

*Blizzards, droughts, and Ma Tinner
bring anxiety to the Creznerns!*

Goodbye, Belvidere: His Eye Is on the Sparrow

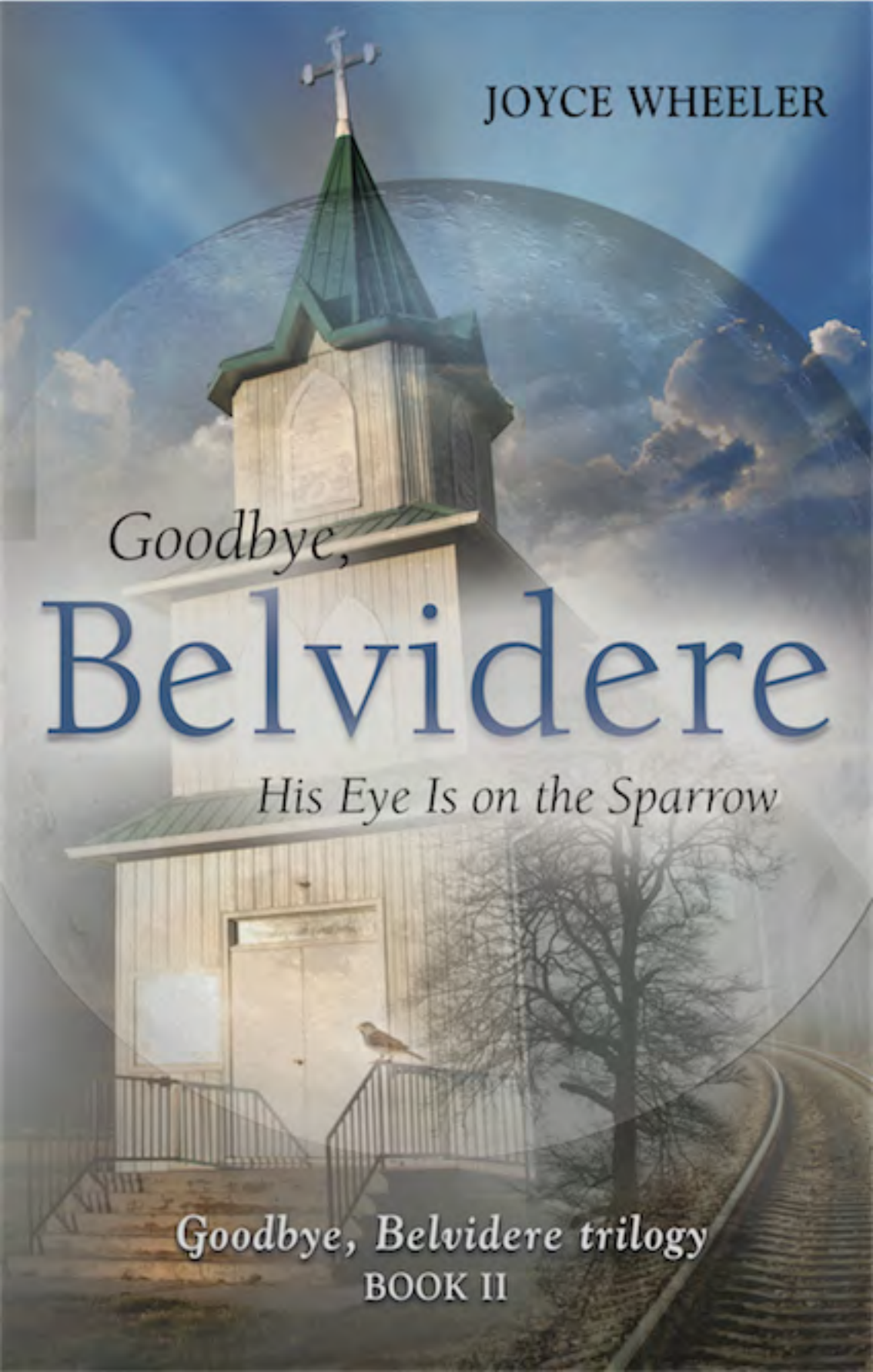
by Joyce Wheeler

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JOYCE WHEELER

Goodbye,
Belvidere

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

Goodbye, Belvidere trilogy
BOOK II

Goodbye, Belvidere

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

Joyce Wheeler

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Second Edition

Scripture quotes from KJV

Dear Readers,

In the first book of the Goodbye, Belvidere series, *A Hundred and Sixty Acres*, CJ Crezner was a young minister on a cattle drive in 1898. He found the virgin prairies of western South Dakota and the people who settled there fascinating, and to his family and his own surprise, he decided to stay—not as a minister but as a homesteader.

Love comes to CJ in two forms. Beautiful blonde Deborah Lynn Smith is a minister's daughter, who feels CJ should return to his family in Missouri. Dark-haired and feisty Joanna Swanson accuses him of running away and seems to care less what he does. Life gets complicated for CJ as he tries to sort out his problems. Fortunately, he has several mentors; and his outspoken landlady, Mrs. Ordin, sets him straight on many occasions.

He, of course, marries Joanna, and their life on the homestead with the ups and downs of weather, crops, cattle, and children weave a story of both fact and fiction.

The Creznors, Smiths, Swansons, Parker Vinue, and Tinnors are all imaginary people. However, throughout both *A Hundred and Sixty Acres* and *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*, real pioneers are woven in as themselves and their line of work.

The first book ended with Joanna and her brother Simon leaving Belvidere on one of the first passenger trains. They are headed to Minnesota to visit their ailing mother, and it's a journey Joanna dreads. She and her mother have never had a good relationship.

His Eye Is on the Sparrow continues the story with a time lapse of several weeks. It begins, as did the first book, with CJ writing to his parents.

Historical fiction is a challenge. This might be a case where ignorance is bliss because had I known the hours of research needed, I might have had second thoughts of tackling the project. However, I've learned a great deal of history and have enjoyed fascinating

Goodbye, Belvidere

conversations with folks whose parents and grandparents settled here during this time frame. I appreciate all the information they have given. Many, many thanks!

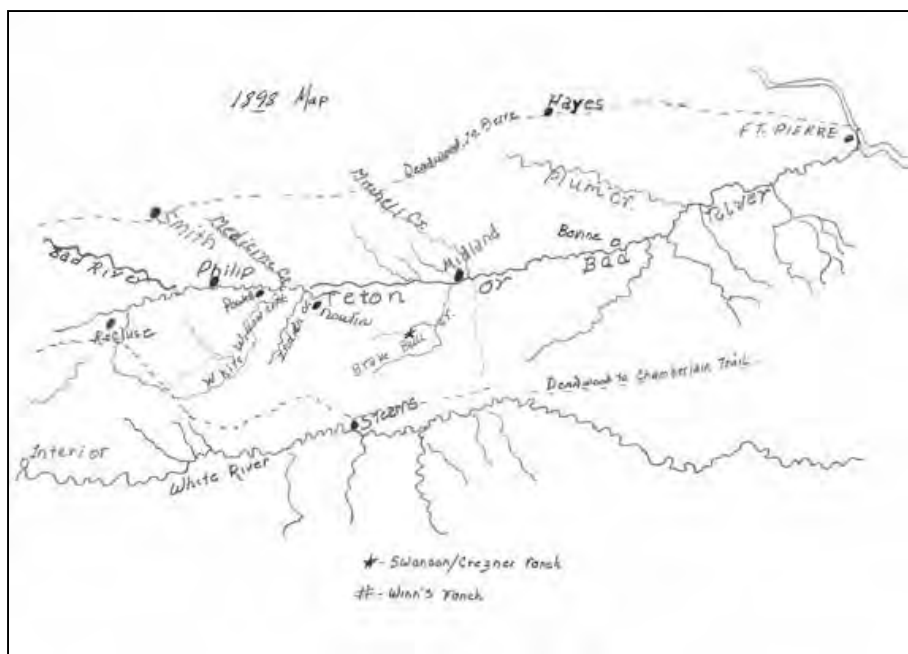
Sincerely,

Joyce Wheeler

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1910 RAILROAD MAP





1

May 1, 1907

Belvidere, South Dakota

Dear Mom and Dad,

Joanna has returned home. My wife continually surprises me. On a cold, damp April morning, two weeks after she and Simon left for Minnesota, a horse with its rider trotted into the yard. There was bedlam for several minutes when we realized the person under the hood of the yellow slicker was wife, mother, and aunt!

We were so elated to see her that we forgot to be ashamed of dirty dishes in the sink, unmade beds, piles of laundry everywhere, and clutter throughout her house. However, within a short time of her arrival, we were all working diligently to correct those oversights.

The best news is that Joanna's mother is feeling much better. I will let her tell you the details. As you know, Joanna and her brother Simon traveled on one of the first passenger trains to leave Belvidere. It was nice for them to have the luxury of train travel from here to Minnesota. Simon wanted to stay with his mother and his siblings for another couple of weeks, so Joanna traveled home by herself. Had I known this, I would have been in an agony of worries.

