

Abbie's confusion begins when she attempts to discover why Mrs. Jackson abruptly leaves her home and children. Soon life becomes even more of a puzzle when unexpected visitors blow onto the ranch on a cold winter's day. Even her boss, Wade Jackson, is surprised at the resulting consequences!

Laughter in the Wind

by Joyce Wheeler

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9828.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Joyce Wheeler

Laughter in the Wind



Laughter in the Wind - Third Edition
Copyright © 2011 Joyce Wheeler

ISBN: 978-1-63263-747-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2018

Third Edition

Scripture quotes are taken from the *New King James Version*, *Holy Bible New International Version*, and *The Living Bible*.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 1 - Abbie in Somerset County, England (2001) | 7 |
| Chapter 2 - Four Years Later (2005)..... | 18 |
| Chapter 3 - Heading West Summer, 2006..... | 31 |
| Chapter 4 - South Dakota | 36 |
| Chapter 5 - Wade Jackson..... | 42 |
| Chapter 6 - The Jackson Ranch..... | 48 |
| Chapter 7 - Sunsets Apart | 54 |
| Chapter 8 - Summer Ends—School Begins | 59 |
| Chapter 9 - Torrie McGovern | 65 |
| Chapter 10 - Toads and Kangaroos..... | 73 |
| Chapter 11 - This Little Pig..... | 78 |
| Chapter 12 - Kada's Confession..... | 86 |
| Chapter 13 - Early October | 94 |
| Chapter 14 - October Sunday | 98 |
| Chapter 15 - Wade's Women..... | 105 |
| Chapter 16 - Thanksgiving 2006..... | 112 |
| Chapter 17 - Aunt Lena's Visit | 116 |
| Chapter 18 - The Redhead and the Redneck | 133 |
| Chapter 19 - You Are My Sunshine..... | 143 |
| Chapter 20 - Common Sense Decision | 146 |
| Chapter 21 - Lena's Lament..... | 155 |
| Chapter 22 - Kada and Bill's Christmas..... | 159 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 23 - Mrs. Wade Jackson | 166 |
| Chapter 24 - New Beginnings | 172 |
| Chapter 25 - Heartbreak | 174 |
| Chapter 26 - Visiting Bill | 186 |
| Chapter 27 - The Doubting Mind | 189 |
| Chapter 28 - Pillow Talk | 193 |
| Chapter 29 - Meet Ace Olson | 196 |
| Chapter 30 - Northwest Wind | 208 |
| Chapter 31 - Tulip Time | 211 |
| Chapter 32 - Torrie and Clive | 221 |
| Chapter 33 - That Still, Small Voice | 225 |
| Chapter 34 - Rope 'Em, Throw, and Brand 'Em | 228 |
| Chapter 35 - Marie's Story | 235 |
| Chapter 36 - Scilla and Seeds | 239 |
| Chapter 37 - Mellowing Ground | 246 |
| Chapter 38 - We Do | 255 |
| Chapter 39 - And What If | 262 |

Chapter 6

The Jackson Ranch

Distraught. That was the word Abbie would have used to describe Kada Jackson the morning after Abbie arrived. When she discovered Abbie had visited with her husband, she seemed unable to concentrate on anything, and she finally headed out to the barn.

It was a strange morning even for Abbie, who was used to many difficult mornings with new families. Mrs. Jackson only had two people listed to call in case of an emergency: the children's doctor and a neighbor lady by the name of Marilyn. Other than that, she seemed to have very little input on her children.

Abbie had taken the three children outside, and when they saw Mrs. Jackson return from the barn, Skyler made a happy dash toward his mother. She picked him up absently and just as absently put him down by the porch.

"Mama, up!" Skyler insisted, but Mrs. Jackson gently swatted him on the behind and told Scilla to entertain him. There was quite a skirmish as Scilla tried to lead him away. Skyler jerked away and threw himself on the ground kicking and screaming.

Abbie hesitated to intervene, feeling it was the mother's duty, but Mrs. Jackson only shook her head and disappeared into the house.

"Scilla, leave him alone," Abbie said quietly. "You and I and Sage are going to swing. When Skyler gets up, he can swing too."

"He's always bawling," Scilla said plaintively.

They were only on the swings a few minutes before Mr. Jackson and a huge German Shepherd Dog appeared. The dog gently nosed the crying Skyler and sat down with a baffled look.

