

PROLOGUE

October 23, 1852

The distant baying of the hounds echoed through the stagnant swamp air like anguished cries from the bowels of hell. Julia pulled her shawl closer around her shoulders. Despite the sweat bathing her body, she felt a chill. The chill of fear. Of agonizing doubt. Of irreversible destiny.

A menacing symphony of night sounds bombarded her ears. The discordant voices of myriad frogs. A muted splash as some unseen reptile slipped into the water. The occasional hair-raising shriek of an owl. The incessant whine of mosquitoes. The dull whack as Jacob beat a stout stick into any shadows where a venomous snake might lurk.

The air reeked of decay and mold. Julia had lived in South Carolina long enough to know that every time she and her companions drew the unwholesome lowland air into their lungs, they risked becoming infected with one or another of the dreaded swamp fevers. Yet any such mortal danger paled before the far greater one posed by the men and dogs now hunting them.

The advantage seemed to lie with the hunters. A full moon hung high overhead, its silvery light penetrating the tree branches and reflecting off the murky water. They had taken precautions to cover their tracks, but they could still hear the hounds in full cry. The promised rescue seemed as elusive as a dream. Seized with panic, she reached for Fanny's hand.

She felt the calloused fingers close around hers in a gentle but firm grip. She sought her friend's eyes through the gloom, memory recalling their placid brown depths. Moments passed. Gradually she felt Fanny's strength flow like a current of calm into her heart. Her companions had so much more to lose in this rash venture than did she. For them, the consequences of failure would be dire beyond description, putting her own paltry fear to shame. She took a deep breath and settled back to wait.

She and Fanny had levied themselves as high as possible onto the knee of a cypress tree, their backs pressed against the bole, their knees drawn tight against their chests. In Julia's twenty-one years of living, she had never experienced such misery of body. Her heavy tallow-and-tar-treated brogans were waterlogged from trudging through the sticky muck. The coarse homespun dress was too small and chafed at her neck and under her arms. Her head ached from the tightly-bound kerchief. Her skin itched beneath the sooty goo masquerading her face and hands.

To help the interminable minutes pass, she thought back to the day it had all begun. It was a cold, rainy late-April morning when Ellen came into the parlor with the daily post. Julia put aside her mending, reached for the thin packet, and smiled with pleasure when she saw the familiar ivory-colored paper addressed in flowing script to Miss Julia Bigsby, 224 Fourth Street, Troy, New York.

PART I—ITINERARIES

CHAPTER ONE

April 24, 1851

The letter was astonishing. Julia abandoned her seat by the meager parlor fire and carried it to the chillier but brighter front window. A late spring rain distorted the view into the street. As a child, she had thought such a scene must have inspired Saint Paul to write in sacred Scripture: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.* Today, inspired by premonition, she saw the window glass as a shimmering gateway beyond which she might come face to face not with her God but with an exciting new adventure. She adjusted the page so the maximum amount of light fell onto its creamy linen face and read again from the beginning: *Dearest Cousin, I must beg your forgiveness as it has been many weeks since last I wrote.*

Julia smiled. Her Cousin Mary had benefitted from the finest education available to a young woman. Yet despite her years at the renowned Troy Female Seminary, her spelling was little improved from the years when the two little girls had studied at their mothers' knees. She continued reading:

Truth be told, it is difficult these days to find anything cheerful enough to warrant putting pen to paper. Ever since Mama's passing into the arms of the Lord, a terrible pall has fallen over our household. Papa either snaps like an old turtle or sits staring into the fire for hours on end, more like a phantom than a flesh and blood parent. With Brother Jeremiah off at Princeton, I am left to deal with this dismal state of affairs by myself. At times I feel as if I cannot bare it another moment.

Julia had also spent many hours grieving for the aunt who had been her guide and stay after her own mother died when she was eight. That the Leeds family was still in turmoil barely ten months after the dear lady's surrender to pneumonia came as no surprise.

There now, enough of gloomy talk. My mind's eye sees the sympathizing tear on your cheek, and I chastize myself for causing such distress to my heart's best friend. I hope to brighten your mind with a proposal that I pray will find favor with you—but especially with my esteemed uncle so he will be inclined to give it his blessing. Jeremiah informed us in a recent letter that he will stop for a fortnight at the Village of Saratoga Springs before continuing home after term is finished. I suspect he is motivated by the anticipated presence of a certain fair damsel from Princeton town who vacations there with her family each June, for his recent letters have been filled with her prayzes. Might wedding bells be in my dear brother's near future? But I digress. Jeremiah proposes that Papa and I join him at the springs. Not only has Papa agreed,

but he insists our little Julia must come as well and has comishioned me to send this invitation forthwith.

