

Daughter Of The Chippewa Territory

"Eyes to the west!", Wilfred Fletcher called out, as he viewed his daughter and her new husband roll out of sight on the old buckboard. "Yes, eyes to the west!"

The old cobbler was glad that the two young people had turned the corner at Bedford Street for he had held back the shimmering tears long enough. It was 1827 and there was little chance that he'd ever see his daughter Margaret again. When Henry Evans asked for her hand Wil Fletcher knew that the day would eventually come when New England would not hold this young man. Henry was preoccupied with visions of the horizon but Wil also knew that the son-in-law was a hard-working man and his daughter would be treated with respect and affection.

As the old cobbler bent down over the table again to work on the sole of old man Jemison's boot he was happy that Lavinia had not lived to see this day. She'd died in the plague of '19 and left a humble cobbler to raise this pretty young Margaret by himself. For some reason Wil had never thought to remarry, it just didn't seem to be a priority. After all, he had a daughter to raise, a business to carry on, and his aged mother to look after to boot. But now that Lavinia was resting and Mother Fletcher had also passed away Wil

found himself alone in his shop, praying for the protection of young Margaret on her way to the Ohio territory.

For a good period of years it seemed that the farewell prayers of a simple cobbler on Hampshire Street in Portland actually were efficacious for the young couple. They found excellent homestead land near Bakerville, and raised wonderful crops and two strong young sons. It was rich bottom land and it was as though every day Margaret felt the prayers of her faithful father embracing their little family. At times she wondered how that saintly old man was, but postal services were scarce and so she felt that all she could do was to return his good prayers back to Heaven for the benefit of her father.

Then, suddenly, it was as though Heaven refused to hear. Four plantings in a row the late springtime brought devastating floods to their valley. Eventually they knew that it would not be possible to hang on to that patch of land any longer. They just did not have the resources to hold on, no, not even for one more season. "We just can't survive with our crops flooded away again, Margaret," Henry said softly after the boys went to bed.

"I know, Henry," the good wife replied. "I certainly know that we must find another way to provide for our boys or we'll starve to death this coming winter."

Henry poked around in the coals of the fireplace and then turned to Margaret and said, "I've heard there's gold in Ontario."

"Gold? What do you know about digging for gold?" Margaret didn't mean to be unkind, she simply knew that Henry, though an incredibly good man and hard worker, only had experience in assisting her father in the cobbler's shop

and the years he had given to farming their land. He'd never even seen a piece of true gold in his life.

"Well, it's true that I don't know anything now but I suppose a fella could learn. After all, doesn't everyone have to start somewhere in any endeavor?", he queried. "It seems that there aren't too many things that any of us are born to do naturally and none of them seems to pay very well!," he chuckled. "Finding an occupation that keeps bread on the table takes time and energy and learning no matter what the field. I suppose that's true of gold too."

"But Henry," Margaret protested, "Ontario is a foreign land. We'd be aliens there and have no one to assist us."

"Margaret, we were strangers here and we've managed well enough, at least until these last three cursed years, haven't we?"

She knew it was true. They'd struck out into the unknown before and even though they had the boys to worry about they were still young and strong and capable of trusting that God would see them through. The parents talked long into the night and as the last embers were losing their vibrancy it was decided, they would go to Ontario. Eventually, they hoped, there would be a viable opportunity to return to Ohio and begin again.

Within a matter of days the Evans family had loaded their possessions on the buckboard and began to head north across the frontier. There were few sections that even could pass as being called "roads" and so the going was slow and rough. Henry let Montgomery and Charles take turns leading the team as they walked ahead of the wagon. In less than a week they crossed the border and entered into Michigan. To their joy they found that as they moved north the warm weather seemed to just be keeping up with them. It

was as though the warmth of springtime was inching up the land with the little family.

