

All that was
PROMISED

A NOVEL

VICKIE HALL

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VICKIE HALL

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SPRINGVILLE, UT

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ONE



CARDIFF, GLAMORGAN, WALES
SPRING 1847

IF THERE WAS ONE THING that made Leah Kenyon proud, it was her husband. She stood dutifully beside him, her arm linked through his. A polite smile crossed her oval face as members of his congregation departed the old Methodist church.

“ ’Twas a fine sermon, Reverend Kenyon,” said one of the worshippers who paused on the steps leading from the moss-encrusted north side of the church. His wife and children corralled around the portly man as he shook hands with the reverend.

He gave the man a slight nod. “ ’Tis a pleasure to see you in church after last week’s illness.”

“Aye, but not half as glad as your brother’ll be to have me workin’ again tomorrow,” Niall snorted.

Niall’s wife glanced over her shoulder to ensure the reverend’s brother was not within earshot. “My Niall’s hardly missed a day’s work in near fifteen year,” she rasped beneath her breath. “Yet your brother’s over the top of the dishes if he’s to miss even one day.”

Reverend Kenyon laughed. “Aye, it does sound like Robert—always a bit unreasonable.”

Niall placed his hands on either side of his round belly and smiled. “Aye, he’s little like your father, God rest his soul,” he said with a sigh of reminiscence. “Your father was a gracious and kind man, and you takes

after him, Reverend. But I'm not complainin'," he said, waving his hand from side to side. "Your brother treats me well enough, and I'm thankful to be workin' for Kenyon'n Sons.

Niall's wife nudged him in the side and jabbed her thumb in the direction of his approaching employer. "We're goin' to go then, are we?" she said hurriedly. "The sermon was a fine one, Reverend Kenyon."

Niall reached out to Leah and took her hand. "So good to see you again, Mrs. Kenyon," he said with a pleasant smile. He leaned forward and whispered in her ear. "You married the better brother."

Leah couldn't help but smile. She had a fondness for the man who had known the Kenyon brothers since they were boys. She often found Niall's tales of her husband's childhood charming and delightful, despite Richard's insistence that Niall's stories were great exaggerations. "'Tis a pleasure to see you too, Niall," she said, happy to keep their whispered secret between them.

Niall ushered his family down the steps as Richard gave his wife a fleeting glance. He smiled at her and gave her hand a squeeze before his older brother approached. "Robert," he greeted. "How did you find the sermon today?"

Robert Kenyon looked much like his brother; both men were tall, with black hair and striking dark eyes. Robert peered at Richard a moment before responding. "As sermons go, I suppose it was satisfactory."

Richard felt a bemused smirk come his lips. "Ah, but not filled with the same satisfaction as say, a good business deal brings, isn't that right?"

Robert gave him a sideways glance. He didn't feel much like sparring with his brother today. Richard's decision to take up the ministry instead of joining the family business had always been a bone of contention between them. Robert found only a cursory use for religion and never understood Richard's devotion to God.

Robert's wife stepped nearer her husband. Abigail Kenyon was a pompous English woman. She oozed an air of superiority as she glared down her long, pointed nose at Richard and Leah. "I thought I might mention we have been invited by some of our dearest friends to attend Reverend Trahern's church. So many of his congregation are among the better classes, and it would be of benefit for Robert to mingle amid them." Then she added quickly, "For business purposes, you understand."

Leah feigned a smile and blinked several times. “I can’t think of a better way to choose a church,” she charged snidely. Richard snagged her by the arm as if to restrain the escalating temper he sensed within his wife.

Abigail looked at her sister-in-law with some disdain. “Well, Leah, you must admit, there are a number of benefits to being seen with the right people and mingling with those who can help expand my husband’s business opportunities.”