"You don't know what to do with him either, do you, Shy?" Mr. Jackson shook his head as he looked down at his unhappy son. "Skyler." Something in his tone caught Abbie's attention.

Skyler turned his volume down immediately, as if he also sensed there was a force he didn't care to tangle with.

"Skyler, either turn it off, or I'll give you something to bawl about."

"Want Mama!"

With one swoop, Skyler was in his dad's arms. He quit crying, and he had a surprised look as he and Mr. Jackson disappeared into the house.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Jackson came out alone and backed the van to a gas tank. From there he drove to the shop, where even from a distance

Abbie could see he found things to fix and take care of. Finally he backed the van to the breezeway door.

Soon he was loading a number of musical items into the back, and Mrs. Jackson was taking things out of her car and putting them into the van. Abbie noted there was very little conversation between the two.

By that time Sage was sleeping in Abbie's arms and she could feel the heat of the sun's rays beating on her back. She was loath to return to the house, but Scilla and she were both ready to quit swinging.

After Abbie entered the house, she was unsure where to lay Sage. Scilla guided her into a back room where his crib was. The smell of dust and stale cigarette smoke was so heavy in the air that Abbie cringed inwardly.

Abbie noted that Skyler was absorbed in a video, Sage was asleep, and Scilla, for the first time all morning, had left Abbie's side and disappeared. Since there were no children to care for at the moment, Abbie decided to see if the Jackson adults needed her help.

She found them in the kitchen, each with a cup of coffee in their hands and having a quiet, intense conversation.

"There's been a change in plans," Mrs. Jackson announced briskly when she saw Abbie. "I'm leaving today. I want to show you how to run the washer and dryer. You may not be familiar with American models."

Her manner was completely different from the day before. No slang talk. She seemed cold and distant, and when she showed Abbie how the different appliances worked, she was brief and to the point. Abbie almost wished the former Mrs. Jackson would appear.

Mrs. Jackson gave a quick and half-hearted tour of the kitchen. Abruptly, without a glance at her husband, she said she needed to take care of some other things and made a quick exit into the hallway.

"Coffee, Abbie?" Mr. Jackson asked, and at her nod, poured a steaming brew into a cup and handed it to her.

"You've probably noticed that Skyler is a complete mama's boy. He's going to miss her a lot." Mr. Jackson was looking at the dark curtains on the window while he spoke.

"Little boys often have a great attachment to their mothers," Abbie said. She paused to take a drink of coffee and then asked, "Should I make lunch for everyone?"

"Great idea." He walked into the next room where Skyler was watching TV, and Abbie heard him ask Skyler with a trace of irony in his voice if there was room on the sofa for any more toys.

It was always hard to find things in a different kitchen, but this one proved more challenging than most. There was no rhyme or reason to the placement of things, Abbie noticed, as she opened cupboard doors and found a mishmash of items sprawled in disarray. It was going to be a bit of a tussle to prepare food. She was in a small debate with herself about what an American family would usually fix for lunch when Mrs. Jackson reappeared.

She looked gorgeous. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a loose twist, her slim figure was encased in white slacks and an apricot colored top, and she wore sandals on her feet. Abbie saw that her toenails were painted the same color as her top and wondered why such a small detail caught her attention.

“You look very nice,” Abbie told her.

Mrs. Jackson granted her a tight smile. “I’m ready for the road.”

“Don’t you want to eat a bite first?”

“No, I’m ready to go. I’ve already said goodbye to the kids and Wade.” She looked uncertainly at Abbie. “I . . . probably won’t be back for quite awhile, so whatever you want to do in here, go ahead. I really don’t care.”

Two questions flashed through Abbie’s mind. Usually children were upset when their mother planned to be gone. Why weren’t these children? Sage was asleep, but she would have thought Scilla and Skyler would be close at hand when their mother left. Instead, Skyler was absorbed in a movie, and Scilla had disappeared upstairs. And how long was “quite awhile”?

“I’ve never been told to do whatever I wanted to do in a home. You might regret those words,” Abbie answered, with an attempt at some light humor. She would have said more, but Mrs. Jackson’s grim expression silenced her.

“Listen, I hate goodbyes, so I’m outta here.” She gave Abbie a snappy salute and within seconds was out the door.