The very thought of such a visit sent Julia's heart into a paroxysm of joy. She had been deeply grieved when her uncle moved his family west to the town of Buffalo three years before. The parting was made even more bitter by the knowledge that her father, the Reverend Samuel J. Bigsby D. D., would never condone much less finance any attempt by Julia to see these in-laws whose wealthy lifestyle he abhorred. Now she allowed her imaginings to soar, if only for a brief moment. She returned to the letter:

I must make it clear that this trip would be at Papa's expense. You would have a ready escort in Jeremiah, who will be stopping in Troy regardless since that is where he must board the cars for Saratoga. Once at the springs, you would share our acomodation as if you were one of our small family, which of course you surely are, in spirit if not in tecknicality. When our holiday is over, we three would accompany you back to Troy, where we plan to spend a week or two renewing old aquaintences. Given these facts, I cannot imagine our proposal drawing serious objection from any quarter. A pointed reference to the sure response of Julia's father. Indeed, it would be considered a niece's Christian duty to offer solace to her stricken uncle and cousins and ease their pathway back to happiness. To say nothing of the benefit from the medicinal waters of that storied place, from which we shall return to our ordinary lives in better health and ready to resume our duties with fresh re—

Here a large blot of ink obscured the intended word. Mary's penmanship had always been prone to careless drips and drops from the tip of her steel pen. This letter was no exception. Julia supplied the word *resolve* from her imagination and continued:

There, I have made my case. Now I must bring this episel to a close and send it off in today's post. We shall all await your reply with great anticipation. I remain your loving cousin, Mary Leeds.

Julia shivered and went back to the fire. Despite the recent cold weather, the Reverend Bigsby had consulted the calendar, determined that spring had come, and turned his frugal eye to the coal bins in the cellar. With several tons still remaining from the winter's allotment, he had decreed that the furnace would henceforth lie dormant so the leftover coal could be saved as a hedge against rising prices the following year. This edict did not stop their housekeeper Ellen O'Leary from bringing a scuttleful of the precious fuel to the parlor fireplace on days such as this so that Julia would have some small measure of comfort as she went about her morning tasks.

She tucked Mary's letter into the pocket of her apron, returned to the large rocking chair, and took up the other letters. There was a notice of payment due from the Troy Gas Light Company, and she laid it aside to be dealt with on a day more suitable for a walk to the company office. The amount was so paltry it hardly seemed worth the effort. Although the parsonage had been fitted for gas at the same time as the church the previous year, the house fixtures were lit

only when there were church members or other important persons to be entertained. The remainder of the time, the household relied on the camphene lamps that had been their staple long before the newfangled devices became available.

The two remaining letters were addressed to her father as pastor of the Fourth Street Presbyterian Church. As his defacto assistant, Julia did not hesitate to open them. One was a letter of gratitude for the Missionary Society's recent gift to a minister laboring among the heathen in the western territories. The other invited Samuel to attend a meeting of a group of regional Presbyterian ministers who shared an affinity for the Old School branch of the church. The meeting was to be held in nearby Albany in a month's time and was to feature a lecture by James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina, a leading voice among those fighting to protect the church and her teachings from the nationalistic and reformist tendencies of the New School. Finding themselves in the minority among the presbyteries and synods of the northeast, these stalwart men met periodically to bolster their resolve and make contact with the southern brethren who were the major standard bearers of their beliefs. Julia knew her father would make every possible effort to attend.

At the moment he was secluded in prayer, study and meditation prior to composing his weekly sermon. She would join him after dinner, at which time they would discuss the letters and any other necessary business. Then Julia would take up her pen for his dictation of the sermon itself, a service she had been providing ever since a crippling rheumatism rendered him unable to write them out himself.

She reached once again for her mending. She was repairing a weak seam on her father's Sunday frock coat, a garment that most men would have discarded long before due to excessive wear. Not the Reverend Bigsby, who would continue to wear the wretched thing until the fabric disintegrated from his very body. She sighed and lifted the work close to her eyes. She had taken but three stitches when her hands fell idle and her thoughts returned to Mary's letter.