We've had lots of moisture this spring, and it has been cool and damp. It's been difficult getting crops in, but in South Dakota, we try not grumble about excesses in either rain or snow.

I'll sign off so Joanna can write her news.

Love, CJ

Dear Mom and Dad Crezner,

The main news I wanted to share with you concerns advice you gave me several years ago about the problems between Ma and me. You said when you were around difficult people, you thought of a couple of verses in Romans 12. I've read that chapter many times. It teaches us to be kindly affectionate to one another, and to live, as much as possible, in peace with each other. As you say, when we ask the Lord for help, He answers in amazing ways. He changed my attitude, not my mother. It made a huge difference during the days we were together.

Shortly after we arrived, Ma was voicing her many physical woes. I mentioned how much she liked her old doctor when she lived on the farm. The next day, she insisted I hitch up the team and buggy and take her to him. When he saw all the potions and pills she was taking, he clucked disapprovingly and took them all away from her. He replaced it with the one heart pill he had prescribed years ago and gave her a good pep talk, saying that nothing was wrong with her and that she best go home and get busy. Only he could talk to her like that!

We saw an improvement immediately. By the following Sunday, when all my siblings gathered together, she was as bossy as ever. And strangely enough, we were glad she was in usual form. I discovered what I used to find so irritating had become rather humorous (a characteristic, I might add, that my siblings did not share, and sister Gertrude worried that I might become just like Ma), but I also recognized that after so many days of being with Ma, even the Lord couldn't prevent my patience from wearing a little thin. It was time to come home. Simon wanted to stay longer, and we decided it was in everyone's best interests if I came home without him.

We always look forward to your wonderful newsy letters. CJ seems to have misplaced your last one, so I can't comment on what you wrote, but I'm sure it will turn up in some unexpected place. It's amazing where men decide to stash things.

The boys say to tell you hello, and that it's only four more months until your visit here!

Love,
Joanna



CJ read the entire letter as the setting sun cast its last glow into the dining room window before it ducked behind the western hills. His world was right again since Joanna was home. The homestead had been forlorn without her bustling activities.

“I wonder why Simon wanted to stay longer. It surprises me,” he said, putting the letter down.

Joanna was darning a pair of John’s socks and stifled a yawn before answering. “He seemed to have lots of people to see. I was surprised too. But I was too lonesome for you and the boys to stay longer. When he said a couple more weeks, I decided to head out the next day.”

“So did your ma want you to stay longer?”

Joanna put the darning needle in the spool of heavy thread and set sock, needle, and thread into her sewing basket. “No. We knew we had reached our limit of being civil to one another. I think we got along better than anyone expected though.” She yawned again. “I was happy she was better, and it was good to see everyone. Ma and I are speaking to one another, which is a huge step in the right direction.” Joanna stood up and stretched. “I think I’ll hit the hay early tonight, CJ. I can’t quit yawning.”

“You’ve been sleepy for the past week. Must be the weather,” CJ remarked as he got up to stoke the waning fire in the parlor stove.

“Or else it’s trying to catch up on sleep I missed while I was gone. I mean to tell you, between Ma and Simon snoring, I don’t think I slept a wink for two weeks. Good grief, I could hear them through the walls—Simon on one side, Ma on the other.” Joanna stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the cheek. “Did I mention I missed you and the boys something fierce?”

CJ put his arms around her and drew her closer. “You might have said a little something about it,” he said and gave her a light whisker rub. “In between planting potatoes, doing laundry, baking, giving the house a serious cleaning, and giving John and Isaac lessons, you might have mentioned it. No wonder you’re yawning. Go upstairs and get to bed, woman. I’ll finish here.”

Even if it was May first, the wind whistling around the corner of the house made CJ shiver. He hoped it wouldn’t freeze again, crazy weather anyhow. The air was damp and heavy as he brought in several armloads of wood for the stoves. By the time he was ready for bed, a light rain was falling. In the early dawn, CJ felt Joanna crawl back into bed, and he slowly opened one eye. He noted the sun was hiding behind some clouds, and he also gained a good understanding of his wife’s cold feet.

“It’s snowing,” she whispered and cuddled as close to him as she could.

“It can’t be. It’s May,” he grumbled as he tucked the covers around the two of them. “What did your almanac say about snow?”

Her voice sounded sleepy. “Never looked.”

Well. That had to be a first. Joanna always checked and rechecked the old farmer’s almanac about everything. He started to tell her she must be slipping in her almanac diligence, but she was already asleep again.



Breakfast that morning was slow and leisurely. It was as if the snow created an unexpected holiday for the household. Chores were kept to a minimum, and Joanna granted the boys extra time to get school assignments done. She fried a pan full of bacon and eggs. Her chokecherry syrup flowed over stacks of pancakes, and the coffee was piping hot.

Even Teddy was quiet while they ate. “You’re the bestest cook in the world,” he finally said as he chased the last bite around his plate with his fork and finger.

“That’s what you told Antonio when you ate her kolaches,” John reminded his younger brother. “You can’t have two best cooks. One is better, one is best.”

“Can too! So there!”

“Boys, stop it. CJ, you spoiled these two while I was gone.” Joanna scowled at her sons and gave her husband a light swat on the arm before asking, “Do I know this best cook?”

“She’s the best kolache cook, but you’re the best everything else cook.” Teddy managed to redeem himself while attempting an under-the-table kick at John.

CJ gave Teddy a steady look and an almost imperceptible shake of his head. It was enough of a warning to make his five-year-old son duck his head.

“Antonio and Frank are the little Bohemian couple that live up the valley. She was a cook in the Lake Andes area, and he was a farmhand. They heard about this country opening up for homesteaders and wanted a farm of their own. Just like a lot of others, I guess.”

“Oh, sure. I know who you mean. I just didn’t know her name. They have the sod house, and she had a baby while I was gone.” Joanna laid her napkin beside her plate and rose to get the coffee pot.

“I don’t know why she wouldn’t let me take him home for a while,” Teddy grumbled. “I could learn him American talk.”

Isaac and John waited for Joanna’s correction of Teddy’s grammar, but her mind seemed to be on other matters. CJ watched as they glanced at each other and shrugged.

“What’s a kolache?” She wondered as she refilled their cups.

“A sweet roll with filling. She’d made several different kinds, and Teddy especially liked the peach one.”

“I ate four.”

Joanna looked horrified. “Four! Good heavens, they’ll think we don’t have any manners at all!” She looked disapprovingly at CJ. “Why didn’t you stop him?”

“Well, because.” CJ shuffled slightly on his chair. “She was talking and passing the plate around, and Frank was talking and pouring coffee, and I was trying to figure out what they were saying, which ain’t easy.”

“Daddy said ‘ain’t’!” Teddy was delighted. “And that’s why I kept taking ‘em—’cause she kept passing ‘em!”

Joanna sank down in her chair. “I leave for two weeks. Two weeks! And father and son have forgotten both manners and grammar. No wonder I’m tired.”



“You wouldn’t think one man would need a wagon and a buggy plus riders to get his stuff home,” Joanna grumbled as they prepared to meet Simon. The middle of May radiated with spring promises. The hills were covered in a carpet of green grass, a refreshing change from the golden hues of late summer and fall. The breeze was fresh with a hint of warmth—a perfect day for Simon’s homecoming.

The white ostrich plume that adorned Joanna’s black velvet hat waved gallantly as CJ helped her into the buggy. “He could have given us a little more time and a little more information. I don’t know what he would have done if his letter hadn’t gotten to us. It’s a good thing Isaac rode into Belvidere yesterday to get the mail.” Joanna settled in the seat before she turned her attention to a pouting Teddy in the back seat. “And you, sir, can wipe that look off your face. Just because you can’t ride in the wagon doesn’t mean your lip can hang halfway to your chin.”

CJ tied two horses behind the buggy before he nodded at Isaac and John in the wagon. At fourteen years of age, Isaac was capable of driving the team, no matter what they were pulling. CJ often wondered

what they would do after he started high school in Pierre. He was a gentle-natured boy, serious for his age, and had been CJ's special friend even before CJ and Joanna were married.

CJ stepped from the ground into the buggy with one easy leap. He gave his team a gentle flick with his buggy whip, and with nickers and head bobs, they started up the road. He reached over and squeezed Joanna's knee. She usually gave him a wink and his hand a slap, but this morning, her mind was on other matters.

"Isaac grew up overnight." Joanna's voice had a melancholy ring. "And look at John—almost seven—riding along with him. Time goes too fast, CJ."

"I'm big too. I'm almost as big as Johnny." Theodore Simon thrust his face up and over the buggy seat. "I'm big 'nuff to ride with them too."

"No, you're not. You're your mother's baby boy, and she wanted you to be with her this morning. Now sit back before you crumple my feather." Joanna patted his cheek absently.

"Baby!" Teddy gave an indignant snort. "I'm five. I'm almost grewed up!"