Richard couldn’t help but feel slighted. Yes, his congregation was made up of people with modest incomes; they were hard-working, common people, but people who found comfort in hearing God’s word. He had dedicated his ministry to those who were most in need, those with humble piety who did their best to live a Christian life. It was a well-known fact that Reverend Trahern catered to the wealthy business class and government officials in the city of Cardiff. His congregation’s offerings kept him well off and comfortable because his sermons did not call out the wicked nor offend the sinner. *Aye, Richard thought sadly, perhaps ’tis where Robert belongs, for his heart is rooted in money and not in the Lord.* “If that is where your heart leads you, then of course, you must go. I will not hold it against you.”

“Well, I’ll rest easy then,” Robert replied with a snide smirk. He took Abigail by the elbow and steered her toward the stairs. “Goodbye, Richard,” he said over his shoulder. “Leah.”

It was only after Robert and Abigail started down the sidewalk that Leah noticed her niece cowering behind the open church door. She looked at the adolescent girl with softened eyes. Leah stretched out her hand toward the girl and smiled. “Amelia,” she called quietly.

The fourteen-year-old girl with her father’s dark hair and her mother’s pale eyes peered from behind the thick wooden door. Without further provocation, she hurried to Leah and threw her arms around her aunt. “I don’t want to leave you and Uncle Richard,” she cried. “I don’t want to go with them.”

Leah smoothed back Amelia’s raven hair and looked into her face with great affection. “Now don’t you worry about that,” she soothed.

Richard lifted Amelia’s chin with the tips of his fingers. “If they attend Reverend Trahern’s church, you must go with them,” he said with tempered

firmness. “You know that, don’t you, Amelia? you know ’tis wicked to disobey your parents.”

Amelia buried her face against Leah’s chest. “But I don’t want to leave you,” she sobbed.

Leah looked at her husband for encouragement. He took hold of Amelia’s shoulders and turned her toward him. Richard smiled softly at her, his dark brown eyes penetrating her heart. “You won’t be leaving us,” he assured her. “We’ll see each other often, just as we always have. The only difference is we’ll not worship together.”

“Aye,” Leah added, wiping Amelia’s tears away with her fingers. “Nothin’ else will change.”

Amelia looked at her aunt and uncle with a dubious frown. She’d heard her parents arguing when they thought she was asleep. She knew they were planning to limit her exposure to her aunt and uncle because they were poor—an embarrassment to the Kenyon family name. She wanted to believe her aunt that nothing would change, but in her heart, Amelia feared the worst.

Leah’s heart ached for her niece. She knew the girl was daily ridiculed by her mother and ignored by her father. Her parent’s loveless marriage spilled over into Amelia’s life in the most unpleasant ways imaginable, and as an only child, she had no one to share in her misery. She spoke little of the conditions at home to Leah and Richard, but the situation was evident to them as they experienced firsthand Robert and Abigail’s treatment of her. They knew how lonely and miserable she was. Amelia became the focus of Leah’s maternal feelings, and she showered her niece with the love and affection that was absent from the girl’s selfish parents. She was the nearest thing Leah had to a child of her own. In five years of marriage, Leah had experienced several miscarriages and two stillbirths, which had left an aching void in her heart.

Amelia heard her name called aloud as her mother marched back to the church steps. The girl’s blood chilled at the sound of her mother’s voice. She lifted the hem of her skirts and padded down the walkway without another word to her aunt and uncle. Leah looked at her husband with that familiar pained expression she so often gave him whenever she witnessed the way Amelia seemed to disappear in the presence of her mother. It was as if the girl became nothing, with no light of her own, falling into the darkness of her mother’s domineering shadow.

Richard put his arm around his wife's shoulder and kissed her temple. It was difficult for him too. His sermons on love and kindness were lost on his brother and sister-in-law. No amount of preaching ever seemed to touch them, and he couldn't help but sometimes feel as though he had failed his niece by failing to change her parents. The church was empty now, and Richard closed the creaky wooden door. Taking the key from his pocket, he locked the church up tight and then took hold of Leah's arm as they started for home.



The afternoon sky darkened as an impending spring storm brewed in the burgeoning clouds overhead. The Kenyon's small stone cottage sat nestled on a small plot of land surrounded by a stacked stone fence built some two centuries earlier. The thickly thatched roof of the little home was in need of replacement, but it was an expense that would have to wait another season.