The longer its contents nestled into her mind, the more she yearned to accept the offered invitation. It was an opportunity so palpable she could feel it as a physical ache beneath her breastbone. She had never traveled more than a few miles outside the City of Troy, much less to a fashionable resort such as Saratoga Springs. The thought of the amazing sights she would see as well as the excitement of traveling there was enough to take her breath away. Yet even these prospects paled before the notion of spending a fortnight with her much-cherished and only remaining relatives. Was there any way she might persuade her father to allow her to go?

She created and discarded a dozen strategies over the remaining hours of the morning, each more preposterous than the last. By the time Ellen rang the dinner bell, she was no closer to a plan than she had been when she first read the letter.

She crossed to the dining room as her father emerged from his office at the far end of the hall. The Reverend Bigsby was a tall, gaunt man of forty-nine, slightly stoop shouldered but with

a staid and lofty bearing. He wore his graying hair long and in an old-fashioned queue. His ice-blue eyes, bushy eyebrows, and high domed forehead gave him a look of severe intelligence that intimidated those who had the temerity to disagree with him but earned him the pride and respect of his congregation.

He caught his daughter's eye and gave a slight nod, waiting for her to seat herself before he took his place at the head of the table. They bowed their heads while he intoned a blessing. Ellen had prepared a dinner of mutton chops, boiled new potatoes, pickled cabbage and soda bread. They ate in silence, the only sounds those of their forks clinking against their plates. Casual conversation had never flowed easily between them, but an awkward incident some months before had thrown a pall over what little there might have been. Given this chronic air of tension, Julia could not bring herself to broach the subject of Mary's letter.

Ellen came in to clear their plates and serve a dessert of rice pudding. The housekeeper had been in Samuel's employ ever since he moved into the parsonage as the church's newly-called pastor twenty-three years before. She was a tiny woman of seemingly boundless energy whom Julia assumed to be well into her sixties, although her exact age was a secret known only by her family and priest. She had iron-gray hair drawn into a high knot, a pasty complexion, and watery blue eyes on the right eyelid of which rested a large mole. She was a kindly soul but mindful of her station. She had done what she could to ease Julia's path as a motherless orphan, but her sense of propriety had prevented her from establishing the warm connection that would have provided the most comfort. Nonetheless, Julia loved her and dreaded the day when old age would of necessity take her away from them.

When the meal was finished, father and daughter went into the small parlor that Samuel used as his office. Books cluttered every surface except the small writing desk where Julia took her dictation. The air was chill and damp, the fireplace cold, and she shivered as she crossed to her chair.

She held out the two letters involving church business and said, "These came in the post."

He took them, hooked a pair of spectacles over his ears, and read in silence. He handed them back, saying, "Make a note of the meeting date. And perhaps you would do me the favor of reading the other out at the next meeting of the Missionary Society."

"Certainly."

"Very well, then." He began to pace. Cleared his throat and said, "I have been contemplating the twelfth chapter of Romans and have decided to use the third verse as the text for this week's lesson. If you will prepare yourself?"

Julia suppressed a sigh, took out a fresh sheet of paper, and dipped her pen into the ink.

The front doorbell rang less than an hour into their work. Some minutes later, Ellen knocked at the door.

“Yes?” barked Samuel, who had little patience for interruptions.

The housekeeper entered the room carrying a silver salver on which two small white cards rested. She said, “These fine ladies beg a moment o’ your time, sir.”

Samuel studied the cards. Huffed and said, “Very well. Show them into the parlor.”

He raised an eyebrow to Julia and cocked his head, indicating she was to join him. They went out into the hallway, which reeked of damp wool from the ladies’ cloaks hanging on the coatrack. Samuel gave an audible sigh as he opened the doors into the parlor.

The two ladies sat side by side on the sofa. They were fashionably dressed in mourning black with lace-trimmed bonnets and fringed shawls. Each held an elegant little card portfolio in one gloved hand and an embroidered cambric handkerchief in the other. They differed only in age and physique, one slender and young, the other portly and well into her middle years.

Samuel advanced toward the younger of the two, took her hand, and bowed over it with the deference any pastor would show toward the new wife of a widowed banker who was one of the church’s most wealthy congregants.

“What a pleasure it is to see you, Mrs. Belmont,” he said.

She beamed at him. “I trust we chose a convenient time to call. I am eager to introduce my mother, Mrs. Wentworth, who has recently joined our household following the death of my dear papa. She has already requested a letter of transfer and wishes to meet her new pastor without delay.”