Some in Ohio had advised the family to go through Ontario on the east side of the lake. They said that there could be some resting at Fort Detroit. A crossing to the village of Windsor near the base of Lake St. Clair might afford them easier traveling than going past the thumb of Michigan on the American side. Margaret really wanted to stay in American territory as long as possible so they continued up the west side of Lake Huron until they came to the Mackinac Strait. To the west the deep blue water coming from Lake Michigan bled into the springtime sky. The band of water beneath the overlook shimmered and they could see the Upper Peninsula across the strip of liquid sapphire that headed toward Lake Huron and the sea.

"Whew, Father!", Montgomery called out. "That has to be more than five miles across, doesn't it?"

"More than that, son," Henry replied over the top of the horses' reins. "I heard tell at the last settlement that it's actually closer to eight."

Charles looked a bit troubled, "Then how are we going to get across. That water's much too deep to ford and much too cold to swim in, isn't it?"

The father laughed heartily and said, "In that you are one hundred percent right my good lad! I'm not sure that I'm up to it but your mother told me that she'd swim on ahead and pull us all across!"

"Henry!", Margaret scolded him, "It's just not right that you'd tease the boys that way. That's nothing but pure fabrication and you know it!"

"I confess," the father chuckled to himself, "she said that she'd only take me across and you two will have to swim with Molly and Pilgrim here."

Margaret jabbed at her husband's ribs as Montgomery called out, "In that case I'll let old Pilgrim carry me across. He may be slow but he's got longer legs than Molly and I wouldn't want to get my feet wet!"

"Hey!", Charles protested. "I'm not riding on old Molly. She's likely to get ornery and try to make me swim with her on my back part way!"

"That she would," the father responded. "Actually, it will be our task to get down to the shore line and find a transport that will ferry us across so we may continue on our journey." And that's exactly what they did.

Levi Bransom operated a ferry service when he wasn't in the north woods trapping. The Evans family felt blessed for they caught one of the of the last crossings that Bransom was going to make before he took off for several weeks of setting trap lines throughout the Upper Peninsula. "It's a good thing that you came the way you did," Bransom said. "Word is that the Chippewas have been creating some commotion on the Ontario side and it might have been rough sledding for you if you hadn't come up past the thumb."

"How far to Sault Ste. Marie?", Henry asked they neared the far shore.

"Well sir, the Sault is about 55 miles but the road isn't much," Bransom replied. "You'll have some rough go of it for a few days and I hope you're ready to fight the bugs."

"Well, we have noticed that there seem to be many more mosquitoes here in Michigan that we had in the Ohio territory," Margaret replied.

"Well, ma'm," the old trapper replied, "I'm afraid you haven't seen anything yet," he shrugged his shoulders and nodded toward the land. "In the U.P. there's mosquitoes that will pick you up and carry you away 'cause they don't want to lose you to the deer flies and that's the God's honest truth."

Margaret rolled her eyes. This journey was becoming more and more of a trial with each passing day. Bransom could read her discouragement and continued, "But, don't you worry now. When we get to the shore I'll show you a combination of leaves and spring flowers that will serve you just fine in keeping those critters off of you. Why, if you like you can even use it on your horses here and they'll thank you 'til their dying day."

Margaret assured Mr. Bransom that she'd be indeed grateful if he'd share his knowledge in that area and within a matter of hours the Evans family was pushing on across the wilderness.

They found the upper peninsula to be rugged and beautiful. Wildlife abounded and there were hundreds of small streams and lakes that recently had come to life again with the approach of the days of summer. Margaret even took a little time one day to make a garland of wildflowers to wear as a necklace. Henry assured her that she was, indeed, beautiful and that the tiny blue flowers were particularly nice as they accented her eyes and brought radiance to her auburn hair.

It was nearly evening when they came to the edge of the small settlement known as Sault Ste. Marie. They could see across the river and realized that the forests on the far side were Canadian. "This is very strange to us, Henry," Margaret spoke as her family sat around the fire that evening. "Yes, we are strangers here, but this place is indeed a paradise."

"I hope that God blesses us here, Margaret," Henry replied as he blew the steam from his coffee. "I really do."