Leah glanced through the kitchen window's diamond-shaped panes of wavy glass, her paring knife halted between the potato and its brown spotted skin. The air had a damp coolness to it that made her shiver as she studied the blackening horizon. Thoughts of Amelia hovered in her mind as darkly as the approaching storm. She couldn't seem to shake the vision of Amelia cowering behind her mother last Sunday morning and the look of haunting sadness on the young girl's face.

Richard sat at the kitchen table, his shoulders hunched over the sermon he scribbled onto a scrap of paper. Rain began pelting the windows, pinging musically against the panes with sharp resonance. He pulled the candle closer to him as the clouds blotted out the last of the sun, and he muttered something about not being able to see his Bible.

A rapid knock sounded at the door, its urgency sending a chill down Leah's spine. She dropped her knife into the bowl of peelings, wiped her hands on her apron, and opened the door. A deafening rumble of thunder shook the cottage with its powerful force and continued to reverberate across the distant skies until it faded to a muffled groan. She looked down at a young boy, already wet from the pouring rain as he stood in front of her. "Why, Timothy, 'tis rainin' old women and sticks! What are you doin' out?" she asked with concern.

The thin sprig of a boy peered up into her face, his tears mingled with the rain. "Your mam says I should fetch the reverend," he said with a

ragged breath. “Hurry!”

The boy spun about and darted up the cobblestone street, disappearing into the dreary storm. Richard was already at the door, his oilskin coat in hand. He looked at Leah, his face filled with dread. “Mary must be in trouble if your mam has sent for me.”

Leah nodded, a sense of foreboding shadowing her fears. Her mother, a midwife, had delivered hundreds of babies into the world. Gwendolyn Murdock was capable and experienced after practicing her skills for nearly thirty years. Only when her earthly expertise failed her did she call for spiritual assistance. Timothy’s mother was a frail and sickly woman, and Leah swallowed hard against the rising lump in her throat. “I’m comin’ with you,” she said grabbing her cloak.

The pair raced into the storm, oblivious to the pelting, icy rain. They proceeded toward Beacon Street to a length of row houses. The door to the Williamses’ was left ajar. They went inside and dropped their coats beside the door. Young Timothy raced toward Leah and threw his thin arms around her legs, burying his face against her apron.

Owen Williams stood near the fire, his arms hung limply at his sides. His deep-set eyes were hollow and dark with haunting shadows. “Reverend Kenyon,” Owen said scarcely above a whisper. “The baban’s died, and Mary’s failin’ ...”

Richard rested his hand on the man’s shoulder, a silent acknowledgment of his breaking heart. He headed to the back room where Mary and Gwendolyn were sequestered through the process of the birth. Reaching for the doorknob, he turned it slowly in his hand and peered inside. “Gwendolyn?”

The small but sturdy woman motioned for him to enter. Her auburn hair was threaded with glints of silver as she raised the lantern from the nightstand. The look on her face revealed more than any words could say as she walked toward him. “The baban was stillborn,” she whispered to him as he came closer. “Mary’s hemorrhaged so much ... I can’t stop the bleedin’ ...” Gwendolyn’s voice cracked, and she turned away from her son-in-law in an effort to maintain her composure.

Richard went to the bed, where Mary lay motionless, her chest barely rising, her skin pale as moonlight. “Mary,” he said gently, “ ’tis Reverend

Kenyon.” Richard reached out and took hold of Mary’s hand, but she made no effort to clasp it in return. “Can you hear me?”

He waited, the sound of his heartbeat counting off the seconds in his ears. “Mary? Don’t be afraid ... the Lord is with you ...”

Again, the woman remained unresponsive. Her breathing was scarcely noticeable, and then the smallest gasp of air filled her lungs. As it escaped her lips with a tiny breath, she fell silent. Richard felt her wrist for a pulse and slowly placed her lifeless arm across her chest. “God bless you, Mary Williams,” he murmured. “Rest in peace.”

