

Rebecca's Hope

By

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All of the characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is purely coincidental.

He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Dedication

To my very own Pastor Nelson, my best friend, love of my life and live in biblical scholar. And to my friends and family who have both inspired and encouraged me, I am immensely grateful for your love and support.

Chapter 1

Dear Papa,

The doctor said I could take the cotton out of my left ear now. But it still sounds like there is something in it...

Rebecca raised her heavy tray above her head to maneuver to the next customer in the crowded diner normally filled with locals. Inhaling the fresh scent of coffee appreciatively, her eyes swept across the room. Rough-sawn plank walls were adorned with horseshoes. A pot belly stove graced the far end. Every bench seat was filled at the large wooden tables. Seemingly overnight, the atmosphere changed from a quiet small settlement to a railroad town, filled with men who waited to assemble their cattle for shipping while others converged in hopes of meeting with the delayed supply trains.

Her stomach growled as she made her way to the next table. A familiar voice called out, “Rebecca, what in the world did you let them do to our town?”

Rebecca waived a greeting at her friend, Jonas Weber, and his granddaughter. As she approached their table, Jonas’s kind blue eyes crinkled and he smiled at her. He was a handsome man in his late fifties, with dark hair sprinkled with gray. He wore a modest suit with tailored trousers; a sack coat buttoned only at the top to show his vest and watch chain at their best advantage.

Hannah, although small for her age, was an adorable child with long brown hair worn down under a wide-brimmed hat. Rebecca admired the fine details on her outfit. Today, she wore a plaid dress with a full skirt and three rows of blue ribbon trim at the hem.

“Oh Mr. Weber, I am so happy to see you both. How are y’all doing?”

“I thought we might starve before you got here.” Jonas’s ready smile appeared.

“I know the feeling.” Can I bring you both your usual? “

“Yes, and one additional order as well. We are killing some time until my daughter gets here. So, there is no rush.”

“Okay, I will let the cook know and then bring you some coffee, while you wait.”

While Rebecca hurried to fill orders, she fondly recalled meeting Mr. Weber and Hannah years ago when Dr. Benton introduced them. She offered encouragement to the family, along with advice on how she coped with similar symptoms from asthma. Rebecca rushed toward the kitchen. Sidetracked by her thoughts, she walked straight into the chest of a tall, sturdy cowboy. Strong arms reached out to steady her. Her eyes traveled from a button on his shirt to the bluest eyes she’d ever seen.

She flushed as she stared into his face that seemed to radiate good humor. “I am so sorry.”

“Not a problem, Miss. I am afraid it was my fault. I was waiting here, hoping for a chance to speak with you.”

Rebecca stared at the man who was at least a foot taller than she, with tan skin, light brown hair streaked with yellow from the sun, and the most perfect smile. “Certainly sir, is something wrong with your order?”

“No, nothing like that. I have been watching for an opportunity all week to speak with you. I know it must seem unsettling for a stranger to want to talk with you privately. Even so, I would find it an honor if you would. We could meet later, wherever you think best.”

Rebecca swallowed, casting a quick glance toward the kitchen. Seeing her employer in deep conversation, she seized the moment to satisfy her curiosity. She gazed into the face of this giant cowboy who quickly swept his hat off and placed it over his heart.

Swallowing hard, Rebecca’s voice squeaked, “Meet?”

“Yes, ma’am.” I know this is unorthodox, but like I said, I’ve been eating here every day this week. Not only are you about the prettiest thing I have ever seen. You are hardworking and kind. As a matter of fact, I haven’t heard you complain once. If you don’t mind me saying so ma’am, there seems to be a lot here to complain about.”

Rebecca blushed at his compliments, captivated by his boldness and polite manner.

“Although everyone is grateful for the additional business. I believe the short supplies along with the high prices are causing some folks to be what one might call, intolerant. Hopefully, the supply train will come soon, and tempers will settle back to normal.”