Joanna rolled her eyes. "Five." She looked at CJ and shook her head. "Where did the time go? I want it to slow down. I want things to just stay the way they are for a while." She gave a disgruntled sigh.

He patted her knee and put his hand back on the lines. "Well, when you're not here, time drags. I guess when you're visiting and keeping busy, it flies."

She gave a short laugh. "I was definitely busy helping my mother. I cleaned, cooked, sewed, did laundry, and helped her entertain her friends. Once she discovered she was not at death's door, she discovered all sorts of things she wanted to do, places to go, people to see." Joanna leaned more comfortably against the buggy seat. "No wonder I came home bushed."

CJ glanced at her and nodded. She still looked tired with dark circles under her eyes. It wasn't like Joanna to not have worlds of energy.

"What did you enjoy the most while you were there?" He gently pulled back on the lines to slow the team's fast trot.

Joanna wrapped her shawl closer around her. "Well, I enjoyed the Sunday after we got there, when we knew Ma was on the mend, and all my brothers and sisters and some of their kids were there. That was nice." Joanna frowned as a wisp of hair escaped her tightly pinned pompadour. "Except, I almost wore myself out by trying to be agreeable and not arguing with anyone over anything."

CJ chuckled. "I can't imagine my sweet crabby Joanna not arguing with someone."

She smiled at him and lightly swatted his arm. "It's what I love about you, CJ. We can argue so wonderfully together, and you let me be my normal crabby self." They rode in companionable silence with only a meadowlark's song and the clopping of the horse's hooves to break the stillness.

"But," Joanna said, breaking the quiet, "the best time was after Ma's whist party, when her friends left and Simon came. The house was clean, the tea was good, and the three of us enjoyed cake and a good visit."

"Is that when you told her about me and she said Teddy was a grand name?" Teddy had heard part of this story before and loved to have it repeated.

"Yes, but don't let it go to your head," Joanna turned to him and winked.

"Teddy is a good name. But I like Joseph better." Teddy sat back in his seat.

"Joseph?" CJ looked at his son. "Joseph Simon doesn't have the same ring to it as Theodore Simon." He and Joanna exchanged

bemused glances. “That must be the time you were telling us it started to rain, and you had a relaxing evening by the parlor stove.”

Joanna nodded. “Ma heard some of the ladies ask me about this country, and maybe it dawned on her that she had never asked anything about you or the boys. She was actually interested, and I wasn’t so defensive.”

“We mature as we get older. I guess that’s the advantage of being adults.”

“I could be manured too,” Teddy said, and frowned at his parents when they started laughing.



Isaac and CJ stopped the wagon and buggy on a hill that afforded them a view of Belvidere. They could see the train pulling into the station and hear the steam and whistle and rumble of the wheels as it ground to a stop. Even coming from that distance, the horses pawed and were nervous. They waited while the steam engines refilled with water and the passengers and cargo were unloaded. Finally the whistle blew again, steam blasted from the sides, and with a great deal of screeching and grumbling, the wheels began to turn. Its next stop would be ten miles down the road at the newly formed town of Kadoka.

The horses were jumpy. This type of noise didn’t invade their world often. Once they resumed the last quarter mile, Isaac’s team danced sideways until CJ drove beside them with the buggy team. The teams must have felt there was safety in numbers, and in short order, they crossed the tracks without any more fussing.

They found Simon checking several crates on the loading dock. When he looked up and saw them, a huge smile creased his face. In seconds, he was off the dock and headed toward Isaac and the wagon.

“You boys are a sight for sore eyes!” he exclaimed, and bounded up the wagon steps in two big leaps. “I missed all of you!” He enveloped Isaac and John in a bear hug and managed a wave at the rest of them.

After a few minutes of enthusiastic greetings, he took the reins and slowly backed the team to the loading dock. "We'll need some help getting this into the wagon," he said and gave a slightly nervous laugh.

"Which one of these are yours?" CJ eyed the jumble of crates, especially the big one that promised to weigh a ton.

"Ah, I hate to say this, but they're all mine. Well, not exactly all of them are mine." Simon whipped off his hat and ran his hand through his graying brown hair. "Ma insisted on sending some things for Joanna."

"Me?" Joanna's voice held a note of incredulity. "What on earth did she send?"

"Boy howdy, Joanna, you know Ma. She started boxing up things she didn't need or want anymore and sent them all to you. Even her old piano."

"What!" Joanna exploded as she stood up in the buggy. "Her piano? That monstrous beast that's been forever out of tune?" CJ gently pulled her back to the seat. Joanna was still sputtering as he left the buggy and tied up the team. "Just leave it on the dock, and we'll donate it to Belvidere," she hollered at his departing back.

Even with extra manpower, lifting the piano and settling it into the wagon was an awkward and heavy job. Finally, it was positioned where it was hoped it wouldn't tip over, and the rest of the crates were stacked around it. CJ had no idea how they would get it into the house. He shuddered at the thought. Simon lifted a small ornate trunk off the dock and set it in the back seat of the buggy.

"Isn't that Grandma Swanson's box that holds the family Bible?" Joanna asked.

Simon nodded. "Ma sent it to you and said not to tell Gertrude. You know Ma, even when she's trying to be nice, she creates a storm."

Joanna slowly descended the buggy steps and patted Simon's arm as he helped her down. "Gertrude has told us ever since I can

remember how much she wanted Grandma's Bible. This is going to be a big bunch of trouble." She sighed in exasperation. She gave her brother a quick hug. "Welcome home. We're glad to see you!"

CJ echoed her sentiments. Simon was an important part of their ranch. He and Joanna had started the Swanson homestead in 1896, with each of them filing on 160 acres. Throughout the years, they had run a good-sized cattle herd on free range and had managed to make a number of improvements on their prairie home. When CJ married Joanna, he was able to add more land. They worked well together, and with CJ's bookkeeping jobs at some of the local businesses, they managed to pay their bills and have a little extra.

"Maybe after you see what else I brought home you won't be so glad to see me," Simon gave another nervous laugh. "Come and see what I bought." He led the way to the stock corrals, and the rest of them filed after him.

Afterward, CJ could never remember what he expected to see, but the sight of ten Guernsey milk cows placidly chewing their cud and looking at them with bored brown eyes was not on his anticipation list. Milk cows had never been on CJ's list of favorite things. Thick tails with burrs knocking his hat off as he sat on the milk stool, flies, the constant duty of morning and evening milking—to put it in his friend Winn's words, "It ain't purty."

"Oh! Milk cows!" Joanna eyed CJ uncertainly. "My goodness, Simon, where did you get these, ah, these beauties?"

Simon shuffled his feet. "Do you remember little Edith Crawford?" At Joanna's puzzled look, he shook his head and answered his own question. "No, of course you wouldn't. You weren't even born when sister Bertie babysat her. Anyway, she grew up, married, and had a family. Now her husband is ailing, and she needs to sell some of their dairy herd. They live right next to where the folks' place was." Simon seemed to lose track of what he was saying for several seconds as he gazed over the green hills toward their own home.

"And?" Joanna prompted him with a frown.

“To make a long story short, when I saw them, I decided to buy them.” Simon let out a quick breath of air, and CJ decided that was definitely making the story short. Very short.

“Ah, well.” CJ rubbed his hand over the back of his neck. He tried to think of a positive remark. “When will they come fresh?”

Simon cast him a thoughtful look. “In about four weeks. All ten of them are starting then, so we can expect some nice calves, I hope.” Simon leaned against the pole corral and put his arms on the top rail.

“The way I look at it, our days of running on free range are about gone. And I said to myself, we need to figure out some way to make money on this place, and it came to my mind that selling cream might be a good investment.” He looked at Joanna and CJ and reached down to tousle Teddy’s hair. “The railroad is right here to ship it out.”

“We’ll need cream cans and a separator and stanchions and,” CJ finished lamely, “all that good stuff.”

“Yup. I know. That’s what’s in some of those crates. I thought I could pick it up a lot cheaper in Minnesota than I could here.” This time, Simon looked him square in the eye without shuffling his feet. “You folks think about this. In the end, I believe you’ll agree with me.”

Isaac had untied the two saddle horses and led them to the group. “Guess we better get started chasing ’em home.” CJ couldn’t tell from the tone of his voice what Isaac’s thoughts were.

“The boys and I will get some supplies and head on home ourselves.” Joanna seemed to force enthusiasm in her remark.

“I best ride with Uncle Simon,” Teddy said and reached for Simon’s hand. “I’ll be in the wagon if you need me,” he informed his mother.

The breeze blew Joanna’s feather in a silent dance on top of her hat. She shook her head and gave her youngest son a resigned smile. “Be good for your uncle and don’t talk all the way home.” She put her

hand on John's shoulder, and the two of them headed toward the buggy.

CJ tightened his cinch and grimly decided it would be a merry ride home chasing ten cows that had no clue what endless prairie was like. He waited until Isaac was in the pen before he reopened the gate. Ten befuddled cows slowly started out of the corral as Isaac whooped softly at them. Once out of the gate, they picked up speed; and in a split second, they turned away from the intended direction and made a dash up the street into the town of Belvidere. CJ knew instantly he was going to hate every last one of them.