He looked at Gwendolyn, whose face was already stained with tears. Richard draped his arm around her drooping shoulders and squeezed her tightly. “ ’Tis not your fault, Gwendolyn,” he said softly. “You did all you could.”

Gwendolyn wrung her hands. So many joyous births in her years of midwifery all melded together in a blur of happy memories. She could scarcely recall one uneventful delivery from another. But births like this one haunted her thoughts for months and even years. She felt helpless to alter the course of these tragedies, which left her feeling impotent and overwhelmed. “I asks her if she’d stepped over a grave or if she’d heard the shriekin’ o’ the hag o’ the mist,” she said absently, straining to put a reason to the awful tragedy, both events known to cause imminent death.

The hag of the mist, he retorted to himself. As if she even existed, much less had the power to bring about death by merely hearing her voice. And stepping over a grave ... He had neither the desire nor will to correct his mother-in-law during the present circumstance and dismissed the nonsense of the folklore without a second thought. Gwendolyn’s superstitions were common to many of the Welsh, with one foot set firmly in the old ways, still believing in legends and wives’ tales, while the other was planted in the more straightforward belief in Christianity, which was meant to dispel such ancient traditions. “I’ll tell Owen,” he offered with a heavy sigh.

“I hears Leah’s voice when you come in,” Gwendolyn said as she turned toward the bed. “Send her to me so she can help me prepare Mary and the baban for the family.”

Richard nodded and left the bedroom, his feet reluctant to carry him to his destination. As he emerged from the back of the house, he motioned for Leah to join her mother and then turned to face Owen. Richard put his hand

on Owen's narrow shoulder, but the man remained unmoving. "Gwendolyn did all she could for Mary. Your wife was a good woman, but she's in God's hands now," he consoled. "I'm so sorry, Owen."

Owen's face hardened as he glared at the minister, his emotions swelling within him. "And you, Reverend? Did you do all you could, then?"

Richard recognized Owen's harsh accusation as that of a man's grief-stricken heart crying out for understanding. "'Twas God's will."

Owen narrowed his eyes and glowered at Richard. "God's will?" he spat, his slim form becoming agitated with anger. "Why is that? What makes him decide to take my Mary away from me? Why don't he take you or your wife, Reverend? Why my Mary? Why our little baban?"

Richard felt himself grappling for answers he didn't possess. There was no other explanation, no trite words of wisdom he could offer that would satisfy Owen's pain-filled questions. For a moment, he wished the deaths had been caused by Mary's stepping over a grave or having heard a shriek from the hag of the mist. Perhaps there was something understandable about those reasons. But God's will was far less comforting. "Owen," he said softly, "I know 'tis hard to understand ..."

Owen's face reddened as he clenched his fists, the raw emotions now boiling over his ability to contain them. "You're right about that!" he hissed. "I don't understand a God who'd be so cruel, a God who'd take away the only decent thing ..." His voice choked with emotion. "The only woman ... I ever loved ..."

Richard struggled within himself for a way to reach this man. How could he make him understand that God's will was not to be questioned? How could he reconcile this man's loss with the omnipotent mind of God? He couldn't. No matter how he tried, he couldn't find an answer that would suffice. "Owen," he began tenuously, feeling his way through a response, "You mustn't doubt God's wisdom. He alone decides these matters, just as he chooses who will receive salvation."

Owen took a threatening step toward him. "And that's another thing," he hissed, his bony finger pointing at Richard. "When I was sittin' in your pews and listenin' to you preach about salvation comin' only to a few God would choose, I swallows it, thinkin' you're the preacher, you know best. But not no more." He shook his head as if to drive the thoughts from his mind. "There isn't—" he stopped himself and gritted his teeth against a

rising flood of tears, “—there wasn’t a finer Christian woman than my Mary. She gave to everyone ‘round her, took care of her neighbors when they was sick, went to church every Sunday—your church, Reverend Kenyon—and if she isn’t worthy of salvation, then no one is!”

