

THE
Preacher's
LADY

LORI
COPELAND



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Prologue

Berrytop, Wisconsin
1877

*L*isten up, Wisconsin!” The young man inched farther out on the pine’s reaching branches and cupped his hands to his mouth to shout at the top of his lungs. “Bo Garrett is helplessly, don’t-care-who-knows-it in love with Elly Sullivan!”

His words echoed over the snowy meadow. Deer scattered toward the far woods, where the heavy snows of Wisconsin lay on burdened limbs.

Grinning, the young woman climbed to join Bo and shouted louder. “Elly Sullivan is madly, wildly, forever, out-of-her-mind in love with Bo Garrett!”

The wind snatched her words and tossed them through a mist of swirling snow. Bo tipped his head toward the ground, and they climbed down together. He took her hand to walk to the leafless maple that stood atop the rise. He dug deep in his pocket for his knife and carefully etched the initials BG + ES in the trunk. Decades of carved vows covered the ancient bole. The permanence of Bo’s promise warmed Elly.

The young couple couldn’t stay somber for long. They dissolved

into laughter over their heady declarations and fell spread-eagle in the snow to stare at the pressing overcast sky. Even with the threat of another storm, Elly held the moment tightly. To hear Bo's words, spoken with such surety, was sheer bliss. When Bo, this soon-to-be man, turned seventeen, they would get married, they would have beautiful babies, and life would be perfect.

Rolling to his side, Bo playfully ruffled the chestnut curls that sprang from Elly's bonnet, his eyes softening with a rare intensity. "I'm fifteen now, but in one year, nine months, thirteen days and"—he pulled a watch fob from his pocket and squinted—"eight minutes, you will be my wife."

She sat up and Bo helped her to stand. She stroked his wind-chapped cheek, where shoots of a reddish-blond beard sprouted. "Lots of kids get married earlier. Rose and Jack were barely sixteen, and they have a baby."

"That's not the way to do it, Elly. I don't know about you, but I'm not ready for babies yet."

"No." She snuggled closer to his warmth. "Neither am I. But the babies could come later."

Shaking his head, he refused the notion. "I know they could, but I'm not settled enough. I'm still in school and I want to finish my learning. Pa says a man needs an education in order to get ahead these days."

"Not to raise cranberries," she argued. The Garrett and Sullivan families owned two of the largest bogs in these parts, and Pa had barely finished sixth grade when he'd gone to work. Raising cranberries had been a Sullivan legacy for generations. Elly couldn't imagine doing anything else.

If she was patient, Bo would see the wisdom of following in the footsteps of their families. And on the day he turned seventeen, he would marry her, and like everybody around Berrytop, come fall

they'd harvest cranberries. Fat little balls that bounced as high as a tabletop. They also stung like wildfire when thrown with enough velocity. She'd been Bo's target in many a cranberry fight. The memory brought a smile to her face.

She tightened her arms around him, feeling the warmth of him through her coat. If only time passed faster. Two years felt like centuries when all she wanted in life was to be his wife, the mother of his babies, the keeper of his heart.

Gazes lifted to the sky to watch the dizzying dance of falling snow. Winter trudged on endlessly in these parts. Their last chance to be together would be the church social Saturday night, and after that who knew when they'd be able to do little more than wave at each other from their bedroom windows? "Think the weather will hold for Saturday night?" she asked.

He smiled. "Sure hope so. So far it's been right pleasant for January. This little storm isn't going to be much. If we're lucky—"

"Why do you say *lucky*?" She lightly swatted his arm. "You should say *blessed*. The Lord has *blessed* us with decent weather."

"Blessed us?" He threw back his head and hooted, white teeth flashing. "Since when does Elly Sullivan talk about blessings?"

She gave him another punch accompanied by a dour look. Teasing about such things seemed dangerous.

"You know I don't hold with religious talk," he said. "You sound like the preacher's wife." Reverend Ed and Myrtle Richardson (dubbed "Reverend and Mrs. Righteous" by the younger crowd) were always harping on the proper use of words.

Reverend Ed had roared from the pulpit, "There is no such thing as luck! You receive a blessing from the Almighty!" Sweat rolled down his temples, and his face turned fiery red. Often he shouted so loud that windows slammed shut. Old Mr. Vaughn patiently got up, shuffled to the panes, and lifted them back into place.

One day Vaughn got the idea to cut some strong wooden sticks to prop the panels open. From then on there hadn't been anything to deter the Reverend from his pious fury.

