Summary

AU. 1930s. Shelagh Mannion has left the Order of Saint Raymond Nonnatus and has answered an advertisement for the Frontier Nursing Service in America. She will provide nursing and midwifery care in the rural mountains of Eastern Kentucky under a two-year contract. In Kentucky she will meet new friends and face new challenges all while getting to know the local doctor, a widower, and his small son...

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
The sun was beginning to rise, pale light showing through the white curtain at the window.

Shelagh Mannion remained in bed, leaning back against the wall. She watched the gray outlines of the unfamiliar room as they brightened into actual color with the sun’s light. Last evening she had only given the room a cursory look, ascertaining the cleanliness of the establishment. She had never before been in a boarding house, and feared the worst, even as the kindly landlady, Mrs. Taylor, had showed her to the room. So far the fears had been for naught, as the room was well in order, almost as neat and as spare as the cell Shelagh had left behind at Nonnatus House.

Shelagh’s heart skipped a beat at the thought of the home she had left. For so long she had been focused on the religious life and now that focus was gone. She was no longer bound to the rules and the order that Nonnatus had brought to her. It shamed her that she felt some relief to be free of the strict rules. It was strangely liberating to walk into the world of man, to wear her hair free, and to choose her own way in life. The larger part of her worried incessantly that she had made the wrong choice, that she had not listened to God’s Will, but rather to her own desire.

Ten years ago the only things Shelagh Mannion had wanted in life were to be a nurse and to be a nun. Now the calling to nursing was as strong as it had ever been and so too was her faith in God. Yet she no longer felt a religious vocation. Sometimes it seemed as if the two were conflated: her religion and nursing, as if she believed she could not have one without the other. And now she had neither, having given up her position as midwife in her exit of Nonnatus.

With a sigh, she turned to the clock on the table next to the bed. It read half past five. Mrs. Taylor had assured her that breakfast would be served at six, ‘on the dot, dear’.

Gathering her courage, Shelagh left the bed. She stood before the small mirror above the washbasin. Pouring water from the pitcher into the bowl, she dabbed a flannel into the water, raising it to her face. She narrowed her eyes to see more clearly in the mirror. A memory of standing in front of a mirror in the convent came to her then, and her stomach clenched. Have I doubted you, Lord? Shelagh closed her eyes and scrubbed at her face. Slightly refreshed, she donned her glasses and dressed, moving toward the window to look out into the street.

London was beginning to awaken, and the street was already filling with people headed out to begin their days, heading in directions known only to them. Shelagh watched as a woman exited the flat across from the boarding house, and set off down the road, sure in her step. For Shelagh the day stretched out, interminable. She was no longer on call, and had no offices to keep. For Shelagh the day stretched out, interminable. She was no longer on call, and had no offices to keep. Nonnatus House was in her past, and she must now look to her future. The only work she had was in making her way in this new and unfamiliar life. The task suddenly seemed daunting, and she almost
wished to go back to the convent and into the familiar. Attempting to squash the fear she turned away from the window and knelt beside the bed. Folding her hands she searched her mind for a prayer, but found only a question:  What next, Lord?

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After breakfast Shelagh settled into the parlour with a few of the other boarders. Mrs. Taylor kept a small library of papers and books on the desk by the window, and encouraged the girls to use what items they needed. Shelagh paged idly through a magazine, noting the classifieds. She would have to go to the shops and find *Midwives Chronicle and Nursing Notes* to look for job openings. Her nursing and midwifery skills were top-notch, and would be valuable in any setting. She had only to find the setting.

“Would you like to switch?”

Shelagh looked at the young woman next to her, holding a folded newspaper. She looked down at the magazine she held, realizing she hadn’t really been reading it. “Oh, of course!” She closed the pages and handed them over, smiling politely. The girl nodded in response and opened the magazine, while Shelagh looked down at the newspaper. She skimmed a few articles before turning to peruse the classifieds, wondering if any nursing positions would be listed. Her fingers itched for a fountain pen as she found a few possibilities, and she wondered if Mrs. Taylor would allow her to take the paper to her room to copy the interesting adverts into her diary.

Running a finger down the page she stopped at the next nursing ad, taken in by its use of bold lettering.