Richard swallowed hard. Suddenly his own words slapped him in the face with a cruel realization. His Calvinist-Methodist doctrine taught predestination, that it was God’s choosing alone who would be saved and who would not, thus the encouragement for all to live righteously. Owen had voiced the doubts that had silently plagued Richard’s own conscience, despite efforts to quell them as diversions from his faith. Yet if only an elect few were to be saved, then what was to become of the rest of mankind? These thoughts tormented him even as he spouted the words from the pulpit. But who was he to question God? How could he doubt in all that he believed, all that he taught to others?

His heart went out to Owen. He saw the suffering in his eyes, the violent struggle within himself to accept his wife’s death. If only he had the words to comfort him, words that would help Owen rise above this tragedy. Richard felt his capacity to comfort this man drain away, leaving him an empty vessel. “Please, Owen, I beg of you. Don’t turn away from God—,” Richard’s words sounded hollow as they echoed in his ears.

“Spare me your sermons, Reverend,” Owen spat bitterly, his palm extended toward Richard. “They’re no use to me now.”

Richard took a step toward Owen, but the man’s posture became even more defensive as he shunned any further efforts to be consoled. Leah exited the bedroom, drawn by the raised sound of Owen’s agitation. She saw Timothy curled up in a ball as he sat in his mother’s rocking chair with her shawl wrapped about him, sobbing against the paisley woolen wrap. She moved beside her husband with a questioning look in her emerald green eyes. “Is everything all right?” she asked glancing back and forth between the two men.

Owen spun on his heel, his eyes lit with fire. “No, Mrs. Kenyon, nothin’ is right!” Owen hollered, his hands clenched into threatening fists. “You’d best take the reverend and his religion and leave my house before ...”

Leah was shocked. She’d never seen Owen so much as swat at a fly and now he was threatening bodily harm to his own minister. “Owen, I can see you’re very upset, and rightfully so, but you don’t mean what you’re sayin’—”

“I means it!” he charged. Owen suddenly bolted for the door and flung it wide, the cold rain splattering against the threshold. “Get out!”

Richard and Leah took up their coats and stepped into the bonechilling storm without looking back as Owen slammed the door behind them. The distance to their cottage was covered in quick, hurried steps accompanied by the silence of their thoughts. Throughout the remainder of the evening, Richard remained sullen, his face buried in the Bible, searching for his own solace, his own redemption for doubting his faith. Leah kept her distance, sensing her husband’s inner pain but not knowing how to help him. As they prepared for bed, she could stand the silence between them no longer.

“Richard,” she said quietly as she turned down the covers. “You’re a good man, a faithful servant of the Lord.” She walked around the bed and stood in front of him. The softened light of the single candle on the nightstand flickered in warm golden hues against his handsome face. Leah reached up and caressed his cheek. “I’m so blessed to be your wife,” she whispered.

Richard placed his hand over hers, brought it to his lips, and kissed her palm. His self-doubt seemed to dissipate with her touch. He tangled his fingers in her auburn hair and pulled her closer to him. “Aye, but you’re beautiful,” he murmured.

Leah found herself lost in his embrace as their lips met. Everything else fell away from their thoughts until there was only the two of them, drowned in one another’s desires. The rain had stopped, and she could hear her heart beating wildly in her chest. How she loved him, and how it pained her to see him brooding over Owen. She prayed she could help him forget.



Richard shoved his arm into the sleeve of his coat and shrugged it over his shoulders until it rested properly across his back. He buttoned a single button in the center of the dark brown overcoat and took his hat into his hands. “I’ll be back in a couple of hours,” he said to Leah as she finished clearing the breakfast dishes from the table.

She paused in her work and wiped her hands in her apron. “Be patient with Owen,” she gently urged. “The sun always comes to the hill.”

Richard crossed the room and kissed her. “Ever an optimist,” he teased.

Leah pushed back a lock of his black hair and gazed into his deep brown eyes. “Aye, that I am.”

He kissed her again and turned to leave. As he opened the door, he was struck by a cold wind that set the last of the morning fog rolling in billowy swirls. The sun was already hard at work clearing the way for a fair but cool day. Richard put on his hat, waved at Leah, and closed the door behind him.