2

May 20, 1907

Belvidere, South Dakota

Dear Ma,

I can't begin to tell you all the excitement we had when we discovered you sent your piano home with Simon. It was good you included music books and a hymnbook since it has been years since I have thought of my piano days!

Grandma's trunk with her Bible was also appreciated. I remember how she always sat on her rocking chair and read her Norwegian Bible. I loved to hear her read it out loud, even if I couldn't understand what she said.

The crate full of crocheted doilies and also the handkerchiefs I embroidered for you were a treasure. I didn't realize you had kept them to return to me. The Blue Willow dishes are a treasure. I've always loved the story of the pattern. I didn't remember you had a complete set of them. We will be very fancy now when we have company.

Speaking of company, would you consider a trip this way? You could see the boys and also hear CJ sing. I haven't tried to play a song for him to sing, but we'll get practiced up and see if we can make music together. Ha.

You have been very generous! Thank you.

Love,

Joanna, CJ, John, and Teddy



CJ put Joanna's letter on the table and looked out the window. It was drizzling again this morning, and he came into the house with the idea of coffee and cookies. Neither was made, and Joanna gave every indication of not caring one whit about the situation.

"You didn't mention we about killed ourselves getting the darn thing in the house," he groused, pointing to the huge upright piano in the living room.

"Did you want me to tell your mother-in-law my husband lost his temper and used *very* colorful metaphors to the extent I sent my sons to their room?" Joanna stopped drawing doodles on an old envelope and raised a questioning eyebrow at him.

"Between fighting to get those stupid stubborn milk cows home and then unloading this thing, anyone would have said the same thing." CJ still couldn't find any humor in either instance. Even the rain was beginning to get on his nerves, which Joanna told him was an unheard-of happening in South Dakota.

"At least they didn't break out of the corral last night, which is a first since they came on the place." Joanna resumed her senseless circles. "Where's the boys?" she asked absently, intent on making a whole row of penciled marks.

CJ rose from his chair and headed toward the stove. He guessed if he wanted coffee, he would have to make it himself. "Over at Isaac's." His voice was clipped, and he rattled the coffee pot to show his irritation.

"Mm."

CJ rolled his eyes and reached for the dipper in the water pail. The dipper was where it was supposed to be. The water pail, however, was empty.

By the time he refilled the pail and had coffee brewing, CJ's temper was beginning to climb into the danger zone. It was unreasonable of him, and he told himself that very thing. It was almost childish to dislike God's created beasts to the extent he disliked the milk cows. He would get over it and probably even become fond of them, he consoled himself. But he didn't believe a word of it. It was also unreasonable to be irritated that his usual busy and ambitious wife had taken to wandering through the house without actually doing anything. The cookie tin that always used to be full of the best cookies in the world was pitifully empty.

It was ill timing on Simon's part to choose that moment to come from the cellar. He was whistling a tuneless little song, and he announced cheerfully that he almost had the separator put together.

"We've never had one of those before. How does it work again?" Joanna's voice was muffled. Her head was bent over her paper, and she was intent on her circles. CJ thought it was the fourth time Joanna wondered how a cream separator worked. Maybe Simon should draw a picture on her envelope.

Simon, however, loved talking about his new contraption. He settled himself comfortably on the chair across from Joanna and, with great detail, explained how the large metal bowl on top of the separator had two spigots, one on top and one on the bottom. When he cranked the handle, the milk swirled around the bowl. The lighter cream rose to the top and drained from the top spigot, and the heavier milk settled to the lower spigot and drained into a waiting pail.

"When you get to cranking, it starts to hum. And boy howdy! The longer you crank, the louder it gets! It's quite a deal. You'll have to come and see it!"

"How do you get all the parts clean after you use it?" Joanna had industriously finished all the squiggles, and the whole envelope was covered. CJ looked at it in exasperation. Not only exasperation, but with a small nuzzle of worry. This was so unlike Joanna.

“It all comes apart so you can clean it.” Simon was so enthused over his new gadget that he didn’t notice the dismay written on Joanna’s face.

She pushed herself away from the table and stood up. “I suppose I should bake something. And think of what to have for dinner. And put Ma’s dishes someplace.” She looked at the Blue Willow dishes still packed in the crate where Simon had deposited them a week ago. Instead of doing any of those things, she wandered out on the porch and settled herself on the wooden bench.

Simon raised an eyebrow at CJ and shrugged. “I’m heading to the barn to get the rest of those stanchions built. You had a good idea, CJ. The lean-to we added last year is perfect to put our milk cows in.” Simon bustled happily out into the gently falling rain, seemingly unaware that CJ hadn’t said a word during the whole exchange.

“I think Minnesota made ’em both a little touched,” he grumbled as he poured a lone cup of coffee. “Milk cows. Separators. No cookies. This ain’t purty.”



Lizzie Tinner came to visit the next afternoon. They hadn’t seen her since they had buried her father on the Tinner homestead after he was trampled by cattle running across a cellar he was building. CJ and other neighbors had dug him out, but he was badly hurt. Mrs. Tinner seemed quite indifferent to her husband’s plight and had the men dig his grave before her husband breathed his last breath.

Lizzie’s high-pitched voice could be heard while she was still at the creek crossing. CJ and the boys were getting haying equipment ready and could hear her warning Burr, their dog, to stay away from her horse.

Isaac frowned as she galloped toward them. Lizzie and her spotted horse always seemed to go full speed. The horse came to a stiff-legged, jarring stop and tossed his head within inches of Isaac.

“Back him up!” Isaac was disgusted. “He’s slobbering all over me!”

“He is not. He just wants to show you his new bridle.” Lizzie slid to the ground and gave Burr a light pat on the head.

CJ looked at the bridle with interest. It was new, and the headstall boasted intricate leather carving. He studied the saddle Lizzie had just vacated and realized with a start that the Tinnors always had nice and well-oiled tack.

Isaac traced the fern leaf leather design with his finger. “Who made it for you?”

Lizzie shrugged. She reached over to give Teddy’s nose a tweak. “Gotcher nose.” She grinned at him and showed him her thumb squeezed between two fingers.

Teddy was immediately concerned he was nose less and ran his hand over his face. He looked relieved when he discovered it was still firmly in place. “Do not,” he informed her, and gave his dad a questioning look. “Does she?” He put the index finger of each hand in his nostrils just to double-check.

“She’s just teasing,” John assured his little brother. “Show him your hand, Lizzie.”

Lizzie acted like she flung something away, and then with feigned innocence, she showed Teddy both sides of her hand. “Maybe Burr will find it,” she said, not unkindly. When Teddy’s eyes widened in disbelief, she laughed and said, “Just kidding, just kidding.”

“Your nose is where it always was, Teddy,” CJ smiled at his son and patted his back. “And Lizzie, your bridle is pretty fancy. Nice carving on it.” He was like Isaac and wanted to ask where she got it, but there was a craftiness in Lizzie’s expression that made him hesitate.

“Uh, Ma wanted me to ask you something.” She scuffed her feet on the ground before she continued. “She said after you said some

words over Pa, that she got to thinking that, well, that maybe she should oughta have some words said over Ben.”

CJ remembered well how Mrs. Tinner resisted “words” when her husband was killed. She had informed him that Zed Tinner was not a religious man. He had told her that whether he was or not made no difference. A soul had departed from this world, and he intended to say a prayer over the grave. She grudgingly conceded, but lines of battle were etched across her face.

“Well.” He looked at Lizzie Tinner with scrutinizing eyes. She was a little younger than Isaac, but she returned his look with eyes of a young old person. Her mousy brown hair was carelessly pulled back in a straggly ponytail, and her shabby clothes hung on her thin frame. She looked a good deal like her brother Ben, except Ben always had a harassed look on his face whereas Lizzie’s demeanor was usually defiant.

“When would she like us to come?”

“She just wants you to come,” Lizzie said quickly.

CJ frowned. An unsettled feeling began to sweep over him. He wished fervently that Joanna would come outside and share this visit. She could always discern people’s motives much quicker than he could.

“Why don’t you boys show Lizzie the new milk cows.” It wasn’t a question. CJ indicated with a quick jab the small pasture where they had chased the cows this morning. Isaac looked horrified, but John and Teddy were already leading the way.

For a second, he thought Lizzie would refuse to follow. When Isaac started after the younger boys, however, she quickly led her horse and fell in line.

Joanna was taking a batch of cookies out of the oven when he hurried inside.

“Cookies!” He breathed in the fresh-baked aroma. “Joanna, I think I have a problem.”

She raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. “That makes two of us. I have a tired problem. What’s your big deal?”

He studied her with concern. She looked tired, and he was worried about her. They were going to have to have a discussion about it right after they had the discussion about the Tinnners.

“Lizzie Tinner is here. Her Ma wants me to come and say some words over Ben’s grave. Alone.”