Samuel turned his attention to the Widow Wentworth, bowing over her hand in turn. “I am most pleased to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Wentworth. Welcoming new souls to our humble flock is my most joyous task as a servant of the Lord.” He straightened and turned toward Julia. “May I present my daughter and right hand, Miss Julia Bigsby?”

The lady gave Julia an imperious nod and said, “How fortunate you are, Pastor. A dutiful daughter is one of God’s greatest blessings.”

Julia hid her instantaneous dislike behind a benign expression as she crossed to a small side chair and sat down.

Samuel took the chair closest to the ladies and continued, “May I offer my condolences on the loss of your husband, Mrs. Wentworth? I, too, have lost a life’s partner and know the pain consequent to such a tragedy.”

She raised her handkerchief to her lips and lowered her eyes. "Thank you, Reverend Bigsby. It is such a comfort to know my grief is so well understood. But I am told the pain will pass ..." She raised her eyes and met his with frank interest. "... and life will bring happiness once again through new connections."

Julia suppressed a smile. Mrs. Wentworth would not be the first eligible female to offer herself to the widowed pastor. So far, his steadfast allegiance to her dead mother had rendered him immune to such advances. Watching this lady's efforts to breach his determination would provide some private entertainment over the months to come.

Samuel's eyes became hooded as he replied, "Keeping busy, Mrs. Wentworth. That is the key. The church has many avenues for such therapeutic activity. My daughter aids me in these matters and will work closely with you to find the best outlet for your interests and talents."

A slight redness crept into Mrs. Wentworth's cheeks, indicating she had noted the mild rebuff. "I thank you for the suggestion. My departed husband and I were most active in our Philadelphia fellowship, and I would expect to follow in that mold here in Troy." She turned to Julia and smiled, revealing decay-ridden teeth. "I am certain Miss Bigsby and I will become the best of friends as we explore all the means by which I may be of service."

Julia forced a return smile. "I shall look forward to it."

The widow sent her daughter a pointed look. The young woman blinked. Gathered herself and said to Julia, "To that end, perhaps you and Pastor Bigsby would join Mr. Belmont, Mrs. Wentworth and myself for dinner one Sunday afternoon. Say Sunday week?"

An awkward silence. Then from Samuel, "I fear that will not be possible. But we thank you for the kind invitation."

His bluntness caused both ladies to blush, and they soon rose to take their leave. In their wake, Julia fought off a wave of foreboding. They had collided with her father's strength of will, just as she was sure to do over the proposed excursion to Saratoga Springs. She feared it would not end well.

The issue weighed heavily on her mind throughout a tedious afternoon of sermon writing. The evening meal loomed, and she still had not thought of a subtle way to bring up the letter. Left with but one option, the direct approach, she went into the dining room before the tea bell rang and placed the letter on her father's plate where he could not fail to see it.

After he had said the blessing, he eyed it and said, "What is this, pray tell?"

"Something I wish you to read." She made a Herculean effort to look him in the eye. "A letter I received today from Cousin Mary."

“How extraordinary. You know I have no interest in the female prattle of two young things such as yourself and Mary.”

“I believe this to be an exception. Please, Father. Read the letter.”

A longsuffering sigh. “Very well.”

He unfolded the pages and began to read. Julia studied his expression to gauge his reaction, but not the slightest flicker of emotion crossed his face. When he had finished, he laid the sheets aside and said, “Help yourself to that fish, Daughter, and please pass it on.”

A knot the size of New York seized her stomach, but she did as he asked and managed to choke down a few bites. Nothing more was said through the remainder of the meal. When the dessert of apple brown betty had been cleared away and the coffee served, she took her courage in hand.

“May I ask for your response to Uncle Cyrus’s proposal?”

He stared back at her, the long seconds marked by the ticking of the mantel clock. At last he said, “Out of the question,” after which he gulped down his coffee and left the table.

Julia had expected such an answer, but it cut her to the core nonetheless. She spent the evening vacillating between despair and anger, tears and defiance. She retired early, hoping sleep’s oblivion would ease the depth of her longing. When she wakened in the morning, her desire was, if anything, more intense than ever. After breakfast and morning devotions, she put on her bonnet, gloves and cloak and went out.