The great city of Cardiff was already busy for market day. Carts, wagons, horses, and people on foot surrounded him, each burdened with their wares for sale in the city. Tinsmiths, coopers, weavers, cheese makers, seamstresses, and all varieties of tradespeople converged on market day. An older man struggled to balance two rolls of his own homespun flannel over his stooped shoulders, while all about him villagers engaged in animated conversations.

Cardiff was nestled in the lower south-east portion of Wales and had grown from a small village of 1,800 souls in 1801 to a small township of 11,400 by 1841. The port city had become a major player in the Industrial Revolution, receiving tons of coal from further north, first by barge through a system of cleverly designed canals, and then by rail as the steam locomotive became the preferred mode of transportation. From Cardiff Bay, the millions of tons of coal were loaded onto ships and sent throughout the world.

He glanced up to his left at Cardiff Castle, rising on a grassy hill and built on a medieval Norman foundation by the first Marquess of Bute, a generous benefactor to the city. The castle was flanked on the west side by a massive octagonal tower that could be seen for some distance. The historically rich setting conjured to his mind the long-held Welsh tradition that the wise and gracious King Arthur held court in Wales with his stunning queen, Guinevere, and the Knights of the Round Table. He imagined the noble Sir Gawain, Sir Bedivere, Sir Cai, and all the brave knights stationed about their king to defend their country and the rights of the weak. Richard shook himself from his fanciful thoughts and turned his sights to Angel Street as he crossed the cobblestone road to visit his brother.

Kenyon & Sons stood as a prosperous business handling fine imported teas. It was started by Richard’s father some forty years previous and had become a well-known establishment. It had even received the honor of providing tea to the royal household. As Richard neared the store, his attention was drawn to a gathering crowd of people across the street. His

interest was piqued as he saw a man standing atop a shipping crate, his arms spread wide and an open book in his hand.

He drew nearer and hovered at the edge of the crowd, watching with curiosity. The man was tall and tanned, as if he spent a great deal of time outdoors. Richard guessed he was near thirty years old. His clothes showed obvious signs of wear but were still tidy and presentable. His English was spoken with an American accent that Richard found amusing, but the look of intensity on the stranger's face was one of unmistakable confidence. "... Then, before the young boy there appeared two distinct personages," the man declared. "God the Father and His son, Jesus Christ, bathed in a white light, hovered above the humble boy."

A murmur rumbled through the crowd, questioning such a statement with astonished gazes. One man yelled at the American before throwing his hands down in disgust as he stormed away from the swarm.

"I testify to you," the American stated emphatically, "that God and Jesus Christ are two separate beings of flesh and bone, just as you and I—"

"Blasphemy!" shouted a man in the crowd. "You speak lies!"

"I speak the truth!" the man insisted. "Mankind has slept in a stupor for centuries. Precious truths have been lost! The gospel of Jesus Christ has been usurped by wicked men. Even well-meaning men are doing their best, but nonetheless, the doctrine has been changed from what it once was."

"Go back to America!" a voice rose from the crowd.

"I testify to you," the man continued undaunted, "that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. That which was lost has been restored, those precious truths are ours again, and the plan of salvation is declared to all nations!"

Richard couldn't help but feel some undecipherable power emanating from the tall American, something that drew him in, something that tempted him to believe what he heard. The man spoke with such confidence and passion that it made Richard want to know more. He pressed his way further into the crowd to ask a question. Without warning, someone hurled a rock toward the man, striking him in the forehead, and causing a nasty gash that began to spurt blood immediately. The man stumbled from the shipping crate but managed to keep himself upright.

"Serves you right!" growled one of the on-lookers.

“He deserves worse’n that!” yelled another as the crowd dispersed, satisfied they had put a stop to the unwelcome preacher.

Several in the crowd laughed and took part in deriding the wounded man as he staggered forward, clasping his bleeding brow. Richard pushed his way toward the assaulted man, reaching for his arm to steady him as he began to waver from the unexpected blow. “Let me help you,” Richard said, taking a handkerchief from his pocket and placing it to the man’s cut.