**ATTENTION! NURSE GRADUATES**

*With a sense of Adventure!*

*Your own horse*

*Your own dog*

*and a thousand miles of Kentucky Mountains to serve*

*Join my Nurses Brigade and help save children's lives*

*Write to M. Breckinridge, Hyden Kentucky USA*

It was certainly an interesting advertisement in comparison to the others. S he vaguely
remembered hearing of a Mary Breckinridge, an American nurse who had trained in England to become a nurse-midwife. Shelagh looked to the print again. Adventure, horses, dogs, saving children’s lives...it was quite something out of a serial. Shelagh looked up from the paper for a moment, and tried to imagine what the ad promised. She found that she couldn’t picture it, or herself in it. Her life so far had been comprised of order, obedience, structure. Adventure had never been something she had been attracted to. Especially not adventure an ocean away. She tried to picture America and where Kentucky might be, and found that she was unsure. She stood and walked to the desk, looking through the materials there for an atlas.

“Can I help you to find anything, dear?” Mrs. Taylor smiled at Shelagh, reaching out to neaten a stack of newspapers.

“Oh.” Shelagh looked down at the advertisements in her hand. She held the paper up for Mrs. Taylor to see. “Might I take this back to my room? To copy the adverts of interest?”

“So long as you bring it back for the others to enjoy, too.” Mrs. Taylor nodded toward the paper. “Did you find anything of note?”

Shelagh smiled faintly, unsure of speaking so freely to the landlady. “Perhaps a few opportunities. I was hoping to find an atlas, which is why I was looking so intently through the items here on the desk. I can always try the library, of course.”

“Oh, there’s no need for that. My Jas had quite a few reference books for his studies. I’ll pop and see if there was an atlas. But whatever are you looking for? I’m sure that I can tell you about any road in the district, dear.”

Looking down to hide a smile, Shelagh held the advertisements up again. “I know my way around fairly well, but this ad is a wee bit different, Mrs. Taylor. It’s in America.”

Mrs. Taylor’s eyebrows rose. “So far away!” She took the ad and read it. “Riding on horseback through the country, a dog at your side? Very romantic.”

Shelagh shifted uncomfortably. “It would be a …. Change.”

Once back in her room, Shelagh copied the advertisement, comparing her copy with the newsprint to ensure its accuracy. She thumbed through the atlas until she found the world maps, and eyed the strange shapes of the American states until she found Kentucky. The vague description of the south-eastern part of the county gave her little information to go on, yet she found herself tracing the strange ridge at the top of the state with her finger. A river, she thought, unable to image anyone drawing a line of demarcation that was so completely jagged.

She looked again at the ad, and thought of what Mrs. Taylor had said, of the romantic notions of horse-riding and saving children. Shelagh had little idea of America, let alone of this mountainous area in need of nurses. ATTENTION NURSE GRADUATES With a Sense of Adventure ….

Shelagh read the words again and again. She wasn’t sure that she was the adventurous type, but being needed and providing care, those were things she was familiar with. What a change it would be, to leave everything behind, to try something new.

Shelagh bowed her head and began to pray. Some time later, when she raised her head, she took a crisp sheet of paper and began to write:

7 October 1934

M. Breckinridge

Hyden, Kentucky USA

Dear Madam,

I am writing to inquire as to your Nurses Brigade.…

Chapter End Notes

The Frontier Nursing Service was a midwifery/nursing program that was started in Kentucky by Mary Breckinridge in 1925. Though born into wealth in Tennessee in 1881, her family had Kentucky ties. The Breckinridge family was prominent in politics and in public works. By 1920, Mrs. Breckinridge had a degree in nursing and had married twice. She had two children with her second husband, a daughter named Polly, who died shortly after a premature birth, and a son named Clifford, known as Breckie. She doted on her son and was devastated by his death at age 4. She traveled overseas
to nurse in France. While there, she learned of the British nurse-midwife model and received training at the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies. Taking her new training, along with ideas that she had witnessed to work for patient care in France, she created the Frontier Nursing Service to provide nursing and midwifery care to mothers and children in need. She chose to base her program in Leslie County, Hyden, Kentucky due to its remoteness, extreme poverty, and need. The area was desperately poor and cut off from the rest of the state due to the Appalachian Mountains. In the beginning, the FNS ran from Mary’s family monies and donations from wealthy friends and colleagues. She then began to fundraise and to publish a journal to provide funds for the service. British midwives were employed to ride on horseback into the mountains to provide midwifery services, nursing care, and medications. A hospital was built in Hyden as well as nine outpost health clinics to serve people where they lived. The service was a success, leading to a decrease in maternal and infant mortality, and in creating a healthier population, specifically in terms of deworming the region. In 1939, as many of the British nurse-midwives went back to England to help families or with the war effort, Mrs. Breckinridge founded the Frontier School of Graduate Midwifery. This story weaves Turnadette into this actual historical period of Kentucky history. I hope you enjoy.
Love of the Mountains

In closing, I can only say, my dear, good friend, that I know your training and courage will serve you well in your undertaking. Please write us of your new life. Until such time, we will continue to pray for your well-being.

