



A Novel

Annette Lyon

TOWER *of*
STRENGTH

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BY ANNETTE LYON:

Lost without You

At the Water's Edge

House on the Hill

At the Journey's End

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*A
Novel*

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Covenant Communications, Inc.



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PROLOGUE



Coalville, Utah—August 1877

FRED HEADED OUT FOR ANOTHER day at the mine before the sun crested the nearby hills. He strode through the chilly streets, feeling giddy and hardly noticing the houses and businesses he passed. For once the cold didn't bother him, and the walk to the mine flew by. Fred's mind whirled.

I might be a father soon. Already!

His wife Tabitha had just sent him off with that bit of news, and now his feet hardly touched earth. At twenty-eight, he was far older than most men when they got married. *But I had to wait for my bride to grow up.* He smiled. *And Tab was worth the wait.* They had a ten-year age difference, but somehow, when they were together, the years melted away, and he felt at home.

When he reached the mine, he went inside with the other men, holding a lantern in front of him to guide the way through the narrow passages. The stale air and dank walls met him like an unwelcome but oh-too-familiar friend. Regardless, he still wore a smile on his face that even the chilly tunnels couldn't erase.

Reaching the section where he was assigned, he set down the lantern and got to work. He was part of the team that constructed the interior supports, attaching beams together to hold up the walls and prevent cave-ins.

Holding a mallet in one hand, he rubbed the base of his back with the other. His muscles cried out in protest from yesterday's work, but his mind kept returning to home. If Tab was going to have a

baby, they should move back to Sanpitch County right away. Her family would want them to be close by. And he'd find some way to keep his mother from meddling in their affairs and continually insulting his sweet wife. He hadn't realized it until after the wedding, but now he recognized that a good part of his mother's objection to Tabitha had probably resulted from the inheritance he'd received four years ago from his uncle, which had provided some money for his mother *until* he married.

No wonder no girl was ever good enough for me in Mother's eyes.

Except for Betty Hunsaker, a woman Fred had courted briefly when he was much younger, a woman who had been married for several years already. His mother always sang her praises.

"Too bad you missed out on marrying her," his mother said often. "*She* would have been a real catch."

He breathed out heavily and got to work. Would Tabitha be willing to buy that piece of land in Ephraim this soon? Even without a baby on the way, he didn't know if he'd be able to stand an entire year here in Coalville as they had originally agreed. Tabitha had wanted a full year far away from Manti—and from his mother. The days were long beneath the surface, with rarely seeing daylight—or his new bride. Leaving Coalville would be a welcome change.

But he wouldn't mention it quite yet; he'd wait a little longer and see how she felt. He'd stay as long as Tab wanted to. They had left Manti for a reason, and he wouldn't take Tabitha back until she was ready.

He finished shoring up the walls of one section of the tunnel and moved on to the next. In spite of himself, Fred kept checking his pocket watch. The hours crept by at a dreadful pace. He kept thinking about the light in Tabitha's eyes when she had told him she was with child. A grin would likely stay on his face until he went home that night, until he could hold Tabitha in his arms again and they could celebrate the new life growing within her.

"Hall, you got the end of that beam?" Joe asked. His voice seemed disembodied, coming from just outside the glow of the lantern.

"Coming," Fred said. He hefted the other end of the beam, and the two men carried it to the next spot on the tunnel wall that needed reinforcing. The two didn't need to talk to communicate as they worked. In unspoken cooperation, Fred held his end of the wood in

place above his head while Joe hammered spikes into the other end, turning it into a crossbeam.

Suddenly the ground trembled beneath Fred's feet. The wood in his hands vibrated, and a shower of pebbles fell around his shoulders. A rumbling went through the earthen walls, reverberating throughout the entire tunnel.

A massive explosion boomed, sending a searing heat over Fred's body. The force of the blast threw him across the tunnel and smacked him into the wall. Heavy rocks and broken beams collapsed on him.

The lanterns had gone black, making the tumbling rocks and cries for help seem even louder. The air was thick and hot. It choked back any cry coming from Fred's throat. He tried to move; his body wouldn't obey. He needed to cough but couldn't get enough air through the strangling smoke and coal dust. Rocks and debris pinned his legs, which had gone numb. The sensation slowly crept uneasily up his torso.

After a few more labored breaths, Fred's eyes slowly closed on their own, and the world began to fade.

Tab, he thought. *Our baby. Oh, Tab.*

Then all went still.

CHAPTER 1

Seven Years Later

Logan, Utah—May 8, 1884

TABITHA CRUMPLED THE LETTER AS she walked down the street. Holding her son's hand and moving too quickly for his short legs, she muttered the first words of the letter.

“Dear Tabby’ indeed,” she scoffed under her breath. “I am not a cat!”

The old nickname was really the smallest thing that rankled her about the letter, but somehow it was the only part Tabitha would let herself think about.

It was also the safest element of the letter to dwell on.

Tabby, she thought again, picturing a fat, multicolored feline. *It's Tab. Tab!*

As she marched down the road, six-year-old Will had to trot to keep up, and Tabitha was only slightly aware that she held his hand a bit too tightly. But what else could she do when the letter clutched in her other hand held information that might change the course of their future? When she knew all too well that her future intertwined tightly with her son's, that whatever she chose for herself, she chose for him?