Joanna slid the cookies unceremoniously off the baking sheet onto a clean dish towel. “Alone? Hmm.”

“What does ‘hmm’ mean?”

“Didn’t you tell me you and Smokey had a little visit about the Tinnners, and he said Sissy Tinner had a huge crush on you?” She put her hand on her hip and glared at him.

“I just repeated what he said, Joanna. Whether she does or not is not even the question here. Why does Ma Tinner want me there alone?”

“Probably because her daughter Sissy has come back home.”

CJ looked at her in puzzlement. “Huh? How do you know that?”

“Rumors.” Joanna poured herself a cup of coffee. “CJ, you naive silly boy. Some people go to any lengths to get close to a person they’re all swarmy over.”

“Swarmy? Is that a word I know?”

She handed him an oatmeal raisin cookie. “Probably not. I wouldn’t go alone if I were you.”

“Will you come with me if I decide to go over there?”

“No. Take Simon. I don’t feel up to Mrs. Tinner, Sissy, or Lizzie. And take some cookies out to her so she doesn’t have to come in.”

He hurriedly put some cookies on a plate. "Wife, you and I are going to have a serious discussion tonight when I get back." He didn't know what he expected her to say, but when she sat down next to the table with her coffee cup in hand and nodded, he felt a knot of fear close to his heart.



Lizzie and the boys made short work of the plateful of cookies. CJ told her he would be over later in the afternoon and she better head on out to tell her mother. He didn't think he liked the calculating look that came over her face.

Simon agreed with Joanna's advice, and with a great deal of apprehension, the two men slowly rode to the Tinnars.

"With people like them," Simon observed as they crested another rolling hill, "you're never sure where you stand. You want to trust 'em, but you just can't."

CJ let out a pent-up sigh. "I brought along a Bible to give Mrs. Tinner. I doubt she'll take it."

"Yup. It's strange that several months after Ben dies, she thinks she should have a prayer over his body. I sort of heard by the prairie grapevine that some folks thought they'd seen Sissy. If that's the case, what do they think they'll gain if you come?"

"Joanna thinks they have some scheme to get me there alone and then accuse me of flirting with Sissy. I have no idea. In fact, I wonder if we shouldn't just go back home and not even go through with this charade."

"And have them accuse you of breaking your word? No, CJ, I think we better go through with it, but I intend to stay close as glue to you." Simon shook his head. "I don't like it though."

Two mounds of dirt were the only markers for Ben's and Zed Tinner's graves. CJ and Isaac dismounted and waited for Mrs. Tinner to come. Within minutes, a little procession left the tar paper shack

that the Tinnors called home. Mrs. Tinner strode toward them without smiling. Lizzie followed a short distance behind with a worried look on her face. The third person was nicely dressed and held a handkerchief to her eyes. She was petite with a dainty dimple in her well-formed chin, and walked as if she were listening for inaudible applause.

“Mr. Swanson,” Sissy Tinner said, her voice breaking slightly, “how nice of you to come and join us.” She patted Simon’s arm absently and seemed to dismiss him completely as she held out her hand to CJ. He knew he was obligated to take it, and he felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

“And thank you so much for agreeing to do this, Mr. Crezner.” Her voice was somewhat breathless and she flashed him a bright smile as she stood uncomfortably close.

CJ nodded. “Your brother Ben deserves a prayer, Miss Tinner.” He was aware that she was clinging to his hand with both of hers.

“CJ, do you want my Bible?” Simon was close by CJ’s side.

CJ took his cue. He quickly reached toward Simon and dislodged Sissy’s grasping fingers. “Thanks. Oh. Well. I guess I have my own.” He backed a few steps from the Tinner ladies and reached into his coat pocket. With both hands firmly holding the Word of God, he looked at Mrs. Tinner. Her face was unreadable.

He took a deep breath and began. “Mrs. Tinner, Sissy, Lizzie, I didn’t know your son or your brother at all. But that doesn’t matter. God knows His children. He knows, the Bible tells us, how many hairs we have on our heads. He knew when Ben was stabbed with a pitchfork in the haystack. God knew the pain, and later, He knew Ben’s agony when that same arm froze and had to be amputated.”

Lizzie hiccupped nervously, and Sissy dabbed at her eyes delicately with her handkerchief. Mrs. Tinner’s eyes never left CJ’s face.

“God always knows.” CJ met Mrs. Tinner’s unblinking gaze. “Whatever we have in our hearts, God knows. He understands, He

cares, and His spirit is always calling us to come to Him with our burdens. Ben's life was hard. I think it was very hard." CJ paused and took off his hat. Simon quickly removed his also.

"Let's pray," he said. Mrs. Tinner closed her eyes but didn't bow her head. Lizzie didn't know what to do, but Sissy Tinner did. She knelt on the broken ground, closed her eyes, and bowed her head. CJ wasn't sure if her actions were from a contrite heart or if she thought the world was a stage she should perform upon.

"Our Heavenly Father, You created us from dust. We are nothing, but You chose to love us. Your Word tells us You loved us so much that You gave Your son to bear our sins on His own body. We ask forgiveness, Lord, for the things we have said and done that are wrong. We ask forgiveness for not being better friends to this young boy. We know, Lord, that Ben's body is here, returning to dust, but his soul is free and is in paradise with You. Eternity waits for all of us after we are taken from this world. You have said that if we love You, our eternity will be with You in paradise. If we love Satan, the ruler of this world, our eternity will be in hell. Help us study Your Word and grow in Your wisdom so we can better love and serve You. Help us remember this boy. He tried to please, he was obedient to his parents, and his life was not lived in vain because it was a precious life in Your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

CJ glanced at Sissy. She wasn't pretending tears anymore. They were falling rapidly down her cheeks. Lizzie was shifting her weight from leg to leg and twisting her skirt in her hand.

Mrs. Tinner cleared her throat. "Thank you for keeping it short. I was afraid you'd ramble on."

"Would you like this Bible, Mrs. Tinner?" CJ held out the Bible to her. He could see the refusal in her eyes before she spoke.

"No, I have one of my own."

"Then I would suggest you read it and teach it to your daughters."

She took a swift intake of air before she replied. “Unwanted suggestions are seldom heeded, Mr. Crezner.”



“I suppose,” Joanna said as she folded their bedcovers back, “the God who knew and understood Ben Tinner also knows and understands Mrs. Tinner. Lord knows none of the rest of us understands the woman.” She sank onto the bed with a sigh.

“I imagine you’re right.” CJ dropped his boot on the floor with a thud. “I want to think maybe the girls will—I don’t know—maybe get a few things right in their lives.” He worked his other boot loose and let it fall beside the first one.

Joanna leaned back on the feather pillow and looked at him. “CJ, how did you put those thoughts together? You hardly had any time at all to come up with anything.”

“I prayed.” He slid into bed beside her and propped himself on his elbow to look at her. “I also prayed for my wife, whom I’m very worried about.”

She reached up to brush his hair off his forehead. “I know.” She let her hand drop. “I keep thinking I’ll get my energy back but”—she looked at him and shook her head—“it’s not there. I suppose I better see a doctor.”

He ran his hand over her hair as it fanned out on the pillow. “I think so. We have to get to the bottom of this.” He wound his finger through one of her curls and bent to kiss her. It was always a joy to kiss Joanna. She wound her arm around his neck and kissed him back. Not like usual, but with some of her normal affection.

He was relieved that she had mentioned seeing a doctor. It was better if it was her idea rather than his. He had thought it for the past several days and didn’t know how to broach the subject. “Joanna”—he propped himself back on his elbow—“when did you start to feel this way?”

She puckered her forehead in thought. “I guess when I got back from Ma’s. I thought at first it was just the visit and then catching up on the work around here. But it seems like this last month, I’m just constantly tired.” She gave an exasperated shake of her head. “I’ve never felt this way before. Just so lethargic, and I really don’t care if I get anything done. I feel totally lazy, and what’s worse, I don’t really care.” She looked at him and sighed. “Totally unlike myself.”

He smiled, hoping to ease her fears as well as his own. “Totally. You’ve always had energy to burn.” He slowly eased himself down on his pillow. The full moon was working its way higher in the eastern sky, and its beams were making magical light in their bedroom.

“Full moon already,” he murmured. “You and I have always enjoyed our full moons.”

“Yup.” Her voice sounded sleepy. “You asked me to marry you under a full moon.”

He grinned. “Remember the full moon before you left to go to Minnesota?”

She giggled. “CJ, you are purely wicked. Do you know that?” She reached over and ran her hand over his bare shoulder. He pulled her close to him and kissed her again.

She wriggled close to him and found a comfortable spot in his arms. “That was already, what, two full moons ago?” She sighed and traced his jaw line with her finger. “Time goes so fast, CJ. I wish it would slow down. I wish...” Her voice trailed off.

“What do you wish?” He was in the process of trailing kisses down her lovely throat when she caught her breath.

“Joanna?”