Grinning, Elly breathed in the scent of smoke, coffee, and bacon from Bo's coat, putting church out of her mind. She still had two whole days to steel herself for the coming wrath of Reverend Richardson's sermon. "Promise me one thing, Bo Garrett. Promise me you'll *never* be a preacher," she whispered.

Chuckling, he tightened his arms around her. "Do I act like a preacher to you?"

"No, but you make it through Richardson's sermons without running for your life."

"Are you telling me that big, loud man scares you?" He playfully tweaked her nose.

She wasn't amused. "Yes, he scares me. Scares me half to death, Bo. Makes me wonder...If God is so petulant and so out to get me, I wonder why I should even worship Him."

"Now come on. God isn't petulant or out to get anyone. Just because Richardson likes to hear the sound of his own voice doesn't mean God isn't what He claims to be. If Richardson makes Him sound tough, well, I suppose He is if His children disobey, but since He created us I guess He has the right to do what He wants." Pushing his hat back, he fixed his blue eyes on her. "You're serious, aren't you? You're afraid of God?"

"I'm very serious. Pastor terrifies me. I would rather stay home Sundays and not feel so threatened."

His grin faded. "You believe in God, don't you?"

She shook her head. "I'm not sure anymore, but I'd never let Pa hear me say it."

Shaking his head, he pulled her close. "Elly Sullivan. What is the world coming to? I've never heard you doubt God's existence."

"I'm dead serious." She broke the embrace and brushed at the snow accumulating on her shoulders. It felt good to tell Bo her feelings. All her life she'd gone along with the ritual: church on Sunday and Wednesday night, weather permitting. But lately Richardson's sermons had been grating on her; made her doubt her belief. "Who in their right mind would believe in a mystical being that makes people miserable?"

"That isn't God's intention."

She didn't like defending herself against God, but the words spilled out. "How can you say that? All that pounding and screaming and yelling from Reverend Richardson makes me feel like I've spent two hours in the very hell he claims is my ultimate destination."

"Well, some folk have a way of getting riled up about the message." He pulled her collar up and tightened her scarf. "Me, I believe what he preaches. Take this snow, for instance, and the trees—the way they seem to die in the fall only to come back to life in the spring, radiant with new growth. Take the workings of the human body. Who but God could make anything so intricate?" He opened his arms to frame the expanse of sky. "All of this is far beyond man's ability."

She shook her head. Bo had sat through the same sermons she had, Sunday after Sunday, hearing nothing but doom and gloom, certainly very little about blessings. She met his lake-blue eyes for some hint of teasing. There was none.

Struggling to her feet, she stomped to pulse some warmth into her feet. "Do you really believe there is such a God, that there's a special—I don't know, something or someone—who sits on high and watches over us, someone who would give His own flesh to spare our sinful souls?" She snorted her disbelief.

"I do, Elly. I believe every word of the Bible. I still have questions, but the story does make you stop to think."

“Who can think with all that screaming and hollering going on from the pulpit? It makes me want to run and hide in shame.”

He gathered her close and kissed her long and sweet.

“Bo,” she whispered against his lips, “you didn’t agree not to be a preacher.”

Laughing, he kissed her again. “I think that’s a pretty safe wager.”

“Better not let Richardson hear you say *wager*.”

“Right, I’ll only mention blessings when he’s around.” Their lips met and lingered. Soft, loving touches on the neck, at the base of the ears. Snow began to fall in earnest now. He gazed at her. “I love you so much it hurts.”

Nodding, she whispered, “Two years is a long time. Will you promise me one more thing?” she asked.

“Anything you want.”

“Promise to never love another?” She knew asking him for such a pledge was unfair and most highly speculative, even with all their talk of forever love and marriage. What she felt now would never change, but Bo could change.

His gaze fastened to hers. “I will never love anyone but you, Elly Sullivan. I promise.”

“Do you want the same promise from me?”

“Nah.” A smug smile spread across his wind-chapped features. “You’ll wait for me. Who in their right mind would let me go?”

She playfully swatted his shoulder again. “You conceited boor. How do you know someone won’t come along and sweep me off my feet? Gideon Long, Hank Martin, Rex Pierson...? Who knows? I might forget all about you, Mr. Garrett.”

Catching her hands, he clutched them tightly to his chest, where she could feel the steady thrum of his heartbeat. He spoke from a deep place. “This heart beats for you and you alone. You asked if

I believe in God? I believe this much: You and I are meant to be together, here, on this earth. You will be the mother of my children. As long as this heart beats in my chest, it will belong only to you.”