And what, oh *what*, should she choose?

“Ma,” Will said between steps, puffing, “why are . . . we going . . . so fast? I thought we were . . . going home.”

She stopped at his words. Sweat dampened his hairline, and his brown eyes looked up at hers with total trust and obedience. She knew that if she were to ask Will to keep running for another hour—in circles—he would do it. *Sweet Will.*

“I’m sorry,” she said, tousling his hair. “You’re absolutely right—there’s no reason for such a rush.” She kissed the top of his head and tucked the letter into her waistband. It could wait. No sense in making him worry about such things yet. He deserved to have her full attention.

“Would you like to visit Chester before we go home?”

“Yes, let’s!” Will said with a hop.

They turned around and headed the other direction. Tabitha’s offer to visit the horse in Brother Merrill’s stable wasn’t selfless on her part. Visiting Chester—a horse she had helped birth and train—was something she did often when needing a spell away from the bustle of life. Somehow she felt as if she could think clearer when brushing his coat, talking out her problems in his stall. She could use some clearing of her mind about now, and Will would enjoy the visit; seeing Chester always cheered him up.

As if he needed cheering up. As if she had already decided to leave Logan and take the job in Manti. Move back to Manti after all these years.

Was that the right thing to do? Her left hand instinctively went to the letter in her waistband, and she drew in a breath. As they reached the stable, Will rattled on about his day at school and how he had won the impromptu spelling bee.

“Congratulations, Will. That’s wonderful!” Tabitha said, grateful she had heard that much of his story. “You even beat out Eloise Spencer, then?”

“She messed up on *neighbor*,” Will said, sticking his chest out, smiling widely with a tooth missing in front. “She put the *i* before the *e*.”

Tabitha gave him a squeeze around the shoulders as they reached the stable. “Then maybe we’ll find time to let you ride Chester for a few minutes.”

She lifted the latch and pulled the heavy side door open. A whoosh of stale manure- and straw-filled air hit her full-on as she stepped inside. She raised her hem a few inches to avoid getting manure on the bottom of her dress.

She held the stable door open for Will and watched him go inside, wondering what it would be like to go home to Manti. She hadn’t seen Fred’s mother or siblings for a long time—hadn’t seen his grave since the funeral.

Her years at Brigham Young College had been a convenient excuse for staying away. After all, even with the nest egg left by her husband, a widow needed a way to care for her son, and it was a matter of provident living for a widow to get an education. No one could argue that—least of all Mother Hall, who had held Tabitha’s lack of education against her. And Fred’s money wouldn’t last forever.

She had done well for herself. At six years old, Will was content, and Tabitha was happier than she could remember being since her oh-so-brief marriage. Refusing to think about that now, she followed Will inside. He had become the center of her world. It was because of him that she had pulled herself out of the spiraling hole of despair and come to Logan to attend school.

She had enrolled in only a few classes at a time because of her little boy, so it had taken longer than normal to earn her teacher’s certificate. Now she taught at BYC while Will attended school during the day. On the two afternoons a week that Will arrived home before Tabitha did, he spent the time with their landlady’s children. All in all, it was the perfect situation.

Yet here she was thinking about leaving everything she had built for the two of them, thinking about taking Will away from it all. Of course, he had never known his father. And he knew his grandparents only from letters, a couple of brief visits her parents had made to Logan, and one visit to Provo two years ago when they had met up with Fred’s mother while she was up north visiting family. Tabitha hadn’t managed to go as far south as Manti since coming to Cache Valley. It was so far away. Hundreds of miles. Days of travel. Lots of money. At least, that’s what she told herself.

If they went to Manti, Will would get to know his family. Yet doing so would take him away from the only home he had ever known.

The stable was empty of people. Hanging on the wall was the kerosene lantern she often used during her evening visits. She walked on, Will trotting at her side to keep up. She unlatched Chester’s stall. They went inside, and Tabitha pulled the door closed.

“Hello, boy,” she said, reaching inside a bucket that held sweet oats. Chester shook his mane and turned his head expectantly toward her voice. Tabitha stroked the horse’s rust-colored neck, admiring his strong lines. With her other hand cupped, she offered the oats, and

Chester's lips opened and scooped them up.

She wiped her palms together to get off the last bits of oats, then lifted Will onto Chester's bare back.

"Woohoo! Ride 'em, cowboy!" Will yelled, pretending to lasso something in the distance. Mild-mannered Chester didn't seem to notice or care.

Laughing at his excitement, Tabitha leaned against a post and pulled the letter from her waistband. The envelope was thin and sealed with a blob of red wax. Inside was a single sheet of paper. When she had picked it up at the post office, she'd been pleasantly surprised to see that it was from old Brother Christensen back home. In her younger years, she had spent afternoons haunting his newspaper shop, watching him typeset the paper and work the press and cleaning up after him. In some ways he had been like an uncle.

But in all the years since leaving Manti, he had never written her. Why now? Even after reading the letter, she could still hardly fathom it. With a sidelong glance at Will, who was apparently chasing Indians at a frantic gallop while Chester stood there looking bored, she reread the letter, again bristling at the old nickname.