The air was chilly, but the rain had stopped during the night, and pale sunshine was already working its magic on the puddles in the street. Droplets fell onto her cloak from the overhanging treetops, glistening like diamonds when caught by the morning rays. She drew the fresh odors of springtime deep into her lungs and immediately felt better. She walked south past the church, which was next to the parsonage, continued to the corner, and turned east up Ferry Street.

Troy, a city of some thirty thousand souls, lay on the east side of the Hudson River at the head of the navigable portion of that august stream. Two promontories, Mt. Olympus and Mt. Ida, stood like sentinels at its northern and southern flanks. Together with the rolling hills beyond, they formed a scenic backdrop such as few other cities could claim.

The farther Julia climbed from the busy center of town, the more her surroundings had the feel of the country. Cobblestone gave way to dirt. The houses were simpler and laid farther apart with gardens aplenty, as well as a variety of livestock. She joined Congress Street where it curved around Mt. Ida and soon heard the rush of Ida Falls, a tumultuous cascade along Poesten

Kill. A short walk farther brought her to the Sand Lake Turnpike, where she crossed the bridge and finally turned into Mt. Ida Cemetery.

Although dwarfed by the newly-consecrated Oakwood Cemetery, this place embodied a peace and tranquility that made her feel as if she were coming home every time she passed through its gates. She stopped to smile at a pair of squirrels chasing each other among the headstones. Birdsong filled the air. The kill gurgled a happy response. She continued on.

The headstone lay beneath a spreading maple tree, still leafless but with buds ready to burst at the next prolonged warm spell. The marker was made of Sing Sing marble, the finest money could buy, and was topped by a cross of the same material. The engraving read:

Harriet Milton Bigsby

Born January 10, 1812 Died July 23, 1839

Beloved Wife and Mother

The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job1:21

Julia's memories of her mother were vague. She had been told she bore a remarkable physical resemblance to her dead parent. As a result, she often studied her reflection in the hope it would spark some memory to which she could cling: large brown eyes, milk-pale skin susceptible to freckling and burning in the summer, unruly black hair that even the tightest braiding and pinning could not completely tame, straight slender build. Alas, her efforts to conjure a maternal image invariably failed. Yet any doubt that they shared an uncanny likeness had been put to rest in one searing moment ten months before.

It happened the day they received word of her Aunt Louise's passing. Samuel had never cared for his sister-in-law's husband Cyrus, but he had always honored Louise as his last remaining connection to his dead wife. Her sudden death plunged him into a black depression. Julia was submerged in her own grief and failed to notice her father's condition until late that night when she was wakened from sleep by a loud thump that shook the floor of her room. She lit a lamp, put on her wrapper, and crossed the hall to his bedroom.

She knocked on the door. Receiving no response, she called, "Father?"

A low moan. Alarmed, she opened the door. Samuel lay sprawled on the floor beside his bed, his nightshirt hiked up around his waist, his private parts in full view. Julia was too stunned to move. She had never seen her father in anything but full daytime dress. Witnessing him thus indisposed was stupefying. The bottle of brandy that the family kept for medicinal emergencies sat atop the bedside table. Not a drop remained. Her father, the esteemed Reverend Samuel J. Bigsby D. D., was as drunk as a common stevedore.

She heard footfalls on the staircase and realized Ellen was on her way up to investigate. She dashed out into the hall and reached the stairs just as the housekeeper arrived at the top step. Her candle cast eerie wavering light across her worried brow as she said,

“What happened, miss? Sounded like someone took a fearful fall.”

“It was nothing. I knocked a chair over as I was crossing in the dark to close the window. I am sorry to have disturbed you.”

The older woman hesitated, peering around behind Julia. “Shall I help you set things to rights?”

“Thank you, but I have already done so. Go back to bed.”

“Well, then, if you’re certain...” She lingered a moment longer, then turned and started down the stairs.

Julia returned to the bedroom. Samuel had struggled to a sitting position. She knelt beside him and said, “Are you all right, Father?”

“Wha’ happen? Why’re you here?”

“You fell out of bed. Did you hurt yourself?”

“’Course not. I am jus’ fine.”

“Then let me help you into bed.”

She took hold of his hands and pulled, but he seemed incapable of rising by himself. She stooped down, wedged her shoulder under one of his arms, and struggled to lift him. After several futile attempts, she managed to leverage them both onto the bed, where their momentum flung them backward onto the mattress. She lay for a moment catching her breath. Slowly she became aware that he was staring at her. Tears coursed down his craggy cheeks.