Lifting her face to his, they sealed the promise with an extended kiss.

Nothing in this world would, or ever could, separate them.

Chapter 1

Berrytop, Wisconsin
1884

Elly ran a finger down her shopping list. With her mother nursing Auntie back to health in Minnesota, household duties at the Sullivans' cranberry farm fell to her. She'd already burned more food than she'd prepared for the table, so she had to keep the menus simple but edible. Pa warned her to stick to the basics.

Adele Garrett, her best friend, leaned in, her eyes bright with conspiracy. Such glee had been a stranger to Adele's face. First morning sickness had gripped her, and then the sorrow of her husband, Ike's, untimely passing. Seeing Adele more like herself lowered Elly's guard this morning.

"Guess what?" Adele whispered.

Elly had waited years—what seemed like a lifetime—to see the truth of what she'd dreamed in Adele's face. "Bo's back," Elly said as she tried to reconcile why his return would be more painful than his leaving. She closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. Somehow she would get through this.

Adele crooked a reddish-blondé brow and frowned, obviously disappointed. "You've seen him?"

"No, and I hope I don't have to." Uttering those words to Bo's sister was the most hurtful thing she could have spoken. Adele, with her awful loss and troubles, didn't deserve Elly's bite. But Bo sure did.

Elly reached for her friend's hand. "I'm sorry. I can be so hateful. But you know Bo stopped writing years ago. I heard nothing for all these years—seven years, Adele. How would you feel? For all I knew, he could have been dead." She stopped, swallowed, and dropped Adele's hand. "For all I know he's married and has children." She stepped around Adele and reached for a box of salt. The mere thought of Bo with another woman set her teeth on edge. Would it have *killed* him to write more often?

For years, maybe all of her life, that boy—correction—that *man* had dominated her life. Bo was full-grown now, not the silly love-struck kid who had turned on her like a snake and become a... Her mind chaffed at forming the word.

Preacher.

Bible thumper.

Harp polisher.

Adele shrugged and looked crestfallen. "Sorry. I thought I should warn you."

Elly could not let Adele's tender condition sway her from getting the shopping done and back home, where she could work out her anger on a kneading board. "Consider me properly warned." She slapped the box of salt into her basket. Forewarned was forearmed.

"You don't want to know why he's back?" Adele pressed.

Elly slung a bag of flour into the basket. "Not really." This morning she entertained more worthy thoughts than Bo Garrett. The berries were starting to pink up. That meant harvest wasn't far off. From now until the end of November, she would have nary a thing on her

mind but plain old hard work. Most folks around Wisconsin parts tapped maple syrup, but not the Sullivans or their neighbors across the road, the Garretts. The Sullivans grew cranberries. Acres of dry, sandy bogs surrounded their operations, and right now the marshes were mushrooming with berries.

Adele tugged Elly's sleeve. "You honestly don't want to see him?"

"I seriously do not, Adele. I don't care if I never see him again. Will you hand me that tin of coffee?"

A familiar baritone from the front of the mercantile startled her. "Miss Sullivan? If you could speak up a bit? I don't believe the folks outside caught your disdain for me."

Someday, when I'm old enough, I'm going to marry you, Elly Sullivan.

Heat flooded Elly's cheeks. She swung toward the door to see the speaker. His eyes had taken on the brilliant hue of a summer sky. Right now they twinkled at her mischievously. He still stood a good head taller than she—enough that she had once balanced on tiptoes to meet his lips. Thick, sandy-colored hair touched his collar, and he looked the part of a rogue from the stubble of his light beard. Rogue though he be, he still wore denims and a blue-and-white checked shirt. The years had been overly kind to Bo Garrett.

He was still the best-looking man in Berrytop. The world, actually.

She stiffened with resentment and checked her reaction. She could not allow something as inconsequential as a comely face make her forget how he had shattered her heart. Taken it and slammed it against a rock and then took the heel of his boot and ground it into the dirt like a roach.

Fine, that was overdramatic, but he had.

Plus shamelessly lied to her.

His voice softened to one she had heard in her dreams on endless nights. "Hello, Elly." Their eyes met and her knees turned to tree sap.

Flustered, she whirled back to concentrate on the shelves that now swam before her eyes. He'd *heard* her crude remark. And his cocky grin told her he'd not only heard, but that the insult rolled off like water from a duck's back.