Dear Tabby,

I'm getting ready to retire from the newspaper. Trouble is, I've spent my life making the paper what it is, and most of the citizens in the county have said they don't think anyone else could possibly run it.

Your parents tell me you've got book learning in newspapering and a right smart head on your shoulders. They've given me some of your writings—newspaper articles and school themes—to read, and well, I'm impressed. You should know that I'm not one who gives compliments lightly. In general, I don't think women are the best choice for positions normally held by men, especially in business. Don't know if you still have an interest in these things the way you used to, but I've been looking around for someone to take over, and after chatting with your folks and reading your work, you've changed my mind. You're the best I've found, man or woman, and I'd be proud to turn my paper over to you.

So I'm hoping you'll consider taking over as the editor and publisher of the Sanpitch Sentinel. At first, I want the transfer to be gradual so that folks here will still think I'm the one running it, 'til they realize that a woman can do the job just fine, as I suspect a good number of them will have stronger opinions than I ever did regarding the matter.

I mean no disrespect, of course. Terms for buying the paper can be discussed when you reply, but I'm sure we can work out an arrangement pleasing to us both.

Please respond in a timely manner so I can make arrangements accordingly. If you do not wish to take my offer, I'd like to begin a search for another replacement as soon as possible.

Best regards,

Theodore Christensen

Feeling tired and a bit confused, Tabitha lowered the paper and tried to think logically through her options. If she stayed in Logan, she could continue to teach. She could continue to write for the *Utah Journal*, the local paper. Financially, she wouldn't be rich, but they'd get along. She'd been careful with Fred's money. They could get by on it for several years yet. But it was also probably enough to buy the newspaper.

The biggest question of all hung over her head. How would Will fare if she stayed in Logan? He would do fine.

But what would happen if she went back to Manti?

She wouldn't be teaching anymore. And she couldn't take any new classes. There would be other issues, things that had nothing to do with employment, and she had to face those, just like she would be facing the past again—everything she had tried to walk away from. She would have to think again about Fred's death, about becoming a widow at such a young age. Those events felt like they had happened to another person, another woman. Not her.

And yet she remembered all too well what it had been like to be eighteen and wearing mourning black as she looked across the grave and saw Fred's mother glowering at her. What could she say to this

woman who blamed her for the accident? In a way, Tabitha blamed herself. If she hadn't been so all-fired eager to leave Manti, Fred wouldn't have been in that mine.

Maybe he would have been better off with Betty Hunsaker. At least he'd be alive today.

After the accident, Tabitha had returned to Manti while she waited for Will to be born. When she left shortly after his birth—to attend school, she told everyone—she didn't admit even to herself that she was really trying to escape. Just as she had escaped Manti with Fred. Only now could she begin to admit the real reason she'd left. But that didn't mean she was ready to go back and face the ghosts and pains of her past.

Tabitha took a deep breath and watched the bits of hay dust dance in the cracks of sunlight. *I'm no longer a child*, she reminded herself. *There are good things about going back.*

She forced herself to list those things. If she accepted Brother Christensen's offer, she could write and publish to her heart's content. She would be in charge of an entire newspaper, be her own employer. The very thought made her tremble with anticipation and excitement, and she almost hated to admit that to be in control of her future was what she had gone to school for. She wanted to be in the newspaper business. She wanted to *write* newspapers, not just *teach*.

And then there was the biggest question, the one she kept returning to. What about Will?

He would be close to all three of his living grandparents. He'd get to know some of his aunts and uncles and cousins—family he barely knew. That would be good for him. He would find new friends. Sure, leaving Logan would be hard. She looked out the window again, this time to the hill where the walls of the Logan Temple were nearly complete. The temptation to stay to see the building dedicated pulled at her, but she reminded herself that a near twin was being constructed in Manti. Staying to be near a temple certainly wasn't an excuse.

When it came down to it, going back to Manti *would* be best for Will. It might be the thing best for her, too, even if difficult.

She folded the letter and put it back into its envelope, then rubbed her eyes as she slipped it back into her waistband. "Will, what

would you think about going to live with Grandma and Grandpa Chadwick for awhile?”

Will pretended to pull hard against the reins to slow down his mighty steed. He patted Chester’s neck.

“Good boy,” he said. “Living with Grandma and Grandpa Chadwick? That would be neat.”

“Then I guess we’re going back to Manti,” Tabitha said. Will leaned down and wrapped his arms as far around the horse’s neck as he could.

“Do they have horses?”

“They sure do,” Tabitha said. “Two.”

Will held out his arms, and Tabitha got him down. He snuck out of the stall, closing the door behind him. If Will had his way, he would be jumping off hay bales and trying to tie a real lasso.

When he scampered off, Tabitha leaned in to Chester and whispered, “I’m going home.”

Home. The word brought a sting of tears to her eyes, and she suddenly had to bite her lips together. *I’m going home.*

All of the emotion that the word *home* implied bubbled up inside her again—childhood, mother, father, Fred, Will, security, love, hope, peace. Emotion filled her, and she didn’t dare speak loudly in case her tears upset Will. Instead, she stepped closer to Chester and began stroking his face and neck.