In the morning they went to the local mercantile to seek out information on Ontario and the gold. The shop owner, Murray Boyer, was a rotund, balding man who was very friendly and talkative in spite of the fact that he acted a bit nervous all the time.

"Gold? Gold?", Boyer said quizzically. "You're one of them, are you?"

"One of what?" Henry queried.

"One of those type who want to get rich quickly. It surprises me. After all, a family man like yourself would seem to need deeper roots than to be running off after some rumor of gold."

Henry Evans shook his head, "Oh, no, sir. You've got it all wrong." Henry leaned forward from the barrel where he sat and continued, "I'd much rather be back on the farm in Ohio but we just got driven out."

"Not Chippewa, not that far south?" the merchant looked concerned.

"No," Henry replied. "It was the infernal flooding. Three destroyed crops in a row would make any man pick up and move for a while."

"Yes," the shop keeper scratched his ear. "I guess I could see how that's true. But tell me then, what do you know about gold?"

"Actually, all I know is that I don't have any and if I could get some then life would be a lot easier!", Henry laughed.

"Well," the merchant stuck his index fingers in his belt loops and said, "well, maybe so and maybe not. All I know is that for all the rumor of gold in Ontario there don't seem to be too many people coming back through here with much to spend. They go up there with dreams and hopes and come back skinnier and hungrier." Boyer concluded, "I'd hate for you to drag your good family all the way up there just to have them find out that there's no end of the rainbow for you."

He then leaned forward intently and said, "If I was you, sir, I'd consider going across to Sault, Ontario and helping them build that place up. There's plenty of construction going on over there and the Canadian government seems intent to make that little village a town that can compete with us over here. That's where the gold is. The government has it and they are willing to spend it."

Henry and Margaret decided that the man's words might represent wisdom, at least for a while, until they became acclimated to being in a foreign land. Boyer helped them make contact with a man who had a stable barge and would assist in getting them across the icy river. The water that came fresh from Superior was biting cold and that, to Margaret, seemed fitting as she felt she was cutting all ties to the life that she'd known in the crossing.

It was Henry's intention to remain in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario for one month and then push on up toward the north and west. He knew that the summer time would be short and it would be only a matter of months before the Arctic blasts came screaming across the Alberta territory and over the great lake. He was determined to have his family permanently settled before they faced the bitter teeth of winter in Ontario.

But, it was not to be. Within a matter of weeks after their arrival on the north shoreline the village was decimated by small pox. Settlers were dropping like flies and much to their great dismay Henry died and left a widow with two strapping lads of 15 and 17. They took Henry's body in a simple box and put it on the wagon for a last journey. "Boys," Margaret said softly, "I can't bear the thought of burying your father in a foreign land but no one will cross the river as long as the plague is rampant over here. I'm afraid we have no choice." So the three of them took Henry up to a rise looming above Lake Superior where they could create a grave that would overlook the water back toward Michigan, back toward Ohio, back toward America, back toward home.

"This is a beautiful spot, Ma," Montgomery assured his mother as he held his arm around her. "Pa would have liked it here," and Margaret knew that it was true.

As the three of them rode back down the little hill Margaret proclaimed, "We'll stay through the winter and then we'll go back to Ohio... or maybe even to Maine."

The survivors of the community embraced each other and looked out after each other as the short summer season passed. Everyone knew that survival depended on good preparation and looking out for your neighbor. With the first blast of winter the village was ready for the challenge. The plague had passed and they would, together, survive.

It was a brutal winter. It seemed as though Heaven was demanding more than it should of that village that had already suffered so much. Margaret had never seen so much snow and she grew tired of the constantly gray skies.

"In Maine," she told her boys, "the winter is just as cold and lasts just as long

but at least there are breaks between storms. Then the sky is just perfect and the sun almost seems warm. I long to be back there again."

One day in late January there was a tenseness among the settlers of the community. The wind from the north was bitter and cutting but then, only for a few hours there was a calm and then the winds shifted and came from the east. Many of the old timers scurried about the village and the phrase that was spoken many times that afternoon was, "An east wind bodes no good!" The old timers were right.