May God Bless You, Sr. Julienne

March 1935

The sun was shining, but the grass was still damp with dew. It had grown chilly overnight and Shelagh pulled her cloak tighter about her shoulders as the horse picked her way along the trail. She was a smart horse, given into her care as she knew the trails and was a smaller horse, ideal for one of petite stature. Her given name was Bailey, but everyone referred to her as Mrs. B, though the nickname’s origins seemed unclear to all of the nurses and couriers. Shelagh enjoyed riding with Mrs. B, though the horse-riding of her youth seemed inadequate in the face of the narrow, dangerous trails she now climbed daily. Mrs. Breckinridge had insisted that all new nurses in the Frontier Nursing Service employ be retrained in riding, and for that Shelagh was glad. The month of lessons had given her time to acclimate to her new life, so similar and yet so different to what had come before.

The two-year contract she had signed had seemed daunting and interminable as the ink dried on the paper, yet, a month in Kentucky had gone by in a flash. Learning to ride in the mountainous area was exhausting on its own, but learning trails, meeting the people, deciphering their accents, and stomaching the food was as wearing as it was exhilarating. Every waking hour was devoted to her calling as a nurse and that was a constant she clung to. The outer trappings had changed, but she was still a nurse, with purpose and a province to care for those unwell and unborn. Yet as she rode out on her horse, in her trousers, and smart cap, she thought that perhaps her previous Sisters and patients would never recognize her. Too much had changed.

She wasn’t used to the trousers. They afforded freedom of movement and yet she could hardly stop expecting to wake in the morning and dress in her habit and underskirts. A dress would be wholly impractical on horseback and so trousers were the basis of the uniform of a Frontier Nurse. Shelagh looked ruefully down at her legs, thinking of the chafed skin of her inner thighs. The cream the other nurses offered helped with the sting of roughening skin, but riding a horse straight up a mountain was entirely different than riding a bicycle over the cobblestones of Poplar.

The children of Hyden liked to ask about England and bicycles, eyes widening to learn of a large city so far away. It helped a bit with the homesickness to talk of London and also Aberdeen, but it almost seemed another life that she had lived in her cloistered community. The restlessness she suffered there had brought her to America, and she tried to keep her mind in the present.
Just now she noticed a young woman standing outside of a small cabin, hand to her back. Shelagh reigned Mrs. B and stopped, smiling at her first patient of the day. “Good morning,” she said, holding to the reins and dismounting the horse. “Nurse calling.”

The quiet woman smiled her assent and waited while Shelagh tied the horse in the shade. She walked into the cabin, standing in the doorway. “How have you been this week, Mrs. Polly?” Shelagh mounted the stone step at the front of the house.

“Tolerable,” she said, easing down onto the quilt laid out over her bed. “I seen Hiram out on his day and just been setting outside, catching the breeze.”

Shelagh smiled, placing her bag on the table and opening it. “How is Mr. Polly? Anxious for your new arrival?”

“Said he’d be glad enough for the least ’un to get here already. Said sleeping next to me is like sleeping next to three people and each with hot coal in their pockets.” Mrs. Polly laughed, smoothing a hand over her large belly. “I can never seem to get cool.”

“Your body is expending terrific amounts of energy to nurture your baby. The crisp mornings must be a boon for you!” Shelagh took a pinard from her bag. “Let’s have a listen and then we’ll get on with your normal checks. Your sugar was higher than I would have liked it to be the last time I was here.”

“I been staying away from sweets. Tryin’ to eat the meat and vegetables, like you tol’ me.” Mrs. Polly quieted for a moment. “It has been cool these past few mornings,” she said, after Shelagh removed the pinard. “Little thing like you must be half-froze!” Mrs. Polly pulled up her shirt and settled against the pillows. Her lips pressed together as Shelagh placed the pinard against the skin. “You kin hear it’s heart, can’t you? It won’t be like my first.”

Shelagh smiled as the steady whoosh of the baby’s heart echoed through her instrument. She placed it on the small table near the bed. “Baby’s heartbeat sounds lovely and strong, Mrs. Polly. I’m here to give you, and baby, the best possible care.”