“Thanks for letting me think in your stall,” she said. “You always help.” Chester nuzzled closer, and she smiled. She reached up to a shelf for Chester’s brush. He nickered with pleasure as Tabitha worked the brush over his coat, smoothing her hand over his muscles.

“I have a lot of good-byes to make,” she said quietly. “Leaving will be hard. I’ve made friendships here; this is the only home Will’s ever known.” She paused, thinking back to the young, inexperienced girl she had been when she’d arrived—scared, alone, and husbandless, with an infant son to care for. “It’s almost as if I grew up here too,” she added with a wistful smile.

At a sudden realization, Tabitha stopped brushing.

Chester must have sensed her increased tension, because he started shifting his weight back and forth. She held the brush between her hands and took a step toward Chester’s face. She gazed into the

horse's big brown eyes, with their long lashes, and put a hand on his neck. The brush dropped to her side. She leaned in and rested her cheek against his neck.

"I'll be leaving you too, Chester. I hadn't thought of that." He pushed her shoulder away as if she had invaded his space, and she laughed. "I'm sorry," she said, stroking his muzzle. Her fingers threaded through his mane—his beautiful, long mane. "And you're right. I shouldn't cry like this." She wiped her cheeks. "But I'll sure miss you."



CHAPTER 2



Manti, Utah

“SAM, WAS IT? I’M BROTHER Carlisle. Good to meet ya.” The man stuck out his hand.

Samuel Barnett shook it and nodded, not correcting the man. He had never gone by the shorter version of his name. It sounded strange to his ears, but Americans tended to call him plain old “Sam” regardless.

“A pleasure,” he said, looking around the fort, constructed of tall, cream-colored stone walls. He stood there, unsure where he was supposed to go or what he was expected to do next. Who knew that becoming Mormon could turn his life upside down and inside out? He had hardly any idea who or what he was anymore.

Not that he regretted it. Not at all. He just hoped that sooner or later he’d be able to predict what tomorrow would bring with a little more accuracy than he could right now. If someone had told him six months ago that instead of trudging beside Helen through the foggy streets of London to go to the factory, he’d soon be riding in a jolting wagon on a hot, dusty road through sagebrush to a city in the middle of nowhere, he’d have laughed them to scorn.

Manti. He silently tried the name of the town on his lips and shook his head, wondering exactly what he’d gotten himself into. A leaden ball seemed to form in his gut as he tried *not* to think back to the burial at sea where he had left Helen behind somewhere in the swirling black waters of the Atlantic.

Brother Carlisle took in Samuel’s build, eyeing him up and down, then jerked his head backward and motioned with his hand. “Come

this way.” He led Samuel toward a barn, speaking as he walked. “You look like a strapping kind of fellow to me, and we’ve been looking for some help at the stable.”

Samuel picked up his sack and bedroll and followed Brother Carlisle across the fort, trotting to keep up. A feeling of dread grew inside him with each step. While Brother Carlisle was right about Samuel being strong—he was broad-shouldered and could lift more than most men—he had only ever worked with heavy machinery. Not once in his life had he ever had to deal with an animal.

Stable work doesn't bode well for me, he thought, swallowing a sickening knot. A breeze kicked up, and with it, the smell of manure filled his nose. Bile rose in his throat, and he had to cover his mouth. *Don't let yourself lose your biscuits*. He clamped his teeth to steel himself and squared his shoulders. *Act like a man*.

“Stephen,” Brother Carlisle called into the dark recesses as he opened the barn’s side door. “I found you some help.”

As they stepped into the barn, tiny bits of straw seemed to float everywhere. Samuel wiped the bottom of his nose with the back of his hand and tried not to sneeze or breathe too hard at the dank stench of livestock. He looked at his boots to see what on earth he had stepped in. They scarcely made a sound on the dirt floor, which was actually more like mud mixed with straw and manure packed down into a thick covering.

Stalls lined one side of the building, and the other side held mostly tools and tack. The far end also housed animals, but he couldn’t make out what kind they were. The only ones he could see right off were horses, some sticking their heads over the edge of the half doors of their stalls, some eating . . . whatever it was horses ate. A couple of tails flicked here and there, and chickens clucked and pecked off to the right.

Brother Carlisle grabbed a handful of oats from a nearby sack and walked up to a horse, letting it eat right from his hand. The animal opened its mouth and gobbled the food right off Brother Carlisle’s palm, its tail swishing as it ate. Samuel watched it work the food, especially watching the jaws and teeth, which looked plenty strong to break a man’s hand. He shuddered at the idea of feeding a horse from his palm.

“This one’s named Molasses,” Brother Carlisle said, then nodded to a shelf at Samuel’s side. “Over there’s some carrots. Grab one and feed her.”

Samuel looked from the shelf to Brother Carlisle and back again, then at Molasses. The horse looked powerful strong this close. He pictured the beast breaking off a finger instead of the carrot. Suddenly Samuel had an urge to hightail it out of the building and get back on the wagon and from thence to Salt Lake City, where he’d catch the first train heading east. It was one thing to ride a wagon that was pulled by a horse and properly attached to a harness and controlled by a man who was trained in such things. It was quite another to see a horse with rippling muscles at this proximity—and with nothing stopping it from biting your hand off. All the way from Salt Lake City, Samuel had made a real point of keeping a good distance between himself and anything alive that had more than two feet.