The stranger weaved a bit more before shaking off the dizziness he felt. “I’m all right,” he said, trying to focus on Richard’s concerned face.

“Here, sit for a minute,” Richard said, steering the man to the upturned crate. Richard picked up the book that had dropped from the man’s hand during the attack and dusted off the cover.

“Thank you for your kindness,” the man said, blotting the bloody wound with the handkerchief.

“Let me take a look at that,” he said, gently pulling the man’s hand from his forehead. “What barbarians,” Richard scoffed, voicing his assessment of the crowd as he inspected the injury. “And they profess to be Christians. What’s your name, friend?”

“Ben Lachlan,” the man said, extending his hand.

Richard took hold of the man’s hand and shook it earnestly. “Richard Kenyon,” he replied. “Your wound needs tending, Mr. Lachlan,” Richard insisted. “I live just a few streets from here. Come with me.”

Ben’s head pounded as he stood at Richard’s urging. “I don’t want to be any trouble to you, Mr. Kenyon,” he mildly protested.

“ ’Tis no trouble,” Richard assured him. He handed Ben his book, and they started back to Richard’s house.

There was something about Ben that Richard couldn’t quite pinpoint. He felt an inexplicable sense of trust in Ben, without cause or even reason. One thing was for certain, Ben Lachlan had stated some outlandish beliefs but some that struck a chord of resonance within Richard. He found himself in an uncomfortable position. Doubting his own faith demanded resolution but so did the validity of the stranger’s claims.

Richard said little as they approached the house. He reached for the latch and pushed open the door. “Leah,” he called. “*Cariad?*¹”

Leah turned from the rear of the house at the sound of her husband’s voice. “Did Owen throw you out again?” she teased as she came toward the

door. She was surprised to see the stranger standing beside Richard. “What’s happened?” she asked with concern, noting the blood-soaked handkerchief above the stranger’s eye.

Richard took Ben by the elbow and led him to a kitchen chair. “This is Ben Lachlan,” he said. “Someone threw a rock.”

Leah instinctively drew Ben’s hand away from the wound and inspected it with a keen eye. “ ’Tis not too serious, Mr. Lachlan,” she commented. “I’ll gather a few things and be right back.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Kenyon,” he replied with an appreciative smile.

Richard took a seat across from Ben at the table. His mind was racing with questions and a curiosity about this man’s discourses. “I want to hear more of your teachings,” he began, trying to rein in his curiosity. Leah returned and Richard reached toward her. “Leah, you must listen to Mr. Lachlan. I know you’ll be interested too.”

“Interested in what?” Leah asked as she set down a basin of water and fresh towels.

“Mr. Lachlan is from America, and he was preaching about the most incredible things—” He stopped himself and looked at Ben. “You tell her,” he encouraged. “Start at the beginning.”

Leah observed her husband’s intense demeanor and thought it odd. What had this stranger said that so intrigued Richard? “Is that how a rock came to meet with your forehead?” she asked with a wry grin. “Was it your preachin’ that got you into trouble?”

Ben couldn’t help but smile. “It was indeed, Mrs. Kenyon.”

Leah dipped a towel into the basin of water and wrung it out. She carefully blotted away the coagulating blood surrounding the cut. “Well, I’ve no rocks in my pocket. Speak freely.”

Ben liked Mrs. Kenyon, and Richard too, for that matter. As he revealed the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, Richard listened with interest, stopping Ben on particular points that didn’t fit well with his own beliefs. The men carried on for several minutes as Leah cleaned Ben’s injury and offered him a clean cotton cloth to hold over the throbbing site. She listened quietly as she cleared away her supplies, her eyes flicking between Richard’s concentrated expression and Ben’s glowing appearance. She watched the intensity in Richard’s eyes as Ben’s amazing claims came to light, one by one. It frightened her to see Richard so open to Ben’s outlandish tales. It

called into question everything Richard had ever preached to his congregation, everything he'd ever believed. Ben related tales of angels and golden plates, of prophets and temples. It sounded more like some story from the Old Testament than a currentday event. Leah was dubious and skeptical of the whole exchange.