“Thank you, Nurse Mannion. You nurses are doing the Lord’s work. What they say over to Hyden is true. You all’s angels. Our angels.”
“Oh, thank you, though I’m sure that’s an overstatement,” Shelagh said, trying to tamp the redness in her cheeks. “We’re just women, ready to serve and to care.” She pulled a measuring tape from the bag. Looking up, she caught Mrs. Polly’s eye. “Please remember that you can have Mr. Polly come for me at Beech Fork Center. Our clinic is every Tuesday. Or, if anything appears amiss, have him go on to Hyden Hospital. We want to take care of you.”

“You already are, Nurse.”

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Waving goodbye to Mrs. Polly, Shelagh and Mrs. B continued up the windy mountain trail, an overhang of trees impeding the sun from warming the hoarfrost. Around the bend was another small cabin and Shelagh again dismounted, this time handing the reins over to a young boy who ran out of the house. “Momma!” he yelled, over the sound of a baby’s cries as he looked back toward the house. “Nurse is here!” He rubbed at his freckled nose and looked at Shelagh. “My Ma’s expecting ya. She’s been paining some.”

“Oh, dear.” Shelagh took down her bag. “Thank you, Elliot. Is your father home?”

“Nah, ma’am. Pa’s done down in Hyden. He’s…” Elliot rubbed his nose again. He shot an embarrassed look at Shelagh before looking away quickly. “Working.”

“That’s fine,” Shelagh said, patting the boy on the shoulder, ignoring the unspoken words. “Thank you for taking care of Mrs. B.”

“We’ll get along just fine.” Elliot walked off with the horse and Shelagh hurried into the house.

“Midwife calling!” She took off her wraps and closed the door. “Oh, Mrs. Sutherland!” She bustled to the woman, who sat in a chair surrounded by her younger children. Her hands were on her distended abdomen and her upper lip was curled as a pain caught her. Shelagh looked to the eldest daughter. “Hello, Sara. Remember me? Nurse Mannion?”

Sara nodded, eyes huge. “‘llo, Miss Nurse.”

Shelagh smiled. “I’m here to help your mother. While I see to her would you mind terribly to take your little siblings into the next room?” It was a two room shanty, and through a partially opened
blanket hanging from a doorway Shelagh could see a few trundle beds made up on the floor.

Sara nodded and took up the baby, whose cries had quieted, though his lower lip quivered and tears stood fat and ready to fall on his eyelashes. The other children ran behind, snapping the blanket closed over the breadth of the door.

Mrs. Sutherland sighed, her hands unclenching as the pain passed. “Thank you, Nurse. I’da asked them to go on but the pain hit me quicker than a tick jumping a hound. I think this un’s a coming today.”

Shelagh smiled. “Little ones come into this world when they’re ready and not a moment before!”

“You kin say that one again, Nurse. Done had six of them give me notice that I ain’t the boss.” She laughed. “Elliot out there was the hardest, but he was first. Little Johnny in there just slid right out, looking for the teat before I knowed he was even born!”

“Oh, my!” Shelagh laughed, and looked around the small room, idly listening to the prattling children in the next. “Let’s be getting you onto the bed for a check and we’ll see just what we’re facing.” Stepping to the bed, she looked to Mrs. Sutherland. “May I?” She imitated pulling back the quilts. “I have some newsprint to put down on the bed to save your mattress.”

“That’d be fine.” Mrs. Sutherland stood up on shaky legs. “My,” she said, moving slowly toward the bed. “Cora said you were the sweetest little thing and from what I’ve seen she hain’t wrong. She ought to be here at some point today. Always knows when a baby’s coming on this mountain. I don’t know if she has the sight or if she’s just so nosy that she knows when a woman’s done her duty by her man.”

Shelagh’s cheeks warmed. “Cora’s been very kind. Many of the Granny Midwives in the hills didn’t want to have much to do with us. She’s been more than welcoming. She wouldn’t even let me refer to her as Mrs. Tucker. Apparently it makes her feel more like we’re friends if I call her by her given name. She’s clucked over me from the moment we met.” Plumping the bed’s pillows, Shelagh waited for Mrs. Sutherland to suitably undress and situate herself against them. “I’ve appreciated the help she’s given me, especially in navigating this mountain!”