“That’s all right,” he said with what he hoped appeared to be a lighthearted shrug. “Let’s see if we can’t find . . . what was his name? Stephen?”

“Oh, of course,” Brother Carlisle said, patting the horse’s face and moving on. “Where is he? Strange. He’s usually in here at this time. Maybe he took a longer dinner break than usual.”

As they moved farther into the building, Samuel wondered what other animals were housed in there. After a few steps, they passed the chickens he had heard before. Were there other creatures like goats or sheep—or something bigger? *Buffalo?*

How many animals would he personally be caring for? What would his jobs be? He imagined all kinds of options. From the end of the corridor came a low moo. Samuel’s step came up short.

Cows. Land sakes, will I have to milk cows? What in tarnation have I gotten myself into?

* * *

The hired wagon took well over a week to travel to Manti from Logan. As they went south, first leaving the Cache Valley canyons behind, then Salt Lake City and Provo, they saw fewer and fewer signs of civilization. Tabitha felt as if they were venturing into the wilderness, with

drab yellow hills and scrub brush in all directions, leading right up to the bluish mountains in the east. She could have pressed the driver to go farther each day, saving her both time and money. But she justified the expense. Surely young Will tired easily, she told herself. There was no need to push either of them to exhaustion.

The real reason, of course, niggling in the back of her mind—and in her middle—was that with each step of the horses' clomping hooves along the dusty road, the more she dreaded reaching their destination.

This is the right thing to do, she had to keep reminding herself as the wagon jolted over the bumps in the road. *It is*. But she had never been one to welcome change—especially not since Fred's death, which had upended her life—and this was the biggest change in her life since then. In some ways, it was also a change that seemed to be an attempt at bringing things back to the way they were.

But life could never be the same as it was when she married Fred nearly seven years ago. She wasn't sure she could face the town without him, the boy she had admired and had eyes for since she was a girl really too young to be noticing boys. But how could she *not* have noticed the handsomest boy in town, even if he had been so much older?

The wagon drove southward on the long road that would eventually bring them into Manti. A hill in the distance was as far as she could see, but it merged into other hills, other colors and shades, and she couldn't make out anything distinctly. She had an arm around Will almost more for her own strength and reassurance than for his.

"We're almost there," she said quietly, not knowing if he'd hear, since he had slept the last hour or more.

Where there had been nothing visible but the purplish hills before, suddenly a brilliant white shape appeared on the horizon ahead. Tabitha studied it for several seconds before she realized what it was—the temple, with its rising walls of ivory stone. Her parents had told her about how big it was now, with sides more than fifty feet tall and the towers on each end about to rise even further into the sky. But to *see* it—to have that be the first thing Will laid eyes on when she came home—was something spectacular and unexpected.

She and Will jostled against one another along the road as they drew closer to the city and what was now clearly visible as Temple

Hill, with the temple getting larger and more distinct every minute. Tabitha took Will's hand in hers and squeezed it. They would pull into Manti very soon. He took a deep breath and lifted his head, blinking sleepily.

The city would be much as it had been when she left, with no place to look that *wouldn't* have ghosts of memories that she and Fred had shared. She imagined what some of those memories would be. Just seeing her parents' porch again would be hard. Fred had picked her up and dropped her off on those wooden steps more times than she could count. That's where he had proposed one rainy spring day.

Where would she and Will sleep? She hoped it wouldn't be in her old bedroom; she couldn't bear to sleep beside the window where she had sat as a young slip of a girl, staring at the stars, dreaming of what she had imagined would be her beautiful life with mature and brave Fred. Their future had stretched in front of her like a long, twisting road, and she had been so excited to see where the road wound, what lay behind all the bends. Who had known it would be short, with only a single turn?

The first of the ghostly memories hit her full force and much quicker than she had anticipated when the wagon hugged the road that edged Temple Hill. Will pointed to the right and asked, "Mama, what's that place?"

Tabitha's voice caught in her throat. "That's the cemetery."

"Is my daddy buried there?"

"Yes, he is," Tabitha said, trying to keep her voice even. "Do you see that line of pine trees on the far end? His is the tall white monument."

While Will searched the area, Tabitha gazed at Fred's headstone. It stood taller than she was and was made of the same off-white rock as the temple, which stood off to the left on the hill. She wished she could press her eyes closed and look away, but instead she could do nothing but stare at Fred's grave as the horses continued their trot. She remembered the day of his funeral—how much she had cried, the weak and frightened feelings that filled her very being, the accusatory stare of Fred's mother from across the open grave.

Tabitha wrenched her gaze away from the plot, finding her breathing had grown rapid. "And over there is the temple," she said, trying to avert Will's gaze—and her own attention—from the graveyard.

While it was natural to be weak and emotional at the funeral of one's husband, her pregnancy had only made her physical and emotional state worse. She hugged Will to her side as the scenes from the past crashed over her and the wagon left the cemetery behind. She raised her eyes to the temple and marveled at the work that had happened while she had been away. The last time she had seen the hill had been shortly after the site was dedicated, and nothing had been built there at all, not a stone atop another, not a piece of the four huge terraced walls that she now gazed on.