“I said that was two months ago, didn’t I? Didn’t I say that was two months ago?” She pushed him away and sat up. “That was two months ago!” She grabbed a portion of the sheet and wadded it in a

tight ball, and her voice sounded hoarse. “Do you know what that means? Oh horse feathers! Why didn’t I think of this before?”

He frowned and watched her sink back into the pillow, not comprehending a thing she said. “Think of what before? What are you talking about?”

She straightened out the crumpled sheet and began to pull it over her head. “I don’t like this, oh no! I don’t like this at all. I can’t believe it!” She was muttering and moaning at the same time, and her voice became muffled under the sheet.

His heart was beginning to thump unpleasantly in his chest. Either Joanna was losing her mind or something was seriously wrong.

He carefully pulled the sheet off her face and tucked it around her shoulders. “What are you saying?” He tried to sound calm.

Her face was pale in the moonlight, and her eyes gazed up at him with a mixture of fear and disbelief. “You’re not going to like this either. Even though it’s your fault.”

“My fault?” he yelped. “Joanna, what are you saying?” He forgot to be calm and gave her shoulder a slight shake.

She took a deep breath before she answered. “I’m saying we’re going to have another baby!”

CJ looked at her with incredulity. “What? What? I send you to Minnesota to see your mother, and you come back with a baby?”

Her eyes flashed, and she pulled her hand from underneath the sheet. “That’s what riding passenger trains do to young ladies.” Her voice oozed with sarcasm.

“I didn’t think after five years you could even have another baby.” CJ glared at her. “What are you thinking of, Joanna? This isn’t good.”

“Your darn tootin’ it ain’t good!” She shoved him away from her and sat up. “You and your blasted full moon. This is all your fault, CJ. I don’t want another baby. I don’t want to be tired and worn out

for the next seven months. I don't want this at all!" She shook her finger at him and then gave him a harder shove away from her. "And for that matter, what's this remark about me going to Minnesota and coming back with a baby? Are you saying I found somebody and had an affair with him in two weeks? Just thanks a lot for that little dig!"

CJ slumped down on his pillow and covered both eyes with his hands. His mind was spinning in several directions at the same time, resulting in a mass confusion that rendered him speechless for several seconds.

"Okay. Okay, Joanna. Just give me a second here. I'm trying to—"

"Shut up, CJ. Right now I don't care one whit what you're trying to do." She slammed back onto her pillow and kicked at the disheveled sheet.

There was silence in the bedroom while CJ pulled his scattered thoughts together and Joanna seethed with her back toward him.

"I'm scared for you, Joanna," he finally said. "I've always been worried about you having another baby and not being able to grow old with me." He turned on his side and reached for her shoulder. He wasn't surprised when she kicked him in the shin.

"And I didn't mean to sound like you had an affair. I know this baby is mine."

"I'm not the one who has swarmy admirers hanging all over them," she muttered and lashed out with her foot again.

He retaliated by putting his leg over hers and pinning it to the bed. "I was just thinking now at least we know why you're tired. I had visions of all sorts of things, and none of them were good. This is a surprise, but when we get used to the idea, we might even like the thought of another baby." He put his arm around her and gave her a gentle hug. Her elbow was wicked as she drove home a swift jab to his unsuspecting stomach.

“And,” he continued as he released her and returned to his own side of the bed, “I think the next thing we better do is go to Dr. Riggs in Pierre, so you can have a good checkup. Then we better see about getting someone to come and help you until the baby is born.”

“If you so much as think for a *minute* I need my mother here, I’ll slap you.” Her voice was mutinous, and he knew from long experience that any more talk would lead to heated words. He also knew that if he gave Joanna an inch, she’d take a mile.

“Woman,” he said softly. “If you hit me one more time, I’m going to hit you back.”

The last of the moonbeams were fading from the room when he heard her say, “Brute. Make me with child and then threaten to beat me.”

The room was completely dark when he replied, “I love you, Joanna.”

She sniffed and slowly turned to face him. “This ain’t gonna be purty, CJ. And I love you too.”

3

July 15, 1907

Belvidere, South Dakota

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm sorry it's been so long since I've written. With our milk cows and the abundant hay crop, we keep busy from dawn to dusk.

The cows are giving lots of milk. I make a trip to Belvidere every week and keep up with the business bookwork at the same time. It works well. John and Teddy had the job of naming the cows, and John wrote all their names on a board in the barn. Good thing, as Simon and I keep forgetting Gloria from Halli and Lulia. We also have Truth, Lilly, Beauty, Trampled. Do you recognize "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" from those words? Joanna found the music in her mother's piano bench, and the boys think it is the most wonderful song they ever heard.

Isaac was hired for the roundup this spring and has just returned after being gone for several weeks. John and Teddy helped Simon and me in the hayfields, but they complain a great deal more about mosquito bites than Isaac ever did. Isaac had high marks on his eighth-grade exam and is officially ready for high school. He has decided to stay with Mrs. Ordin. She offered him room and board in exchange for odd jobs at the boarding house. He was pleased about the offer and took it. We are both excited and apprehensive about his new adventure.

The most amazing news, however, is that we are going to be parents again at the end of the year. Yes, that means you will be grandparents again. Joanna consulted with Dr. Riggs at Pierre and was relieved to hear that both baby and mother will be fine. She has been more tired with this baby than with the boys. I am looking for someone

to help her with her household jobs. However, she has refused all of my suggestions.

We have a woman doctor close by. Dr. Sullivan lives about a mile from us, but Joanna says she's heard the good doctor is quite rough and her vocabulary is colorful. The plan is to go to Pierre and wait for the baby to be delivered by Dr. Riggs.

Always glad to hear from you, and we are counting down the days until your visit. Have you considered taking an extra week for vacation now that your associate pastor is helping so much?

Our love,

CJ, Joanna, John, and Teddy



The morning sun had scarcely peeked over the eastern hills by the time CJ finished writing his letter. He and the boys were making an early morning run to Belvidere with the team and wagon to deliver cream to the depot and milk and eggs to some Belvidere residents. So far, Simon's cows had added extra coins to the money box, and even if CJ detested each and every one of them, they probably would pay for themselves in the long run.

"Dad," John whispered as they quietly left the house, "do you think Mom will miss us when she wakes up?"

CJ nodded as he shut the screen door slowly. Left to its own devices, the door slammed closed with a great deal of screeching and banging, thanks to the spring CJ put on it so that it wouldn't stay ajar with their coming and going.

"I think everything's loaded, CJ," Simon spoke quietly also. It was the mission of Joanna's men folk to let her sleep as long as possible in the morning. She grumbled a great deal about them pandering to her, but the usual bustling lady of the house had simply lost most of her energy. Doctor Riggs had reassured them it was a passing phase, and one all of them hoped would pass quickly.

It was completely different for CJ to travel to town from what he had experienced during the first years of his marriage when the prairie was still open and unoccupied. He was beginning to resent the shacks that dotted the landscape as much as Joanna. In fact, this morning, he almost resented his whole lifestyle and was testy with his young boys as they bounced across the prairie. They, in turn, were so surprised at his short and curt replies that they lapsed into hurt silence. The six miles into town were long and quiet.

He was worried. Time and again, he reassured himself and Joanna also, that the baby would come without any problems. Time and again, worry took control and gave him sleepless nights as he pondered what-if scenarios. What if she died in child birth? What if it took away her energy forever? What if she became an invalid? What if...? What if...? The worry had consumed his peace of mind.

CJ had trouble making small talk to his milk and egg customers. When he finished his deliveries, he gave each boy two pennies and told them to spend it wisely while he balanced the scribbled books of his bosses.

To add to his already irritable disposition, the wife of one of his bosses was ensconced in the tiny cramped upstairs office. She was an unsmiling woman and was constantly checking his work. Usually, the issues she debated with him were easily clarified, but it always took more time than he wanted to spend with her. This morning, she was poring over the ledger as he walked in.

"I think you once again have made some mistakes, Mr. Crezner." She greeted him with her usual sour expression.

CJ stopped just inside the door. He knew before she said another word what he was going to do. He also knew he'd regret it later on, but at this moment, he was going to take great pleasure in his next actions.

"A mistake, ma'am?" He made his voice sound mild. "That's terrible. I imagine the best thing for me to do is quit and let you take

over.” He turned to go before he added, “I’ll ask your husband to pay me in full before I leave.”

He also took great pleasure in the shocked look she gave him. He thundered down the narrow steps and found the husband stocking shelves.

“Your wife has just gained my job,” he said abruptly. “I’ll collect my wages for the past month, if you don’t mind.”

The husband minded a great deal, but there was no dissuading CJ. And when he put the wages in his pocket, he left the store with the sole intention of rounding up his boys and heading home.

Even though it was only midmorning, the sun was unbearably hot. It would be a long, slow, hot ride home. The thought crossed his mind that if he didn’t have the two boys along, he’d head into the nearest saloon and have a cold beer. It was a troubling thought, but once it took hold, it wouldn’t let go of him.

The boys were sitting in the shade of the wagon with frustration written on their features.

“What’s wrong?” CJ wondered.