That night a storm ripped into the village and literally screamed like demons coming through the shivering trees. In the middle of the night there was a heavy crashing on the cabin door where the Evans family was staying. It was Coughlin, the foreman of the construction of the fort. "Mrs. Evans!," he boomed in his Scottish laden accent. "Mrs. Evans, you must come with me and bring your boys!"

When the family opened the door the blast nearly blew out all of their lanterns. "Why, Mr. Coughlin?", Montgomery asked. "Are we not safe here?"

"No lad," the old man replied. "Son, this is an 'easter' and she's going to rip this village down to the skeleton. You must come with me and join the rest of the community at the fort. The new dining hall there is the very best shelter we have in all the village and we must all stick together to survive her."

They bundled up and, nearly blindly, followed the old settler through the screaming snow. Miraculously, they found their way to the edge of the village where the fort was being erected. Over the next week many were thankful that they had chosen to build the great room and the barracks of the compound before they tackled any other portion of the structure.

It was there, in the confines of that shelter that Montgomery and Charles became increasingly aware of two French Canadian lasses, Emily Fontaine and Marie Levallier. Once the storm passed and families began to return to their own homes Margaret noticed that her sons seemed readily available to assist in any project or portion of the community work where Emily and Marie were involved. It was not long before the widow knew that there'd be spring weddings.

And so it was that in late April an itinerant French Catholic priest performed the ceremony uniting the young couples in the eyes of God and the village of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. "If this had been in Maine or Ohio," Margaret reminded her boys, "You'd have been married properly by a Christian parson!"

Margaret hoped that God could bless these unions in spite of her reservations about the fact that the sweet girls were "Papists". She felt, somehow, that God would understand and wished that Henry would have lived to see the day. "Perhaps," she thought to herself, "perhaps God will now open up the windows of Heaven to bless us for God knows that we've been coming up dry for about six years."

But it was not to be. By mid-May, just as all the snow had receded from the forests and the ice had cleared from the river the village endured a Chippewa raid. All the men of the community were called out to defend the community while the women and children found refuge in the fort again.

The men turned back the raid but there were 17 men of the village lost in the defense of their homes. Montgomery and Charles were both buried by the three widows on the ridge over Superior beside Henry.

When the moon shone over the water that night the three grieving women stared into the fireplace. Finally, Margaret broke the silence and said softly but with great intensity, "Curse this land. Curse Ontario. Curse the dream of gold." And then she fell silent again.

After a long period the mother spoke again. "I will wait no longer. It is time that I leave this land that has taken all from me... all except for you two girls." She stood, looked out of the window toward the south and concluded, "Tomorrow I leave for Ohio."

Young Emily walked up behind Margaret and put her hand on the mother's shoulder. "I'm going with you."

"No, child," Margaret protested. "There's no reason for that. Your home is here and you can build a life here but I've got nothing." She turned to look at Emily squarely and said with finality, "You must remain here for Ohio holds nothing for you."

"But Mother," Emily replied, "I stood before the priest and promised Montgomery that I would marry into his family for better or for worse. I will keep my vow." And then Emily turned to Marie and asked, "What about you?"

Marie began to cry softly and replied, "I'm sorry. My family is here. I feel I must remain."

"I understand," Emily said. "I really do."

Early in the morning the three of them packed the Evan's family belongings onto the old wagon again as the two women prepared for the journey toward summer and what they hoped would be a better life. They went up the hill for

one last viewing of the three graves above the lake and then followed the shoreline to the river-crossing area. Emily and Margaret embraced Marie and then turned their faces to the south as the young girl/widow remained, viewing them as they were taken across the river.

After many days the two women rolled into the town of Bakerville. It was but a matter of moments before the word raced across the town, "Margaret Evans has returned without her men and she's got a Papist with her!" Margaret knew that would be the response of the community but she also knew that there was one man in the region who might treat her with some respect, Judah McCracken, Henry's father's oldest brother and the most prosperous man in the territory.