Those walls had been under construction when she'd left with Will; she remembered explosions shaking the air as tons of rock were blasted away. They were another reason she had wanted to escape—each explosion sounded so much like the one that had taken Fred's life that they sent her entire frame trembling and shaking. At times the noise made her retreat to her bedroom and sob from sheer fright.

But the work went on. The blasting allowed stone, sagebrush, and wild trees to be cleared, and in their place those four giant walls were constructed in terraces going up the hillside. Tabitha had heard about the size of the terraces, but seeing them herself was different. At a distance, they appeared to overlap, making them look like one mighty wall—a rugged fortress protecting what would someday become a house of the Lord. This close, the separate walls were more distinct, and she could see the zigzagging pathway that led from the top of the hill and through the walls to the street below on the west. So far, the Manti Temple looked like it would be close to the same size as the one in Logan. But the terracing here gave an entirely different feel to the hill.

On their wedding day, after they had left the crowd of well-wishers behind, Fred had stopped their buggy right here on the road and pointed to the hill. "Someday," he'd said, "we'll be sealed for eternity in a temple right up there." Tabitha had wrapped her arms around him and had gazed at the hill, planting her dreams of the future on the hillside as Fred clucked his tongue and moved the buggy forward. She had looked over her shoulder as they had driven along the road leaving Manti. Gazing at the hill, she had wondered what the temple would look like when it was complete.

Now as she skirted the hill, there it all was—the terraced walls layered one atop the other, and above them, four white walls rising

into the sky. Her parents had told her in one of their letters that the towers on either end, one taller than the other, would represent the two priesthoods. Tapping, pinging sounds echoed as the stonecutters worked and formed white stones to the right shape and size.

She couldn't help but think back to when she used to walk up to Temple Hill on Sabbath afternoons—years before any discussion of a temple being built, let alone before the blasting and the terracing began—in search of trinkets with the other children. Not arrowheads and fossils—that's what the boys wanted. No, the girls sought for round, black rocks—Jack Stones, the girls called them—which they used when playing jacks. But her favorite thing to find was the round, white ones that looked almost as if they had fallen off a pearl necklace. At home in a small fabric pouch that she had made herself, Tabitha kept a small hoard of the pearly stones and dreamed of somehow making holes in them and stringing them onto a thread to make a necklace for herself. How beautiful she would look!

As the wagon rumbled past the hill, she rubbed her arms, feeling unwell and shaky as the rush of memories came over her. When she was a little girl, the hill was ugly and barren, nothing but rocks, weeds, and sagebrush. Back then you could still see the dugouts in the south side where, her parents often told her, some of the early settlers had huddled against the brutal winter their first months here. She looked back at the south side of the hill. All evidence of those days was gone with the blasting powder and the terracing.

The last time she had dared play on Temple Hill was when she was ten, so she never did get quite enough pearl stones to make that necklace, even if she had managed to come up with a way to drill holes into them.

That's where it happened, she thought, noting a spot on the near side of the southern slope where the top terrace and the one below met.

The day stood out in her mind as if she could see it happening before her all over again—a Sabbath evening when, as usual, the children and the youth congregated at the hill to talk and search for treasure. At the time, Fred was a man of twenty, so mature and grown up. Tabitha was sure he didn't even know she existed, but she definitely knew of him—and seriously disliked Betty Hunsaker, the girl he had walked around the hill with, picking wildflowers and giving them to

her. Betty gathered the flowers into a bouquet and gave him shy looks and smiles that infuriated Tabitha in spite of the fact that Fred was so much older.

She had watched the two of them climb past her, and Fred stooped down to pick up a gleaming white stone to hand to Betty. Stomach roiling with envy, Tabitha glared at the seventeen-year-old beauty batting her eyes at Fred as she told him thank you. Tabitha balled her fists, wishing she had found that pearl stone for her own collection before Fred had given it away to Betty.

Tabitha stomped forward but then halted abruptly. Not two steps beyond Fred's boot was the biggest rattler she had ever seen. And he was about to step right on it. If he did, it would surely bite him, and—

Acting before she thought, she ran toward him as fast as she could, yelling, "Fred, stop!" He paused in his step just as she reached him. She grabbed his arm and pushed him backward. He stumbled, lost his footing, and landed on the ground, pulling Tabitha on top of him.

All these years later, she could still remember how strong his arm felt, the muscles flexing beneath his sleeve, along with the excitement and awkwardness of unexpectedly finding herself in such close proximity. Suddenly shy, she scrambled off him and to her feet.

"Silly, what was that for?" he asked with a smile as he sat up and replaced his hat, which had fallen to the side.

Tabitha was unable to respond at first for catching her breath. Instead, she just pointed several feet off where the rattler had disappeared under some rocks, then managed one word. "Snake," she panted.

Betty squealed in fright and backed away. Fred looked a little pale, but he smiled. "Thanks, Little Chadwick," he said, patting her shoulder.

Tabitha's heart began racing faster. He *knew* her name?

"That's your name, isn't it? Tab?" he asked.

She nodded, a giddy warmth shooting through her. No one had ever shortened her name to Tab before. She liked it.

"Then thanks again, Tab," he said, putting an arm around Betty, who was near hysterics, having abandoned both her wildflowers and the stone Fred had given her. He gently led her down the hill. Tabitha looked after them then defiantly picked up the pearly white rock and slipped it into her pocket before leaving too.