“Lord, I’ve lived here since the day I was borned and there are still some trails I don’t... ohhhh, here’s another, Nurse...” Mrs. Sutherland grunted, clutching her hardening stomach. “You’d think this’d get easier, dealing with the pain...” She blew out a breath as the contraction eased, turning her head toward the blanket as Johnny began to cry. After a moment he settled as his sister began to sing and she turned back to Shelagh.
“It does seem unfair that it should still be so painful.” Pulling on a pair of gloves, Shelagh moved to the end of the bed. “Whenever you feel ready, Mrs. Sutherland, I’d like to check your progress—”

Mrs. Sutherland moved into position, knees wide apart and feet pressed toward her bottom. “Ready, Nurse.”

“Well, quite.” Shelagh examined her quickly, nodding resolutely. “Absolutely perfect, Mrs. Sutherland. You’re very close now. I would imagine that your waters will go at any moment and before…” she looked at the small clock that ticked on the mantle, “...the noon hour we may have a baby.”

“I’d just as soon have it before that, if I can manage it.”

Shelagh smiled softly, pulling a quilt up over Mrs. Sutherland’s legs. “Your quilt is lovely.” She lightly touched the bright circular pattern. “Did you make this?”

“My Momma,” Mrs. Sutherland said, touching another circle. “She was always a-quilting if she had a moment to herself. I never did pick it up. Said my fingers weren’t so nimble.” She spread her hands out over the quilt, examining the boxy digits. “She were right. But I purely love these quilts. Makes me miss her less.”

Shelagh thought briefly of her own mother. There were no quilts to carry on her memory. “That’s lovely—”

She was cut off by Elliot trudging through the door. “Momma, I done pulled the milk out of the stream so’s we can get the cream. And Clarence and Bud are wanting to know if I can go and cut some hay with ‘em. I told ‘em I’d ask you... oh. Is the baby a-coming today?” He set a jar of milk on the table.

“Well,” Mrs. Sutherland said. “So you go on with Clarence and Bud but come on home afore dark, you hear?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He smiled and went to the blanket, peaking around it. “Sis, come on out here and separate the cream. I’m going to the fields.” Looking back to Shelagh he grinned. “Your horse is fed and watered, so if you aim to leave, she’s ready to go.” He looked back toward his mother.
“Have Sis come for me if you need me, Momma.”

The door closed behind him, as Sara exited from the blanket to take up the cream from the milk.

“How are the least ones, Sis?” Mrs. Sutherland shifted on the bed as another pain came over her.

“We’re fine, Momma…” Sara looked at Shelagh. “Do you want some milk, ma’am?”

“No. Thank you.” Shelagh smiled at the young girl. “Are you going to make butter?”

“Momma is.”

“Momma will later…” Mrs. Sutherland gave a quiet gasp. “I think my waters went. Sis, go on back in there. We’ll deal with that milk later. Take some of the cream for your breakfasts…” she trailed off, lip furling again.

Sis took a bowl of cream and went back behind the blanket as Shelagh checked the bed. “The waters are clear, just as they should be. Your mother’s quilt is also quite safe. She pulled it back and then worked to remove and replace the soiled newsprint. “Cora’s not here yet. I think perhaps the least one will be here first!”

“I think…” Mrs. Sutherland curled her lip again. “I think you’re right… oh…”

Shelagh performed another check. “Mrs. Sutherland, you’re into transition. It won’t be too long now.”

The next hour passed quickly, as the contractions strengthened. “I think I need to push now,” Mrs. Sutherland panted, breaking her silence.

Shelagh had been told upon entering the FNS that women in Kentucky labored silently, so as not to scare the children that were often underfoot during the process, but also due to their pride. Mrs. Sutherland had labored with her breath, but had not uttered a scream or any noise louder than a grunt. “Let’s have a look…” She examined Mrs. Sutherland and then looked over her shoulder at the clock. “Almost the noon hour….”
A knock sounded at the door.

Mrs. Sutherland smiled through her pain. “And that’ll be Cora.”

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Twenty minutes later, Cora sat rocking a newborn baby girl by the fire, cooing gently as she counted fingers and toes, exclaiming over each one. “As fine a baby girl as ever was borned,” she said, smiling at Mrs. Sutherland. “You done good, Mercy.”

“Thank you, Cora.” The afterbirth had passed quickly, and now Mrs. Sutherland rested as Shelagh checked it. “Did Laurettie have hers yet?”

“Just yesterday,” Cora said, holding the newborn close as it began to fuss. “Lord, baby, I don’t have what you want.” She stood and passed the baby back to Mrs. Sutherland. “Ready for the teat. Laurettie had a boy and it had three teeth already in hit’s head.”

“Teeth!” The baby latched on. “Oh, poor Laur. I reckon I can help her to feed him if he chews her raw.”