When her gaze focused on the coffee, a sun-bronzed arm reached around her, chose a brand, and dropped the tin into her basket. "Easier on the stomach," he said. He moved on, straightened a tin of baking powder, and walked toward the harness section in the back of the store. Thank goodness he had not chosen a public encounter to scold her for her careless words.

And now she couldn't find her voice. His presence had rendered her speechless, which wasn't easy to do.

When she approached the clerk with her items, she realized Adele had quietly excused herself and left, the coward. Elly was alone to face the man she'd sworn never to speak to again.

But she needn't have worried. Bo lingered in the back of the store, so she hurriedly paid for her purchases and trotted out of the store. Releasing a sigh, she crossed the street and walked the short distance home, glancing over her shoulder to be sure she wasn't followed.

Bo was back. She'd stoked a healthy hatred of the man only to turn to mush at the sight of him. Hating someone wasn't quite as easy as she'd imagined.

A groan escaped when she spotted a young woman trying to wave her down. Rosie Meadows. Not only was her name difficult to say without grinning, the young woman was quickly becoming a pest. Seven years ago she was a darling little girl who liked to tag along, but today she was a fourteen-year-old who was quite certain that Elly lived a fairy-tale existence. Though Bo had been gone all these years, Rosie still expected him to ride back someday and swoop Elly up into his arms. And then the two star-crossed lovers would live happily ever after. Elly had tried to explain a hundred

times that she and Bo were no more, but Rosie wouldn't believe it. Her head was filled with girlish expectations, and like it or not, Elly and Bo's love was the town legend.

Surely, Rosie stated with a sigh of finality, a love like theirs would *never* "wither away on the vine."

Reversing her steps, Ella headed the opposite direction, but she wasn't surprised when the maneuver failed to deter young Rosie. The young girl hurried to catch up. "Have you seen him yet?"

"Seen whom?"

"*Him*. Bo! He's back."

"Really?" Elly picked up her pace.

"Are you serious? Bo's *back*." Rosie reached to halt Elly's steps. "What's wrong with you?"

"Wrong? There's nothing wrong. I need to get home and fix Pa's dinner." Elly gently released the girl's grasp. "Isn't it your dinner time?"

"Who can think about food at a time like this? Love is in the air!"

More like rotten apples. Elly kept her pace.

"Elly Sullivan, I don't know what to think of you. How can you be so calm and collected when the boy you've loved forever has finally come home?" She fell into step and trailed Elly across the street. "Well, I suppose I can understand your reaction. He's returned so suddenly—you'll surely have a chance to catch up at the church social. It's the last of the season, you know. Everyone will be there—simply everyone. Quint has already asked if I'd take a long walk with him—you know, it's so fascinating that you and Bo fell in love at such an early age, and Quint and I—well, I'm fourteen and he's fifteen but the minute we're old enough we're getting married—"

Elly listened as the young woman prattled on, sowing impossible dreams like handfuls of wildflowers. At the tender age of fourteen, everything seemed possible.

Stepping on the back stoop, Elly turned and smiled. "So nice to see you, Rosie. Give my regards to your folks."

Rosie paused, her cheeks red with exertion. "You *really* haven't seen Bo?"

"I really haven't."

The girl's eyes narrowed. "Have you broken up? You and Bo? The two people in this whole wide world who truly love each other?"

"Yes, we have."

She gave a heated stomp. "When?"

"Actually, Rosie, Bo didn't tell me when. Now hurry along. Your mother needs you in the kitchen."

Elly pushed the door open with her back and left Rosie with a mystified expression. How did you tell a young girl with a head full of dreams to not count on any single one coming true?



Her arms ached under the weight of her purchases as Elly entered the kitchen. The old dwelling had housed Sullivans for generations. The one-story rock house meandered, creating crooks and crannies, enlarging its footprint as each generation added on rooms and service porches.

Various pieces of farm equipment sat poised in the yard, waiting to be utilized when the harvest reached full swing. Bogs stretched across ten acres of Sullivan land. The Garretts presently owned the biggest cranberry operation, twenty prime acres. The Sullivans were their closest rivals.

When the screen door slammed behind Elly, her pa, Holt Sullivan, glanced up from reading the newspaper. He'd been scribbling figures in his journal, most likely the prices for bushels of cranberries.

"Elly? Are your pants on fire, girl?"