“So beau’ful. My sweet Harriet.” He reached up to caress her cheek. “Where’ve you been, m’love? Why’d you leave me alone? I—I need you so.” His hand slid down her neck, his breath coming in short gasps. “Want you, dearest one. Must have—” His wandering hand settled on her breast, and he gave a deep groan.

Julia jumped up and away as if she had been burned. She stared down at him, hand pressed to her mouth, eyes wide with shock and revulsion. Lustful passion drained from his face as he came to his senses. Dawning horror took its place.

“O, m’dear. Di’nt mean... So like her...”

Julia backed away, shaking her head. She bumped into the open door, groped behind her for the handle, then turned and fled. The sound of his wretched sobs followed her across the hallway and into her own bedroom.

He remained in his room the entire following day, taking no meals and speaking to no one. When he emerged on the second day, he was shaven and dressed for business as usual. They had not spoken of it since.

Now Julia's face burned at the memory. She had a habit of carrying on a one-sided conversation when she visited the grave on the chance that her mother's spirit might still linger. This incident was the only subject she regarded as tabu. She reasoned that if the human soul could return to earth at will—and there was certainly no evidence of such a fancy in the Bible—then such spirits could surely read the thoughts of mortals, in which case Harriet already knew what had happened. Julia need not compound her shame by repeating it out loud.

She arranged her cloak on the still-damp grass and sat down. She reached out to trace the smooth grooves of the headstone's engraved letters and said, "I have a special problem today, Mama. Cousin Mary has written to invite me..."

She went on to relate the events of the day before. Wiping tears of frustration from her cheeks, she finished, "I do not know how to reconcile my heart to this impasse. I know Father has been put in authority over me by our dear Jesus Himself, but I am sorely tempted to have my own way. Visiting with Mary and Jeremiah and Uncle Cyrus would be such a comfort. And I cannot help being curious about the life of those who frequent places such as Saratoga Springs. Has Satan sent this opportunity to tempt me away from my duty? Or is it a gift from above to expand the circumstances of my life?" A small keening cry. "Oh, Mama, what shall I do?"

She lay back and stared up into the sky's deepening blue. A hawk circled high overhead, searching for prey. She thought of the poor little mouse or baby rabbit that would become the predator's next meal. Was the tiny victim even now nibbling happily away at its last meal, unaware of the horror to come? It seemed to her this was the state in which she had received Mary's letter the day before, ignorant of the torment that would soon consume her.

The damp began to seep through her cloak, but still she lay there. Lethargy crept over her, and she allowed her eyelids to surrender to it. How long she dozed she could not tell, but when she wakened, there was a calm certainty in her heart. The inner tumult of the past day was over. She knew what she was going to do.

○○○○○

Samuel had barely lifted his head after delivering the dinner blessing when Julia said, "Father, I have something to tell you."

She seldom initiated dinner-table conversation, and he looked more surprised than concerned. She continued with more equanimity than she would have thought possible even twelve hours before, "I have decided to accept Uncle Cyrus's invitation to join his family at Saratoga Springs."

Silence. Then, "I beg your pardon?"

"I have given the matter a great deal of thought and can conceive of no rational reason why I should not go. I will be in the constant company of trusted relatives. You will incur no expense on my behalf. But above all, these are people whom my mother loved. My heart convinces me she would want me to take advantage of this opportunity, particularly since I might not have another for many years to come, if ever. I would prefer to have your blessing. But if you withhold it, I shall go nonetheless and pray that you will forgive me for defying you."

A forbidding glare. "My forgiveness is not what you should pray for."

She shook her head. "Accepting the kindness of a much loved relative is not a sin. I have always looked to you for guidance, as I should. But in return, you owe me justice in your decisions. In this instance, I can think of no motive for your refusal except spite."

He drew in a sharp breath. "That is an evil accusation! You and I have obligations and duties in our work for the Lord, duties you cannot perform if you go gallivanting off to that den of iniquity."

"Father, they are *your* obligations and duties as the called pastor of this church. Since I live in your household, I am obliged to assist you in any way I can. My brief absence will not interfere with that duty."

"What of my sermons? You know I cannot write them out myself due to this wretched rheumatism."

"We have more than a month in which to commit them to paper. As for any other business of home or church, there is nothing that could not wait two weeks until my return."

His face was flushed, but she could see defeat in his eyes. At peace with herself, she waited for his reply.