She never did go back to look for stones, telling herself she was too afraid of the snakes. But she did return several years later, her arm through Fred's as they walked together. They had meandered the hillside during the last summer before the workers had begun blasting and leveling the hill. The two of them reached the top, on the northwest corner of the future temple's footprint—although neither knew that at the time. There Fred picked a small spray of surviving wildflowers, this time for her.

"It looks like a castle, Mama!" Will cried with delight, twisting in his seat to watch the temple recede behind them.

Tabitha didn't turn around. "Yes, it does."

She shifted forward on the wagon's bench, looking away from the hill. In her mind's eye, she could see the day with the snake as if it were only a moment ago rather than nearly fifteen years previous. Just as she could picture the precise spot where Fred had plucked her bouquet—right there, where a worker was pushing a wheelbarrow.

As the wagon traveled through the town streets, she could almost see herself and Fred walking together, arm in arm, to a dance or a theater performance in a neighbor's parlor. The girl whom he had seen as nothing more than "Little Chadwick" before had now begun to grow up and had caught his eye. Fred was closer to thirty than twenty, and it was no secret that his parents wished him wed.

One night after they had been courting for a few months, they attended a recitation of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Under normal circumstances, she wouldn't have dared be so bold, but something about Coleridge's poetry moved her and made her more brave than usual. As they left the performance and drew away from any prying ears, she eyed him askance and asked airily, "So Fred, after all these years, have you simply sworn off marriage altogether?"

In all honesty, she yearned to know the answer but would never have thought herself capable of asking such a thing. But truly, what *did* he want in life? Betty had married a few years back, but there had been several other girls who would have happily become Mrs. Frederick Hall had he so much as uttered the question.

"On the contrary, I have the greatest affection for the institution of marriage," Fred said. He turned, took her hands in his, and kissed the tops. "I just had to wait for you to grow up."

Could that night have been less than a lifetime ago? Could it really have happened to *her*? Tabitha had thought the moment was nothing short of the most romantic thing to ever transpire anyplace in the world.

But what if Fred hadn't waited for her? What if he had married Betty or someone else when he was in his early twenties, when all his other friends were marrying? He'd almost certainly be alive today.

She smoothed her forehead with her fingertips, knowing that she couldn't live her life on "what if." But she had a feeling that after returning to Manti, it would feel like this everywhere she turned. No matter where she looked, she would be faced with one more "what if," and each one was horrendous to contemplate.

I saved him from death when he was twenty. But saved him for what? To die in a mine explosion when he was newly married?

A boom rocked the air, shaking the wagon, and Tabitha sucked in her breath. "What was that?" she asked, hating how much panic filled her voice.

"Just some stone blasting, ma'am," her driver said over his shoulder. "For the temple over yonder."

"Oh, of course," Tabitha said, sitting back. "How silly of me." The sound had been only a quieter version of the huge boom that killed Fred. She'd dealt with it after his death, too. If the construction workers still blasted stone regularly, she would simply have to learn to not hear the noise or react to it. Nevertheless, the memories of Fred, combined with the explosion from a moment before, made a torrent of emotions come back. She pressed her lips together tightly and looked away.

"Mama, what's wrong?" Will asked, reaching for her hand.

Opening her eyes, she put on a smile. "Just a sudden headache, that's all. Must be from the sun." She put her hand on his cheek and tried to smooth away his worry with her thumb. "Really, I'm fine."

But as she attempted to swallow the lump away, Will's mouth pursed to one side. He studied her face, remaining unconvinced. She laughed and kissed his hair. "I'm all right," she said, pulling him close and resting her chin on top of his head so he couldn't look at her. The young boy could practically read her soul. She held him tight and let tears fall silently down her cheeks as their driver continued down Main.

Was it part of God's plan for me to save Fred from the snake so we could have our child? she suddenly thought. *If I hadn't been on the hill that day, I might not have Will.* Tears stung her eyes, and she forced herself not to sniff, in which case Will would know she was crying. She held him tighter, grateful for the greatest blessing in her life.

"Farther this way?" the driver asked over his shoulder as they went past the Little Fort.

"Left after the fort, and then straight for a few of blocks," Tabitha said, hoping emotion didn't register in her voice.

She wouldn't let her mind continue straying to memories about Fred and Temple Hill. Not today. With brute force, Tabitha shoved such thoughts from her mind. She would see Mother and Father soon, and a sniveling daughter wasn't the first thing she wanted either of them to lay eyes on.

In no time, the wagon stopped before her parents' home—a pretty, pale blue house that sat on a corner lot with a flagstone walkway leading from the street corner to the front door. The path was flanked by shrubs that were much larger than when she was there last. Some of the plants were new. To the left of the porch stood a round, turreted room. Woodwork scrolling edged the gables and roof, while flowers and small bushes nestled at the base of the house. The maple out front was taller now, as was the line of stately evergreens along the right side of the house. The place felt smaller than the one in her memory, especially the round room, which she used to imagine as a castle tower.

The front door opened, and an excited voice emerged, saying, "Paul, they're here! Oh my goodness, they're here!"

