would marry Nathan in order to remain in Kansas City? Surely they realized I would want to be with them.

While the children loved me with an unconditional zeal that couldn’t be questioned, my relationship with Nathan ran warm and cold, depending upon his mood. If I said or did something that displeased him, he could remain aloof for days. But when he

was satisfied with me, he behaved quite the opposite. While he'd avowed his love for me on two occasions, the declarations had both been made after we'd disagreed and I'd suggested we put an end to seeing each other. To marry Nathan while still unsure of his love for me—or mine for him—would be foolhardy.

"There's my work with the children. To leave them . . ." My voice trailed off as I recalled the fun we'd had earlier that afternoon.

My father nodded. "You should let the director of the orphanage know that you are considering a move so they won't be surprised if you decide to come with us. Unless, of course, you arrive at another decision after you have prayed." His lips curved in a lopsided grin. "And after you have spoken to Nathan."

In my heart, I was certain of my decision. To be away from my mother during the remainder of her life was unthinkable. If I didn't go with my parents, I'd forever regret the decision. Yet they had asked me to pray before making a decision, and I intended to honor their request. Maybe God would change my mind. But Nathan? I didn't think so.

I wondered what my future would be like in Amana. Women couldn't be teachers in the colonies, a fact my parents had pointed out to me when they'd told me to seek God's direction. They didn't want me stepping into a new life without knowing the truth. And that particular truth caused me more concern than I cared to admit. No matter if it was a fact in history, geography, reading, or arithmetic, nothing gave me greater joy than to see the light of understanding shine in a child's eyes. I would miss teaching, and I prayed God would somehow fill that void in my life.