The minutes grew into hours, and Leah sat quietly in the parlor sewing as she listened to the men's discussion. As it neared suppertime, she went to the kitchen to begin preparing their meal. She decided on simple fare—*crempog*, a Welsh pancake smothered in butter. She didn't interrupt them as they continued, still in their deep conversation. Only when she presented each of them a plate of food did they stop long enough to take notice.

The pendulum wall clock, a wedding gift from Leah's mother, chimed nine times. Leah set her sewing aside, her eyes tired from straining to see by the dim light of the candle. She walked to the kitchen table and for the first time broke into the men's discussion. "Begging your pardon," she interrupted. "Could I offer you some tea before I retire?"

Ben suddenly blanched with the realization of the time and then quickly blushed with embarrassment as he came to his feet. "Oh, Mrs. Kenyon, please forgive me. I've monopolized your home far too long. How very inconsiderate of me."

Leah glanced at Richard as if to place a portion of the blame on him. "Not at all, Mr. Lachlan," she said. "I've been listenin' with great interest to your unusual beliefs and've been most entertained by them."

Richard stood beside his wife and placed his arm around her shoulder. "I guess time just got away from us." He grinned sheepishly. He reached for Ben's hand. "Will you come back tomorrow?"

Ben smiled and shook Richard's hand. "Certainly," he replied. "I'll bring you a copy of the Book of Mormon—it's just two shillings. Much as I'd like to give them away, we simply don't have the funds to do so."

"Aye, I'd be very happy to buy a copy from you," he agreed eagerly.

Ben extended his hand to Leah. "Thank you for your kindness and for the lovely meal, Mrs. Kenyon. You have been a most generous hostess, and I promise not to take all of your husband's time tomorrow." Leah managed a smile. She liked Mr. Lachlan, despite his strange religion. "I'll hold you to that."

Richard closed the door after Ben and faced his wife. His eyes gleamed with excitement. “How remarkable,” he breathed. “Isn’t it amazing?”

Leah studied her husband for a moment and then frowned. “Don’t tell me you believed him?”

He seemed stunned by her question. Most of what Ben had taught him appeared to make sense. There was a resonance to it he found difficult to deny. He felt crestfallen as he peered into Leah’s doubting eyes. “I do believe him. Don’t you see it? ‘Tis as though I’ve been lifted from my doubts. I see now how corrupted man’s religion has become.”

“Man’s religion,” she countered. “I thought you preached God’s religion, Richard. I thought you were a minister of God’s truth, not man’s.

He took a firm hold of her arms. “I’ve been wrong, Leah. Christ’s church has been corrupted by man. So many things make sense to me now.”

Leah struggled with her feelings. Her husband was a minister, a man who had dedicated his life to teaching the word of God through the enlightened inspiration of Calvin and Wesley. He had worked hard to shepherd his small congregation of followers, despite their meager offerings being scarcely enough to sustain them. It was all he knew, all he had ever wanted of life: to teach and to serve others. How could he jeopardize that future by believing in the incredible claims of a complete stranger?

Her face grew sullen. “It makes no sense to me, Richard. I listened to every word Mr. Lachlan had to say and found no truth in it. Don’t let yourself be deceived by his lies.”

Richard’s heart plummeted into the pit of his stomach. How had he and his wife both heard the same words and the testimony of Ben’s convictions and have come to such opposing viewpoints? How was it possible for him to feel such truth and she such deception? He couldn’t deny what he felt, couldn’t believe what he’d heard were lies, he just couldn’t. It touched him too deeply, resonated too clearly in his soul that what he had heard was absolute truth.

Leah put out the candle on the kitchen table and took up the candlestick beside her chair. “Are you comin’ to bed?”

Richard nodded. He couldn’t bring himself to question her feelings. Instead he felt impressed to pray for her. He turned and followed her silently into the bedroom and closed the door.

1 Welsh for “My love” or “Dear one”

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