It was the most unusual leave taking Abbie had ever witnessed.

She hadn’t realized that Mr. Jackson was also outside. Through a slit in the dark curtains she saw him open the van door for his wife. They exchanged a few words, and when she drove away he abruptly turned and walked into the house.

“Let’s get rid of these curtains,” he said as he brought in a huge cardboard box and plopped it in the middle of the kitchen floor.

Abbie gave him a startled look. He meant business and was already whipping the ugly dark shrouds off the window with his strong hands. He

reached out to hand them to her, and she deposited them into the box. In a very short time the kitchen had light.

“Well done, Mr. Jackson.”

He looked pleased with himself and gave her a brief nod. “On to the rest of the house, Miss Miller.”

Abbie was slightly amused that Skyler never quit watching TV while his father took down the curtains in that room. From there they moved into the back room where Sage was sleeping, and when the light began to filter in, she was shocked to see a fireplace.

“This was my grandmother’s living room and her pride and joy,” Mr. Jackson informed her. “It’s going to be that again.”

He almost savagely ripped away the ugly black material that hung on two French doors that separated the living room from another room. “This, Miss Miller, is the office. Kada had made it into a studio, but since we moved all her equipment out this morning, it will be a studio no more.”

Abbie had an eerie feeling looking at the heavy black drapes that were hung all around the former studio. “This almost gives me the creeps,” she said. “I wonder if we should move Sage out of your grandmother’s living room before we take these dusty things out.”

“Yes, you’re right. I’ll close the doors again, and we’ll leave it until later.”

By now the carton was heavy, and they both manhandled it into the hallway. The utility room and mudroom were quickly taken care of. Abbie hadn’t noticed the small bathroom tucked away in the utility room, and noticed that Kada had hung the same thick black curtains on the bathroom’s small window.

“Did Mrs. Jackson get a discount with these?” she asked, wondering if that was the reason the ugly things were hanging on every window.

“I have no idea,” he said, taking down the final pair that covered the hallway door. “Help me push this box into the breezeway, and we’ll get the lot of them out of the house.”

“That was accomplished very quickly, Mr. Jackson,” Abbie said as they walked back into the kitchen.

“Yes,” he murmured absently, looking at the dirty windows. “I’ve actually accomplished quite a bit this morning, Miss Miller.” He turned to her and smiled. “But we have only just begun. Before tonight we are going to have this carpet out of here.”

“Wonderful!”

•••

By evening, Abbie was far less enthusiastic. Mr. Jackson had kept her on a fast pace the entire day. It was as if he couldn't wait to eradicate every trace of his wife's decorating folly.

They relocated the bedroom furniture for the boys to an upstairs bedroom and rolled up the carpet throughout the entire downstairs and carted it outside. Mr. Jackson had taken down the strange wall coverings that were lightly tacked onto some of the walls. With strong hands, he tore them in two and threw them into the same box as the curtains. Even the office was reverted back to its original purpose.

As the evening brought slightly lower temperatures, Mr. Jackson opened the doors and windows, and while Abbie tiredly put supper on the table, he scrubbed Sage's high-chair tray with gusto.

Scilla had kept busy with them most of the day. She coughed from the dust they stirred up but refused to leave. Even Skyler tried to help, but soon found the work tiring and didn't complain when his dad put him in his new room for a nap. If it worried Wade that Sage slept most of the day, he gave no indication of it.

"I believe I worked you too hard today," he said as she yawned for the fourth time during their meal.

She laughed a little embarrassedly. "I'm getting used to a different time zone."

"Oh, of course you are. I forgot about that. Listen, when we're done eating, you quit for the day. I'll finish up."

For the first time in her nanny career, Abbie left supper dishes and three bedraggled little kids for someone else to take care of. She was asleep seconds after her head hit the pillow.

...

In the days that followed, Abbie came to understand that while Mrs. Jackson was vague and unsure of what a nanny should do, Mr. Jackson had no problems with planning her schedule. He was energetic and focused, and when he started a job he meant to finish it. He also expected her to keep his same pace.

As far as Abbie could tell, he didn't seem overly upset that he had become the sole parent in the house while his wife was gone, or even that she had left.