"No." She stalked across the kitchen floor, carrying the bulky parcels of goods, and headed for the pantry. *Young, foolish girls falling in love, thinking their emotions would last forever, thinking promises made during moonlit walks would actually be fulfilled.* Nothing but silly speculations fed by spirited boys who had no intention of keeping their promises.

"Elly?"

She was in no mood for Pa's teasing. How many times had she reminded him to adjust the spring on the screen door? Honestly, nothing got done around here with Ma gone. Pa would never let a heartbeat skip before doing what Ma asked of him. But now, seasons would change before he got around to mundane chores.

Despite his reticence for mending doors and such, Elly adored the man. He still sported a headful of wavy hair, clearly the contributor of Elly's richly colored locks. Even in his middle years, his back stood erect to support broad shoulders. He'd worked hard to build the farm, and he wore the evidence of his toil in his muscled form.

Pa's gaze dropped to the newspaper. "What's for dinner?"

The prices must be good, if he was thinking ahead to dinner and not remembering the chops she'd burned the day before. "Ham and gravy."

He glanced up, disappointment weighing his features. "But it's Wednesday."

Since she could remember, Ma had made beans and cornbread for dinner Wednesdays. She'd thought Papa would appreciate a change. Evidently, he liked the rigid menu. "Beans and cornbread, then," she said with resignation.

His voice lightened. "Got a letter from Ma today."

Elly glanced up as she poured the flour into a chipped crock. It had been weeks since Ma had left to tend her aunt when a summer

cold had turned into pneumonia. Elly rested her hands on the bundle. "How is Aunt Milly? Will Ma be home soon?"

"Aunt Milly is coming along. Your ma has a way with healing. She says Milly will be up and around in no time." A touch of relief colored his tone.

"That's good." Elly missed Ma and she was sure Pa missed her even more. Since Uncle George passed, Aunt Milly had needed Ma's help often. Her mother had answered the call to go to Minnesota yet again, assuring Elly and her father she would be back before they missed her.

Well, that hadn't happened and harvest was upon them. She had missed Ma since the first day, and no end was in sight. With her around, the old house smelled of warm bread and fresh pies. These days it smelled of neglect and burnt toast, even though Elly was trying her hardest to stay ahead of the workload.

What she missed most of all was Ma's hand smoothing her hair when the two hugged goodnight. Irene stood nearly six feet tall and managed to make a home, bake pies, cakes, and bread, plus working long hours in the bogs right alongside Pa. This was the dream of a happy marriage and motherhood Elly held in her heart.

Theirs was the marriage she should have had with Bo Garrett.

Stoking the dying embers, she slid the iron plate into place and moved the bean pot to the front of the cookstove.

Her father glanced up from his ciphering. "I hear Bo's back. Hope to see the boy in church Sunday."

Bo. Even in her own house she couldn't find peace from that name. After all these years, his name stung like a wasp, but even she couldn't say why. Yes, he'd broken her heart by not coming back. And she loathed the thought of him striking off to see a small part of the world before he settled down. He wouldn't be gone long, he'd said. Just a while.

Seven years?

She didn't know his meaning of *a while*, but hers was entirely different.

It wasn't as though she hadn't tried to forget him and his worthless promises. She'd courted almost every single man in the county, even a couple of widowers, but no one filled the empty hole in her heart. And now he was back. How would she ever face him? Surely he didn't think that she had waited all these long years for him. He was smarter than that.

If she were wise, she would accept Gideon Long's marriage proposal and start a family. She wasn't getting any younger. A couple of children underfoot would erase Bo's memory, but she couldn't marry for children alone. She wanted the kind of wildly exciting love that she and Bo once shared. In truth, she couldn't fathom any man other than Bo to father her babies. And there roosted a perplexing problem.

Elly Sullivan! Where is your respect? Your grit? He's back. You saw him with your own eyes. March over to the Garrett place and ask where he's been all these years. What happened to the declaration that he loved you forever? That he would be back shortly? There was a time you could talk about anything. Nothing was off-limits, and surely not your feelings for each other.

She stiffened her back. She wouldn't ask that man for so much as the time of day, especially when he'd turned into such a low-down deceiver.

She stoked the flame under the bean pot, trying with all of her might to focus on dinner and not Bo Garrett. One hope remained. He would attend to whatever had brought him back to Berrytop and return to wherever he'd been all this time, and do so quickly.

Pa tilted his chair back. "I been hearing the Reverend's gonna preach on hell this week. That's good. Folks need to hear more sermons on the subject."