“Everything we want costs more than what we’ve got,” John said with evident disgust.

“And that, my boys, is the story of life.” CJ looked down at their dismal faces. “But I have enough to buy us something cool to drink before we start home. I guess we’ll have to be contented with that.”

“When I get growed up, I’m gonna have lots of pennies.” Teddy stood up and reached for CJ’s hand. “And I’m gonna live someplace where it ain’t so hot.”



Their lemonade at the café was not cool. Their waitress was apologetic, but there was no ice chips to put in it. At least, John

observed, it was wet. And that gave CJ the idea to let the boys swim in the Belvidere dam before they headed home.

They stripped down to their shorts after they stopped beside the curve in the road, and the cool water, even if it was a bit mossy, felt refreshing. CJ waded in a big circle to make sure there were no drop-offs and told the boys to stay in that spot. They splashed and shouted, and soon forgot their money woes as they enjoyed and had fun in the water.

CJ looked longingly at the expanse of water and wished that he'd dare leave the boys alone while he swam. He couldn't, of course, as neither boy knew how to swim. And that gave him another idea. He spent the next half hour giving them swimming lessons. They were quick learners, and Teddy boasted he could swim across the dam with just one lesson.

"No, you can't, Theodore Simon, and don't even think about trying to swim unless I'm with you." CJ was firm, and for emphasis, he tweaked Theodore Simon's ear.

"Mr. Crezner! I have to talk to you!" A woman was standing at the edge of the water. It was a tall, gaunt woman, and CJ recognized her immediately as the unsmiling wife of his former boss. Did she know he just had underwear on? What was the woman thinking about anyway?

He waved at her. "I'll come back to the store," he hollered. Surely she would go away.

"You left unfinished business at the store. I need to talk to you right now!"

Bossy woman. First she fussed over his work, then she took his job, and now she wanted to talk to him when he was indecent. He should just wade to shore and stand there in his shorts and see what this was all about. But he was, after all, a preacher's son and a preacher himself—and preachers did not do such things, even if they were extremely irritated. On the other hand, maybe a cattleman might get away with it.

He waved again. "I'm not decent, ma'am. I'll talk to you later."

She waved back. "I'll wait by your wagon. Hurry." He watched her stalk up the grassy bank and head toward his waiting team.

"Daddy! I can too swim! See?"

CJ jerked toward the sound of Teddy's voice, and his heart jumped into his throat. In the few seconds that he had been preoccupied, his youngest son had moved several yards away from him and was now happily flogging away in deeper water.

"John," CJ said softly, "go to the shore and wait."

In a louder voice, he called to Teddy. "Come this way now, Teddy. Swim to me." He moved closer to his errant son as fast as he could. Teddy turned toward him and started to say something more as he moved his arms and kicked his feet. Instead of breathing out to talk, however, he gulped in water, and panic immediately overcame him.

He plunged and coughed and took in more water. "Daddy!" he screamed, and he bobbed under water.

CJ swam as fast and hard as he could and reached his flailing son in seconds. Teddy was terrified and grabbed him around the neck in a death grip. CJ flipped over on his back, and with almost lazy strokes, he made his way into shallower water with Teddy securely in tow.

When the water was waist-deep for CJ, he stood and held Teddy out of the water. His son needed a lesson in minding.

"Ted, I told you not to do what you just did. What almost happened to you?"

"I ate so much water I almost puked!" Teddy blubbered.

"You almost drowned!" CJ yelled and gave Teddy a shake.

"We better go home and see Mama." Teddy looked extremely worried and started to snuffle.

CJ checked to make sure John was on shore. Sure enough, his oldest son was waiting anxiously on dry ground.

“You need a lesson in several areas, Ted. First of all, you need to know more about swimming. I’m going to let go of you. You can swim to shore.”

“No! No! Daddy, I can’t swim that far!”

“Yes, you can. I’ll be right here beside you.” CJ lowered him into the water and released him.

Teddy immediately began to howl and started to sink.

“Remember what I taught you! Reach out with your arms! Cup your hands! Scissor kick!”

Teddy bawled and flailed the forty feet to shore. His next lesson began with a good sound spanking because he had disobeyed his father. More tears and sobbing, and while the three of them were getting dressed amidst all this distress, the sharp tone of his former boss’s wife rang out.

“Mr. Crezner!”

“What!” CJ roared, and with his pants half-buttoned and his shirt barely thrown over his wet shoulders, he stomped up the bank. “What do you want?” He glared at the woman and didn’t care that she was blushing at his appearance.

“I-I...” She turned away from him and looked extremely uncomfortable.

“You boys hurry up and get in this wagon. We’re going home!” He finished buttoning his pants and fastened his belt while John helped his heartbroken little brother up the bank. “Ma’am, whatever you have to say to me, spit it out. I’m in no mood to waste time.” He lifted Teddy unceremoniously into the wagon while John climbed the steps.

“I had no idea you had such a temper, Mr. Crezner!”

“Well, now you know. Did you come down here to tell me I had a temper?”

“I-I came because I realized, that is, my husband told me...Oh! I’m supposed to ask you if you would come back to work for us.” She waved her hands awkwardly.

CJ checked the horses’ harnesses before he answered. He knew what he was going to say. He stalled for time so he could answer politely. He slowly climbed into the wagon and sat on the seat before he looked at her.

“No. I’m not working for anyone who questions my honesty. You, ma’am, have checked and double-checked my figures from day one. You never found any mistakes, yet you harassed me about one thing or another. Do the books yourself.” He clicked his tongue and flicked the lines over the team and didn’t bother to wave goodbye.

They made their way slowly over the dam grade and headed north toward home. Teddy eventually cried himself to sleep, but his sobs continued even as he slept. John sat timidly on the seat next to CJ, and CJ felt a weariness creep into his entire being.

The sun baked the earth, the flies bit the horses, the wind blew hot air all around them, and it was a dismal bunch that followed the dusty prairie trail. Finally, John put his hand on CJ’s arm and said haltingly, “Dad, I was thinking about something.”

CJ roused himself from his own desolate thoughts and smiled down at his brown-eyed son. “What were you thinking, John?”

“You wouldn’t have let Teddy drown. That’s why you were right beside him with your hands close by him. I knew that, but it still scared me. I was afraid for him.”

CJ gave a pent-up sigh. “I wanted him to know he can swim but that he needs to respect the water. Sometimes, when people get really scared about swimming, they never learn how to enjoy it.” CJ sat up a little straighter and gave his son a gentle squeeze on his shoulder. “What about you? Do you like swimming?”

John nodded absently, but it was obvious his mind was on something else. “I was thinking something else. I was thinking maybe God is like you, Dad. Maybe when we think we’re in trouble and no one is around to help us, God is right there, with His hands close to keep us out of the water.” John looked up at CJ. “Do you think that’s right?”

“I think you’re a very thoughtful young man. That’s a good likeness of our Heavenly Father’s love.” CJ looked away and found it hard to swallow past the lump in his throat. All the while Teddy was screaming that he would drown, CJ was making sure he wouldn’t. All the while CJ was worrying about what might happen to Joanna, God was trying to reassure him that she was in God’s hands. He’d take care of her. Simple as that. Where had his faith been? Good thing his seven-year-old son had set him straight.

When he got home, he’d set Joanna straight too. No more moping around for either of them. She would be just fine. The doctor said so. And he was going to find someone to come and help her with all the work. And that was that.



“She did what?” CJ looked at Isaac incredulously while the two of them unharnessed the team and rubbed them down.

“She hired Lizzie Tinner to come and work for her. And the worst of the worst”—Isaac jerked the harness away from the lathered horse—“she’s letting Lizzie stay in the old washhouse. That’s right behind me and Dad’s house. Lizzie Tinner, CJ. Lizzie Tinner living right behind me.” Isaac’s usual quiet voice had taken on new volume.

“You mean—”

“I mean at this very minute, Lizzie is making herself right at home, and Aunt Jo is bustling around like an old hen. ‘Isaac, get the cot out from the cellar. Isaac, check the pump and see that it’s primed. Isaac, carry over this bedding. Isaac, get lost for a while. Lizzie is going to take a bath.’ I never thought I’d say this, but I’m almost glad

I'm leaving this fall. This is terrible!" To prove his point, Isaac swatted the big rump of the workhorse with his cap and was rewarded with a tail swished in his face.

CJ got some oats from the grain bin and poured it into a wooden trough for his team. He shook his head, muttered unintelligible sounds, and sat down heavily on an upturned keg. "Maybe I better hear this from the beginning. No! Wait! Maybe I better hear this from Joanna." He didn't move, and the only sound was that of the horses crunching their grain. "Maybe I should just sit here and think before I say too much."

"Maybe"—Isaac threw himself on the ground beside CJ's perch—"you better let me tell you what I know."

"Sure. Kill me with information." CJ sighed and put his hands on his knees.