He quickly glanced back at the dining area filled with mostly loud and dusty cowboys and gave her a wide grin as though she had told an excellent joke. “I suppose you know best about those “intolerant” customers of yours. Let me say this; if you were my girl, I would marry you in a minute. I wouldn’t want you to work in a place like this, unprotected. I don’t mean to imply this is a bad place, mind you. I mean no disrespect, but I’ve noticed quite a few folks coming and going, some good, but a lot not-so-good. I would be concerned for your wellbeing.”

Rebecca studied the man who began to nervously rub the brim of his hat. She shifted her weight, unsure of his intentions. Thinking it best to make an excuse and return to work, her thoughts were interrupted before she could speak.

“You see that is what I wanted to talk to you about. I would like to court you, ask permission to court you. I wondered if there was someone to ask? That is if you would agree?”

Swallowing hard she stammered, “Thank you, Mr.— I am sorry I don’t even know your name.”

Squaring his shoulders, he continued, “Jonathan, Jonathan Pierce. I assure you my intentions are honorable. I am a God-fearing property owner. My family and I own a ranch about fifty miles west of here.”

“Thank you, Mr. Pierce. I am honored you would ask to speak with me, especially after such a brief acquaintance.”

“Not at all, ma’am. You would make me a happy man if you would agree.”

Rebecca shook her head. She’d become immune to the almost daily marriage proposals offered to her while working at the diner, yet she never took one seriously. Due to a shortage of unmarried women in this area, most of the eligible age or sometimes not-so-eligible didn’t stay single long. Most, but not her. The one man she wanted to marry was dragging his feet. Rebecca stared into the eyes of the handsome cowboy then blushed when she realized he awaited a response. “I appreciate your offer Mr. Pierce, but I have a beau.”

Once again, he gave her a playful grin, displaying dimples on both sides of his mouth. “Might have known. You were too perfect not to be already taken.”

Rebecca felt her face redden. *What in the world is wrong with me, reacting like this to a stranger?* “Thank you, Mr. Pierce, although far from perfect, I am flattered.”

Not wavering his steady gaze, he adjusted his hat back on his head. “I plan on being here for the next week or two waiting to ship my cattle. If anything happens, or should you change your mind, I’d be honored if you would let me know.”

Really, the man is adorable, Rebecca thought as she hurried to fill orders and clear tables. Once the rush hour was over, Rebecca placed the closed sign on the door and returned the last of the dishes to the kitchen.

Mrs. Potts approached the work table, with a grin, then elbowed Rebecca good-naturedly. “I was about ready to send out a search party for you. I noticed the tall, good-looking fellow singled you out. What did he want?”

Mrs. Potts possessed an uncanny way of keeping up with all the comings and goings of everyone in the diner, including the ability to listen to different conversations going on at the same time.

Without looking from her work, Rebecca answered, “He wanted to court me.”

Mrs. Potts put her hand to her face, dropping her jaw in mock surprise. “Now don’t that beat all.” Patting Rebecca’s hand, she continued. “In all seriousness, as far as appearance goes, you could do a lot worse. From the make of his boots and his hat I would say he could take care of you quite nicely.”

I can’t believe she didn’t mention his smile. Rebecca laughed despite her frustration with another effort of matchmaking from her employer. “You would honestly make a decision based on what you see, and what he is wearing? His hat and boots? From what I remember my father exhibited fine taste in boots. You see where that landed me.”

Scuffing a chair to the work table, Mrs. Potts patted Rebecca’s hand. “When you have been in business as long as I have, you get a certain feeling about people. Appearance is one thing, and behavior is another. Not only is he handsome but he is respectful and polite. He isn’t like some of these men who try to grab you. I also noticed the men he is with are well mannered.”

Stopping her work for a moment, Rebecca stared into her employer’s eyes and grinned. “Mrs. Potts, do you think if I possessed two good ears I could keep up with things the same as you?”

Her employer wiped her hands on her apron and wrinkled her nose, ignoring Rebecca’s comment. “I expect he did what so many of these fellows want to but can’t find the backbone to try. I give him credit for attempting. He did say court, right? That’s what courting is, getting to know one another. Besides, I agree with him; things are getting a little too rough here for my liking. Yes, I believe a body could do a lot worse.”