Elly rolled her eyes. Papa was a good man. Why did he take such delight—practically wringing his hands in pleasure—in hearing that some people were bound to burn in an eternal fire? Yet she couldn't get too upset with him. Pa only echoed what he heard every Sunday in church. Unfortunately, she heard it all too, and took no such delight in anyone's impending doom.

Not a single unsaved soul sat in Pastor Richardson's pews on Sunday mornings. Just once she would like to hear encouraging words, like the stories Ma used to tell at bedtime of a God who suffered in His children's stead. She spoke of a God born into this world to love, not to scare folks. Ma always said you could win more souls with honey than persimmons. The Reverend had Elly so confused about what she did believe and what she didn't believe that she dreaded Sundays.

"Yes, sir." Her father's chair hit the floor with a thud. "Someone needs to set a fire under these folks. They're too lax."

"How so, Pa?" She knew the answer, but she never missed the chance to challenge him.

"Because they go their ways ignoring God, never give Him a moment's thought except when they get in a fix and need Him. *Then* He hears from them all right! Oh Lordy, Lordy, help me! I need your grace now!"

"Which He unfailingly gives," she murmured under her breath. "Now, Pa, what is that Scripture exactly? 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged'—something like that?"

"What I'm sayin' is different, smarty pants. The truth is as plain as the nose on your face. Some folks turn their backs on the good Lord until they need Him, and then if He doesn't answer right away they say that proves He isn't there."

He stood and folded his newspaper. "It so happens your pa sees things with his own eyes. Folks don't make the slightest effort to

attend services when the weather gets bad. They stay home and roast their toes before the fire like heathens.”

“Even old Mrs. Snell?” Elly asked, expecting she’d caught him this time. No one in the county lived more saintly than Mrs. Snell. She’d been attending the sick and taking in orphans and visiting newcomers with baskets of home-baked goodness since long before the Reverend came to town. She even brought Pa’s favorite, cinnamon rolls, when he twisted his ankle two seasons ago. Many a time Edith Snell had shown up on a cold, snowy day to bring the Sullivans something fresh out of the oven.

“Mrs. Snell can surely make it into town if she runs low on sugar. No siree, church attendance drops off if the weather isn’t fittin’. But we’re there. Preacher can always count on us.”

Yes, her family was always in their pew. Through sickness, deplorable weather, and bone-biting weariness, the Sullivans were faithfully in church to hear the wrath of God meted out Sunday after Sunday. It seemed to Elly that no matter how hard she tried to live right, confess her sin, and accept God as her Savior, she balanced on the brink of damnation. Years ago, she had stopped trying to make sense of the fury. She now attended church services because Pa required her to do so, not because she expected any sort of encouragement or revelation. When the preacher yelled, turned red in the face, and spoke of a vengeful deity, she wrapped her hands around her stomach and mentally removed herself from the pew.

The God who tempted her belief wasn’t mean or angry. He was faithful, meant what He said, would dole out punishment when necessary, and didn’t much care for folks who tried to step in and replace Him. Hers was the God Ma had told her about, who had died for her sins, and only by His grace would she ever step one foot in heaven. Not by her works. Not by her attendance in a building. Not by judging dear friends who took a Sunday off. Certainly only

through shed blood would she enter the gates of heaven. Hers was a completely different God from the one the Reverend spat about.

“What this town needs is a good revival.” Pa pounded the table with his fist. “That would set a few of these folks straight and jerk a knot in their tails.”

Elly longed to change the direction of this conversation. “Do you want coffee or tea with dinner?”

“Coffee’s fine. There’s still some in the pot.” He walked to the door and settled his hat on his head. “I’m headin’ over to invite Bo to Sunday services. No doubt he could use a good talking-to for all the heartache he’s caused Milt and Faye.” He paused and turned to look at her. “Have you seen him?”

“Briefly.”

“I guess...” He shook his head. “Guess you and him are history.”

“Correct.”

“Well, he needs to be in church. Think I’ll go over and talk politics with Milt.”

Closing her eyes, Ella whispered, “Don’t let Milt be home.” Every election year was a nightmare. If her father favored a candidate you could bet Milt wouldn’t. And this year’s candidates had started a small war between the men. Thank goodness November was in sight, and nobody would have to listen to the political bluster much longer.

Elly fished a piece of salt pork out of the beans with a ladle and remembered something else. Obviously, Pa hadn’t heard of Bo’s new calling.