Judah McCracken lived in a large, well-appointed log cabin on the border of one of his apple orchards. This man held title to many, many sections of land and all of them were tilled and productive. It was Judah McCracken who had purchased the Evans' plot when they pulled up stakes to escape the flooding. He'd encouraged Henry to stick it out as long as he could and promised that if Henry ever returned from Ontario that he'd sell him his land back at a fair price.

Margaret drove the team directly to McCracken's home and stepped down from the wagon. "Margaret, my daughter," Judah said as he emerged from the house when summoned by one of his hired men. "Oh Margaret, I've heard of your terrible misfortune. I'm so very sorry."

"Thank you, I appreciate your kind words. But sir," Margaret continued, "you must know that I've come to make a request of you." She looked at the farmer and continued, "You promised my husband, Henry, that if he ever returned from Ontario that you'd sell him our land back at a fair price."

"That I did," Judah agreed. "That certainly was my intention and I'm a man of my word."

"I know that," Margaret nodded. "But, I must ask for your kindness. I have nothing. I went to Ontario to follow my husband's dream and I've come back empty. The only asset I have in this world is this wagon, a few belongings, my two old horses, and this sweet girl here. God has taken everything else from me." She continued to press her case, "I am not asking for your generosity, I am just asking for time. Would it be possible that we might be allowed to stay in our old homestead and work for you until I am able to either raise the capital to buy back our land or, perhaps, make the journey to Maine where my father may still be alive?"

"Margaret, my child, your misfortune has been tragic," the old man responded. "Of course, you may stay but there's no need for you to return directly to your home. The flooding and the winter were quite harsh and your old homestead certainly would need some weeks of good labor before it would be fitting for two ladies to live in it."

The gentleman turned and called out, "Ira, see to it that Mrs. Evans here and her daughter are put into that cabin near the Martinsville Road... and see to it that they have plenty of fire wood and that the bucket for the well is in good condition!"

"Yes sir," the foreman said. "I'll be right on it if you ladies will follow me..." He jumped up onto his horse and began to head toward the east along the orchard line.

"Thank you so very much," both of the women said through tears. "You can't know what this means to us."

"Never mind that now," McCracken called out to them. "You just get yourselves settled in and I'll see to it that you get what you need to get you started."

When the wagon arrived at the cabin about twenty minutes later they found that it was really quite a bright and cheery little structure. The porch was freshly repaired and there were even pleasant curtains in the windows.

No sooner had they begun to unload the belongings before a small group of men were there to assist in carrying the items into the home. McCracken had arranged for them to leave the orchard to assist the ladies in settling in.

Just as the last items were being deposited in the cabin and placed where Margaret and Emily decided they should go there was a knock on the door. They opened it to find another small wagon with Mrs. Garland, McCracken's house lady, and two more men carrying a large basket and a box. When they opened the lid of the basket the magnificent smell of hot stew and fresh biscuits filled the small room. Soon there was a regular feast spread on the old table for Margaret and Emily and all the working men.

"Won't you join us, Mrs. Garland?", Margaret asked.

"Oh no," the old lady replied, "I'm only here to make sure that you each get enough to eat. Now you make sure that you save some room for some of these pastries or I will be offended!" The group ate to the fill and then dispersed to leave Emily and Margaret to settle in.

In the morning Emily said that she must be early to the orchards as it was only fitting that they begin to "pay for the blessings". Margaret agreed and sent the sweet daughter on her way. The young lady went immediately to the orchard and saw that the men were finishing some of the early pruning and were cutting off the sucker growth from the base of the trees.

Emily found the work hot and tiring but she was glad to be making a contribution for what she'd received. In a matter of hours she found that she was nearly as proficient as the men in clearing the shoots but she also knew that it would take days to build up protective callouses like they had.

Randomly Ira Bergland, the orchard master, would come by to instruct her on her task. He was a bit abrupt but he also knew that Mr. McCracken would not take kindly to anyone being less than gentlemanly to the two women. By the end of the day Emily felt she could hardly stand up straight but she didn't want the hired men to know that she was suffering so badly. Bergland gave her a brief compliment on a day's work well done and then turned quickly to leave.