The house needed to be thoroughly cleaned, he told her, and he was willing to take time away from his ranch work to get it that way. Between the two of them, they washed the windows, took out garbage bags full of

trash, emptied cabinets and the pantry, and cleaned and reorganized everything else. The vacuum cleaner, little used for several months, found itself running almost continually on the carpet that lay dusty and forgotten under the monstrous black carpet.

“Paint,” Mr. Jackson stated simply one afternoon while the two were taking a momentary break at the cleaned kitchen table.

She looked at him warily. “Paint?”

“I’ve always wanted to repaint the hallway and kitchen.”

“You have?”

“Do you paint, Abbie?”

She answered slowly. “I have been known to paint.” Visions floated before her of red braids splattered with white paint, a sprinkling of white freckles on her face. Aunt Lena had declared Abbie had more paint on herself than the walls. “You realize, of course, Mr. Jackson,” she informed him, “that my main job is to care for the children. Actually, I haven’t really seen them enough to get acquainted very well.”

He leaned back in his chair and studied her with a noticeable twitch in the corner of his mouth. “You’ve seen them constantly for the last couple of days.”

“That’s quantity time, sir, not quality.” She looked down at Sage, who was patting the cleaned floor with his beloved teddy bear. She actually leaned forward to take a closer look. There was something decidedly different about him now than when she had first seen him at the airport.

“What are you seeing?” Mr. Jackson’s voice was sharp.

“Is it my imagination or does there seem to be more color in his cheeks?”

“I thought this morning he wasn’t as pale as usual. He coughs less.”

“So does Scilla. Good heavens, all that dust and dirt was probably doing them in.”

“From the way you sounded the morning after we cleared all that junk out, it almost did you in.” He pushed back his chair and grinned at her.

“We all were a bit croaky from it, I would say.” Abbie slowly stood and surveyed the bright and airy kitchen. “What a wonderful transformation in three long days. But,” she looked at Mr. Jackson with a troubled gaze, “what is Mrs. Jackson going to say about all of this? I worry about her reaction.”

“I wouldn’t worry at all about such matters if I were you,” he replied shortly. “Kada will be so engrossed in her singing that she won’t give it a second thought.”

Other books written by Joyce Wheeler include:

My Lady

Goodbye, Belvidere (A Hundred and Sixty Acres)

Goodbye, Belvidere (His Eye Is on the Sparrow)

Goodbye, Belvidere (I much love you)

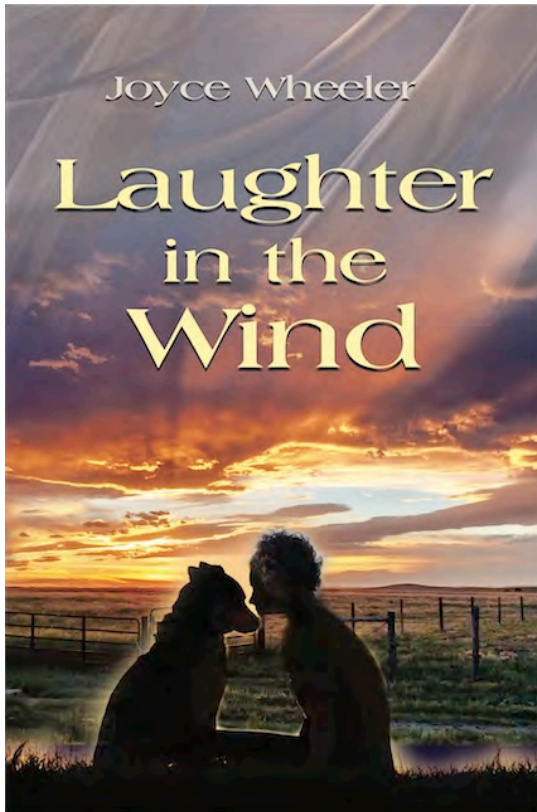
The Countries of Whine and Roses

Joyce can be contacted on her web site:

www.prairieflowerbooks.com

Or, on her Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/joycewheelerbooks



Abbie's confusion begins when she attempts to discover why Mrs. Jackson abruptly leaves her home and children. Soon life becomes even more of a puzzle when unexpected visitors blow onto the ranch on a cold winter's day. Even her boss, Wade Jackson, is surprised at the resulting consequences!

Laughter in the Wind

by Joyce Wheeler

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9828.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**