Tabitha took the driver's hand as he helped her down, and then she reached for Will as he jumped off the wagon. She turned to the door, where her parents stood, smiling broadly. Father had more gray hair than he used to, especially in his brown beard. Mother's face had more lines, and both of their waistlines had grown by a few inches. Her father leaned on a cane, his shoulders not nearly as erect as they used to be. He looked so much like Grandpa Chadwick had before he died. When had her father grown old?

Seeing her parents brought another lump to Tabitha's throat. She took Will's hand and marched up the walkway, then noticed one

more person standing in the doorway—Fred’s mother. Sister Hall’s face was unreadable.

“I didn’t know you were coming today,” she said evenly. Her voice still carried the same chilly bite Tabitha remembered. “I came by on a Church matter. But it’s good to see you again.”

The shock of seeing her mother-in-law so soon made Tabitha’s step come up short. She swallowed hard and tried not to reflect her surprise. She hadn’t prepared herself for this. What would she say? The woman surely still blamed Tabitha for marrying Fred and taking away her money, for making Fred move to Coalville, which had killed him.

Sister Hall, I still blame myself, too, she wanted to say but couldn’t. As she and Will walked up the path to the door, Tabitha wished fervently that she had known Sister Hall would be present for her return.

Her parents came forward and crushed her and Will with hugs. Her mother kissed her cheek then pulled back, holding her daughter’s hands out to the side as she appraised her. “Look at you! So grown up and ladylike.”

Tabitha smiled in spite of her nerves. Of course her mother still thought of her as an adolescent, a mere girl. Just as Tabitha thought of her mother as the young woman she had been when all of the Chadwick children were small, not the grandmother with graying hair and lined face that stood before her now. Time had a strange way of playing games with one’s memory and expectations.

Her father bent down with his hands on his thighs and looked right at Will. “And who do we have here? He’s sure a handsome fellow. Must take after his grandfather.”

Will looked from his mother to his grandfather, sudden shyness etched in his eyes, which had opened wide. Tabitha stepped beside him and put an arm around his shoulders, enjoying the banter. “Will, this is my father, your Grandpa Chadwick.”

Her father stuck out his callused hand, virtually enveloping Will’s small white one, and pumped it a few times. “Nice to see you. You’re practically a strapping young man.” He measured how tall Will came on him—just to his plump waist. “Your mother had better stop feeding you so much, or you’ll up and grow taller than me, and that just won’t do. Maybe I can squish you down a bit.” He playfully

pushed on Will's shoulders as if trying to make him shrink. Will's mask of shyness melted, and he burst into laughter.

"I'm *supposed* to be this big," Will said, stretching himself to his greatest height, jutting his chin into the air as if that would add another inch. "I was six in April, and I'm gonna keep growing."

His grandfather laughed. "Let's go inside and show you around." He put a hand on one of Will's shoulders, leading him into the house. At the doorway, he paused and said in a mock whisper, "Let's see if we can't swipe some of that cake Grandma Chadwick made today."

When the screen door clanged shut behind them, there was nothing left to delay speaking directly to Sister Hall. The ease Tabitha had felt a moment before evaporated. She nodded and said quietly, "Good to see you again, Mother Hall. I hope you've been well."

"Likewise," Sister Hall said with the slightest tilt of her head.

It was strange calling her "Mother Hall," but the moniker was something the woman had insisted upon after the wedding. Perhaps the name—the title—would have seemed natural by now if the two had spent time with one another over the years, but using it felt stilted and false. She had hardly known Sister Hall before the wedding, but not for lack of trying to create a relationship on Tabitha's part. But it was difficult to spend time with and get to know a woman who didn't think her son should marry "that Chadwick girl," as Tabitha had heard herself referred to during their courtship. Apparently none of her successes in becoming self-sufficient and raising Sister Hall's grandson had made a snit of difference in her opinion of Tabitha.

The woman's face was inscrutable, which made Tabitha's stomach turn over. For the last hour on the road, she had felt rumblings of hunger, but suddenly her stomach felt sour, and she had no desire to eat anything.

"Come, come," Mother said, ushering Tabitha inside like a hen. "Let's get you settled." To the driver, who was still waiting patiently by the wagon, she called, "Come in for some refreshment, and then I'll send the men out to help with unloading the wagon."

Everything inside the house was smaller than Tabitha remembered. In spite of her uneasy middle, she graciously took a plate with cake on it and tried to choke down a few bites as Will sat with his grandfather

next to the fireplace and laughed himself silly at his games and magic tricks. Will seemed perfectly at ease now, having no qualms about reaching up and pretending to steal Grandpa Chadwick's nose. Will let out a belly laugh over the capture, which turned into a delighted shriek when his grandfather began tickling him, demanding, "You give me back my nose!"

Tabitha let the plate rest on her lap and watched the scene with sudden contentment as Will reveled in his grandfather's attention.

For the first moment since she had left Logan, Tabitha felt happy, for the sake of her son, even with Sister—*Mother*—Hall peering at her over her own cake plate. The road ahead would be bumpy at best—especially if she were to make peace with her mother-in-law. But somehow, as Tabitha settled into her chair and enjoyed watching her son play, pure joy on his face, she knew she had made the right decision. For Will at least.