Rebecca sighed in frustration, though she felt certain Mrs. Potts meant well. “Why do you suppose a man I have never set eyes on until last week, would intentionally seek me out, while the one person I would like to show me that kind of attention seems disinterested? I wish things were different between Sam and me. However, the past few years have scared him, what with the bad weather and all. He wants to have some money set aside before we set a date.”

“If you ask me, Sam seems to be getting along fine. He has a nice home, a profitable business, food to eat. Those two girls of his need a mother, and honestly, I don’t like the way he is holding you off. Speaking of such, you won’t even have a roof over your head soon. Have you found another place to stay?”

Rebecca pressed her hand to her chest and took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly. *I’ve all but made myself sick with worry about the possibility of being homeless.* She plastered a smile on her face in order not to worry her employer and friend. “No, nothing permanent. Doc and his wife have offered me the use of their extra room. Mrs. Doc said she could use the company. That gives me a few more days to try and work something out.”

Leaning in, her face filled with concern, Mrs. Potts pressed further, “Have you considered staying with your friends, Molly and Adam? At least until things settle down a little in town.”

“I don’t want them troubling themselves about my problems. They have plenty to worry about already, especially since they lost so much during the last blizzard. Adam is so protective of me, and since he is Sam’s older brother, I know it’s caused a strain on their relationship and put him in a position where he feels like he needs to choose sides. Not to mention, I don’t want to add another mouth to feed at their table.”

“Pshaw, no more than you eat, I don’t think they would mind. Especially now Molly is in the family way. You could be a big help. What about the lawyer friend of Horace? Have you thought any more about getting his help to go after whatever inheritance your Ma left for you?”

Glancing at the work table, Rebecca stared unseeingly at the stack of dishes. Papa Horace may not have been her actual parent, but he’d loved her like one. He encouraged her to write frequently to her father, sharing with him each academic achievement, her apprenticeship, and every other accomplishment. His death and the discovery the letters written to her father were returned unopened delivered a double tragedy.

A noise startled Rebecca. She realized Mrs. Potts waited for an answer. “Since there was never any money sent to Papa Horace to help with doctor bills, much less to help raise me, I don’t know if there, is actually an inheritance to be had.” *What does money matter when compared to the loss of Papa Horace?*

With a wave of her hand, Mrs. Potts scoffed. I don’t mean to pressure you honey, but I’m worried about the way everything is going in town. Things are getting a little too rambunctious for a young single miss like you, to my way of thinking.”

Looking around the kitchen with a certain amount of pride, Mrs. Potts’ mouth tightened, and her shoulders dropped. “The extra work caused from the new business in town has put a strain on all of us. Our stocks are running low, so I am going to have to cut back on our hours at the diner until the supply train gets here.”

Rebecca shuddered. Her budget was already stretched thin. *I have been praying for wisdom to know what to do. If Mrs. Potts is about to reduce my hours, I am out of time.* “When do you plan on starting the new hours?”

“I am sorry to spring this on you like this, but honestly Rebecca, based on our supplies, we should start tomorrow.”

Lord, I sure wasn't expecting this. Tears sprang to her eyes. Rebecca blinked rapidly and looked away, so her employer wouldn't see discouragement on her face. "Mrs. Potts, you have always been good to me, and I don't want to give you cause for concern. I do have another option although I have been hesitant about accepting the invitation. I recently became reacquainted through correspondence with my Mother's cousin, and she invited me for an extended visit. I have been hesitant to take her up on her offer since we have never met. But with my situation in losing my room at the boarding house, this might be the push I need to go ahead."

Mrs. Potts put her wash towel aside, turned and patted Rebecca's hand again. "These are the kinfolk your Papa Horace said you could trust, right?"

Rebecca took a slow, deep breath as she tried to fight the all too familiar feeling of the tightening of her chest. Lord, please don't let me be getting sick on top of everything else, she silently prayed. "What you say is true. The idea makes me feel anxious. You are right though. I will consider more seriously accepting the invitation. In the meantime, I will mention it to Lois. Maybe business has picked up at her dress shop."