Emily slowly walked home. She had never hurt so much in all of her life, but she knew that she was keeping her promise to Montgomery.

Within a matter of days Mr. McCracken called Ira Bergland in for a discussion of progress in the orchards. After considering the weather and the needs of irrigation and the potential of the crop Judah McCracken asked, "And how is that young Canadian girl doing?"

"The papist?", Bergland responded. "Oh, I have to give it to her, she's a decent worker, that one. She's willing to work and though I'm not keen of

having a woman on my crew I must admit that I've not lost any time because of her."

"Good then," Mr. McCracken said. "I tell you what, those two have had more than enough bad news for a while. I think we should find some way to be generous. Why don't you let her stay near their cabin and just work that portion of the orchard. It's a good section and it will mean that she doesn't have to travel far to do the work."

"But sir," Bergland interjected with surprise, "that's the most productive section that you have. That's rich bottom land and must be taken care of with special concern. Don't you think that we should give Ben Thacker the rights to work that section? It's not that I want to speak up against these Evans women or anything but after all, Thacker's been with you a long time and he's about the best we have."

"Thacker's a good man, all right," McCracken agreed. "But I just feel that we can help two souls who are long past due a good turn."

"But sir," Bergland protested but the land owner cut him off by lifting his hand and gesturing that he'd heard enough and his mind was made up.

When the summer passed the Ohio nights began to chill. The temperatures were perfect for making delicious, crispy apples. It was a bountiful harvest and the bumper crop was a reason for rejoicing throughout the region. Many citizens were looking forward to the annual fall festival with special anticipation because of the blessings of the harvest. There would be celebration and food and cider squeezings galore.

October 24 was to be the full moon and the village knew that it would provide the perfect backdrop for the annual fall festival at Judah McCracken's barn. The village was astir for days ahead of time and everyone looked forward to the warm community event.

As the evening progressed Jeb Jebson pulled out his old violin and was joined by Matthew Cattling on the accordion. The moon shimmered over the lanterns and decorations as the gratitude and love of the community filled the place with laughter and song and dancing.

After Jebson and Cattling finished a particularly spirited Irish reel Judah McCracken was standing by the cider table, surveying the occasion with satisfaction. "These are good people," he thought to himself, "and I'm a lucky man to live with them." Suddenly his reverie was interrupted by a quaint, French Canadian accent, "Pardon, Mr. McCracken, but may I have this dance?"

Emily stood blushing. She was so thankful for the host's generosity that it overwhelmed her sense of modesty and propriety. In her innocent gratitude she became a bit presumptuous. She did not weigh well the consequences of her actions in the eyes of the community. The young stranger was so lost in her simple and unadulterated thankfulness for what this good man had done that she didn't realize that everyone in the circle heard her.

For a moment Judah McCracken looked at her and then the community that stood in amazement at Emily's forwardness. "Why yes, Child," the old farmer beamed. "I'd be honored," and he offered his arm to lead her to the center of the barn where the space had been cleared so that the community might kick up its heels.

At first Emily was not at all aware of what was happening around her. Ma Evans had encouraged her to step forward with a simple gesture to express their respect and gratitude, but neither of the women really predicted the repercussions of the act. As Emily and Mr. McCracken began to dance and laugh to the tune voices could be heard whispering, "Did you see that? How very forward of her...", "Why, I never...", "Look at that man, he's old enough to be her father and he's acting just like a schoolboy...", "I thought he'd have more sense than to carry on with a papist like that..." "Why, that girl has no shame at all..."

Initially Emily did not notice but Judah McCracken was not at all surprised. He knew this community, he knew their good points and he knew their bad. He loved them, but was not at all naive about how they could be very narrow at times. When Judah McCracken accepted this young Catholic's invitation he knew full well the reverberation it would trigger within these people.