"Well, Dad left to rake up that one creek bottom, and I was cleaning harnesses when Lizzie come riding in. And you know, even though Burr is getting older, she always barks at Lizzie. So here's Burr barking, and Lizzie screeching, and Joanna walks out and tells 'em both to pipe down. Then Lizzie sorta slides off that spotted devil she rides, and I could hear her trying to tell Joanna something, then she ties old Spot up, and she and Joanna go in the house. After a while, Joanna is hollering at me, and the next thing I know, I'm being ordered about like a slave."

CJ shook his head. Isaac never complained about helping Joanna. That was as unusual as Joanna hiring Lizzie. His belly started rumbling, and Isaac looked at him in surprise.

"Been a long time since breakfast." CJ stood up. "Is Simon coming in for dinner?" His question was answered by a horse's whinny and the clatter of the rake.

Isaac jumped to his feet and headed toward the barn door. "I'm gonna fix our own dinner. I will not eat with Lizzie Tinner!"

CJ's hunger pangs growled again. He wondered if there would be anything ready for a meal. Lately, one never knew if Joanna would have cooked plenty or just enough to get by.



Even though it was hot, the cook stove was in full force. Joanna was wiping beads of perspiration off her forehead. Potatoes, gravy, green beans, and fried chicken were on platters, waiting to be carried to the table.

"You've been busy!" He eyed her warily.

"Yes," she snapped. "While you're swimming and cooling off, I'm cooking and getting hotter by the minute!"

He glowered at her and picked up the platters. Anything he would have said was drowned out by running footsteps on the stairway. Lizzie was chasing both boys, and there was a chorus of laughter as they raced to the table. There were two extra plates neatly set with silverware and folded napkins. CJ took them off and shook his head at Joanna and her unspoken question.

Lizzie. CJ looked twice to make sure that it was really Lizzie. Joanna had found a skirt and a waist for her. For once, Lizzie was clean, and her hair was not only combed but also washed and braided neatly.

"I'm working for ya now, Mr. Crezner!" The voice was Lizzie. Loud and screechy. Like an old well pump that needed new leathers.

"Well. Well, I'm sure you'll tell me all about it after we pray." CJ managed a weak smile for her.

"Sure! You want I should get out that fruit you fixed?" At Joanna's nod, Lizzie raced over to the ice box and then slowly, carefully, carried a bowl of canned peaches to the table. She didn't seem to breathe until she had set it down beside Joanna's plate.

CJ thanked the Lord for the food, the safety of the family, the day in general, and lastly, for Lizzie—even though he didn't exactly feel grateful for her being there.

Teddy had become very quiet after his prayer. CJ wondered how much Joanna knew of their swimming episode. When he arrived home, he carried Teddy's sleeping form into the house and upstairs to the bedroom. When he returned downstairs, Joanna had disappeared.

"I guess we were hungry," he said apologetically to Joanna after three helpings of everything. The boys ate almost as much as he did. "And," he added, "everything was very good. So good we forgot to talk while we ate." He pushed his chair back slightly and looked at Lizzie. So far, she had eaten like a bird, taking a few bite of this, a few bites of that, but mostly looking in awe at the way he and the boys were demolishing the platters of food.

"Well. Lizzie, it sounds like you have been hired to help Mrs. Crezner. Why don't you ladies tell me about this?" He smiled at Joanna, who, he noticed, had two little red spots on her cheeks.

"Mrs. Tinner has a job up in the north country herding cattle for the Matador Cattle Co. She couldn't take Lizzie with her, so I have hired her until she can return to her mother." Joanna looked at him steadily, and CJ knew by the expression on her face there was much more to the story.

"I see." He saw very little, he realized, but the rest of the information would come when they were alone. He glanced at Lizzie. "And you're not staying in the house but instead have taken up residence in the washhouse?"

She nodded and stood up slowly. "You want I should clear off the table now, Mizzus Crezner?"

"Yes. Stack everything on the right side of the sink."

CJ watched absently as Lizzie made trips back and forth and put everything on the left side of the sink.

"Daddy, can I be 'scused?" Teddy's voice was subdued.

“No. You cannot be ’scused until I hear about this swimming thing.” Joanna was firm.

“We were hot, so we went swimming in the Belvidere dam. Cooled off, came home.” CJ looked at Teddy and John. “Or was there more that happened?”

John was not going to be trapped. He shrugged and looked at Teddy. Teddy looked down at his plate.

Joanna looked at all three of them in turn, and then she sat back and folded her arms in front of her. “I’m waiting.”

CJ stood and took some dirty dishes to the right side of the sink, and motioned to Lizzie that she needed to move plates from left to right. Then he found two cups and poured both himself and Joanna coffee, which had been kept hot on the back of the stove. He set their cups on the table and opened the dining room window. A blast of hot air came through, and he quickly closed it again.

“You boys are excused, and I think in light of all we’ve done this morning, you better take a little nap upstairs.” Teddy was gone in a flash.

“And since Lizzie is here busily clearing off the table and getting dishes ready to wash, let’s go into the other room and have our coffee,” he told Joanna, and gently pulled her to a standing position.

He guided her to the old rocker, and she sank gratefully into the worn cushions. Balancing her cup carefully, she put her feet on the footstool and sighed. CJ closed the door between the two rooms and sat down close to her.

“Mizzus Crezner, shall you go first, or shall I?”

Joanna took a slow drink of coffee before she answered. “I know you think I’m crazy, CJ, but where else is she going to go? And I remember needing a home when I was a little older than she was. Mary took me in, rough edges and all. Maybe this is my way of paying Mary back.” Whenever Joanna looked at him with her lips in a

vulnerable smile and her eyes begging understanding, his heart seemed to have a mind of its own.

“Why the washhouse?”

“That was her idea. She didn’t seem to like the thought of being in the house with all of us.”

“Will she cause more work, or will she actually help?”

Joanna shrugged. “Time will tell.”

He leaned back in the wing chair. “What’s her wages?”

“She didn’t want wages. Room and board, she said. I think she was quite desperate.”

They heard the sound of water being poured into the big tea kettle. Joanna gave no indication she was in a hurry to help her new helper.

“What happened at the dam?”

CJ narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “Our youngest son learned that he pushed his daddy a little too far. I spanked him. He took off in deep water, and I was scared half to death I was going to lose him and also scared that John would try to help and I’d lose him too.”

Joanna put her hand to her mouth, and her eyes widened in horror. “I wondered if it was something like that. Teddy has needed a spanking for a long time, and I’ve been too tired to whop him.” She rocked in silence then asked, “How come Isaac and Simon didn’t come in for dinner?”

“I believe your favorite nephew is far less than happy to have Lizzie as his new neighbor.”

“He should put himself in her place and think what he would do if his only parent left without making any provision for him.” Joanna snapped, brushing at a buzzing fly with irritation.

“Ma Tinner has already left?”

“Ma Tinner had her horse saddled at daybreak. She told Lizzie she was leaving, and Lizzie could figure out what she was going to do. She said she was on her own when she was Lizzie’s age, and it taught her how to think for herself.”

“How old do you think Lizzie is?” CJ sputtered a little laugh. “Lizzie is. That’s a mouthful.”

Joanna shook her head at him and managed a small smile. “Lizzie is twelve. She knows how to read a little, knows a little ciphering.”

“Joanna, I know you want to help her. Sometimes folks like her appreciate it, but sometimes they bite the hand that feeds them. Be very careful how much you feel sorry for her.”

They sat in silence while they finished their coffee, and then Joanna asked, “Who was the woman?”

“Woman?”

“The woman who wouldn’t let you get dressed before she talked to you.” Joanna’s voice held an edge.

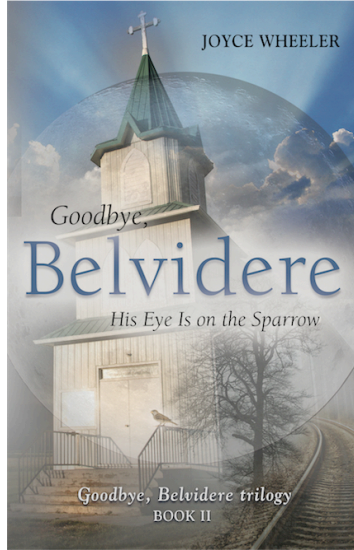
CJ started to laugh. “Ah yes, Mrs. Prillis. I quit my job at the Prillis store this morning. I got tired of her fussing over the figures. She can do the books herself. Her husband is not sure she can, but I told him I have complete confidence in her. She came to the dam because her husband wanted to hire me back.”

Joanna rocked slowly and seemed to be lost in thought. Outside, the wind had picked up, and they could hear the dust particles hit the windows.

“What are you going to do after dinner?” Her head was tilted as she looked at him, and her expression was tender.

He stood and gazed at her, and a smile danced over his face. Bending down, he brushed his lips against hers. “I would love to sit here all afternoon and enjoy my wife, but I suppose I better see what Simon has lined up for us.” He studied her profile. “What are you going to do?”

She sighed and slowly took her feet off the footstool. “Find jobs for Lizzie Tinner.”



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