But Judah McCracken also knew that this was a sincere young girl who had a simple heart and only meant well in her invitation. She'd gone through so much and had been so loyal that there wasn't one ounce of this decent man that was going to reject her. He had no reason to, in spite of what the community thought. In that moment of decision Judah McCracken was much too big of a man to let immaturity and bigotry and gossip shape his decision. No amount of pettiness was going to force him to break a bruised reed.

That one dance was enough to give the community fodder to chew on for weeks. "Did you see her?", it was spoken by the mercantile. "Did you see that papist holding up her skirts and kicking up her heels with a man more than twice her age?"

"Oh, I know. And him! What about him?", the respondent would agree. "I never thought I'd see the day when Judah McCracken would make such a fool of himself like that."

Several weeks after the harvest celebration the first snows began to fly across northern Ohio. Emily stood by the fire, and as she looked out of the window she watched the whistling wind swirling the flakes around the naked trees of the orchard behind the cabin. For a few moments she was exceedingly homesick for Ontario. She stood lost in her reverie when the reflection was broken by a knock on the cabin door. Ma Evans went across the small room to open it, finding Judah McCracken standing on the porch. "Come in," she motioned against the chilly breeze that blew through the opening. "Please, come in and warm yourself in our little home here."

"I thank you very kindly," Mr. McCracken said and stepped through the door. He stamped his feet on the simple rug and then opened his heavy outer jacket.

"Please, come in and warm yourself," Emily spoke in her lilting accent.

"Oh, I thank you, my dear but I cannot stay long this day." Ma Evans motioned for him to sit down on the bench by the table and when he had settled Emily brought him a cup of coffee from the pot by the fireplace. The two women sat across from him as he held the cup in both hands, warming them and sipping.

"Margaret, Miss Emily," Mr. McCracken spoke, "I'm not one for long speeches and so I would make this brief, if you don't mind." The ladies looked at each other and then shrugged in agreement. "Margaret, when you brought this young girl to our community my heart went out to the both of you. Here you

were, a woman who, like myself, has seen the prime of life slipping away from you. You'd lost so much. Your husband, Henry, God rest his soul, was a fine man and those were two strapping lads you had..."

"I thank you," Ma Evans interjected, "It's kind of you to say that."

"Yes, well they were. And then you came back here and the only real treasure you had left on earth was this kind and decent girl." Judah nodded toward Emily and continued, "Ladies, I'm not a young man. I've grown weary of cold, long winter nights alone. My Caroline, may God rest her soul, was a fine, fine woman but she was not able to bear children." Mr. McCracken put his cup on the table, still with his hands wrapped around the warmth of it and leaned forward, "I still yearn to hold a son and I'm not getting any younger. I want to leave more of a legacy in this valley than just a well-kept farm where I can be buried. What I'm saying is, Miss Emily, I know I'm not a young man but I'd be indeed honored if you would consent to be my wife."

I know it crosses our modern sensibilities to realize that for the vast majority of world history people had reasons to get married other than limerance and romance. We are so attuned to the concept of romantic love being the majority determinant of marriage and that "the glow" is enough justification for this step, but the truth is that this is a relatively modern construct. For generation upon generation people weighed out their circumstances and picked a partner with whom they could build a life. They looked to living in the long term and knew that solid commitment alone would be enough to provide a foundation for the great essence of life.

Emily Evans saw a good and decent man across the table, a man who would provide security for herself and for Margaret and a man that she could easily

honor and respect. She knew she could grow to love him and that was enough.

Emily looked at her mother-in-law and they both knew that there never would be a day when Emily would not love Montgomery, but even he, God rest his soul, would have understood and approved.

They didn't know it that chilly day, but before the snows of another winter blew down out of Ontario and across Michigan the community was going to be blessed by the sweet cries of Obadiah Fontaine McCracken. On that blustery early-winter day no one could have predicted that within three generations the President of the United States was going to come from the root stock of the McCracken apple orchards of Ohio.

*And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life,
and a nourisher of thine old age:
for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee,
which is better to thee than seven sons,
hath borne him.*

-Ruth 4:15