Cora laughed. “Lord, don’t they all?”

Shelagh finished with the afterbirth. “Perfect, Mrs. Sutherland. All’s well. Cora, how was baby? Did she pink up well?”

“Prettiest, fattest baby you ever seen.” She grinned at Mrs. Sutherland. “Mercy’s an old hand.” She jerked her hand toward the blanket and the noise of playing children beyond it. “Just listen at ‘em. I dearly love to hear them play.”

Mrs. Sutherland shook her head. “Sometimes it’s nice to kick ‘em out into the trail so I can get some peace!” She looked down at the newborn. “Though tween this one and Johnny, I think my days of peace are far off yet.”
“Lord, don’t wish for too much silence,” Cora answered. “My Fount’s been gone five years and what I wouldn’t give to hear him snore. Never thought I’d say that, that’s fer damn sure!”

“Oh, Cora,” Mrs. Sutherland patted her arm. “He was a good man.”

“He was. And I miss him.” Cora looked at the suckling baby, smiling fondly. “Catching babies has filled my life since he’s been gone.” She looked to Shelagh. “And these young nurses. Once I got to understandin’ their fancy talk.” She grinned, reaching for her bag and pulling from it her pipe. She lit it and watched as Shelagh finished stripping the bed. “You headed up the trail oncet you’re finished here?”

Shelagh tied the sheets together into a neat bundle. She began to wash her hands in a clean basin of water. “Yes. I want to look in on Mrs. Johnson and get a look at this baby born with teeth! Also, I believe there is a family with children on the other side of the creek that runs behind the Johnson home, though I haven’t yet met with them. I wanted to call in and invite them to tomorrow’s clinic.”

Mrs. Sutherland nodded. “There is a family up there. Kentons. They keep to themselves. The wife’s name is Ruth. I’d tread lightly. Maybe take Cora here with ya.” She patted the newborn as it released her breast and sqawked. “Try again,” she murmured, encouraging the baby back to the nipple.

“Them Kentons do like to stick with their own. Mean-like people. But hard workers. I reckon Ruth Kenton could use someone to help her look after that brood. If I recollect correct, she done lost two to the influenza and one fell out of a tree and broke his neck. Dr. Turner was called but couldn’t save the poor thing.”

“Oh, how dreadful.” Shelagh finished washing her hands and dried them on a clean towel. “I can only hope that perhaps Mrs. Kenton will be open to preventative health care for herself and her children. Dr. Turner will be at Beech Fork tomorrow. He alternates daily between clinics. Perhaps she’d feel more comfortable coming in on the day he’s seeing patients.”

Cora looked at Mrs. Sutherland. “Kentons and the Turners always had bad blood. Back when I was a girl they feuded a bit, though it calmed after the Great War. Don’t think the men had it left in ’em to fight after what they seen.”

Mrs. Sutherland agreed, switching the baby to her other breast. “The feuds have gone, mostly, though you would never know it from the way the boys carouse and shoot their guns down there in Hyden.”
“It is very dangerous,” Shelagh began to clean her instruments, placing them in a bag to be sterilized back at the center.

Cora puffed out a ring of smoke. “They’re showing off. Bunch of young boys with too much time on their hands and too much moonshine in their bellies.”

“Well, there’s a lot less in my belly now,” Mrs. Sutherland said, patting the baby on the back as it fell asleep against her. “Thank you, Nurse Mannion.”

Shelagh smiled and did a final check of both Mrs. Sutherland and the baby, pronouncing them both to be in fine fettle. She closed her bag and looked to the new mother. “If you need me before tomorrow, just send your husband or Elliot to the Center. Otherwise, I’ll see you tomorrow on my regular rounds.”

Cora stood from her seat, stretching her lower back. “I can come back, stay the night, should you need the help tonight, Mercy.”

“Thank ya, but we’ll be fine, Cora. You go on with Nurse Mannion.” She smiled down at the baby, fast asleep at her breast. “I gotta feed my other’uns.” She buttoned up her dress. “Children!” she called, toward the blanket, “come and meet your new sister!”

A whoop came up from the kids, as they galloped into the room. Laughing together, Shelagh and Cora took their leave, heading out into thin sunshine and a cold breeze. They mounted their horses and set off on the trail, Shelagh smiling over at Cora. “Thank you for riding with me. I think it’s a comfort for a new patient to see and talk with someone familiar.”

“Happy to do it, Shelagh. And you can count on me for clinic tomorrow. And not just to hold babies. I can help with the set up and cleaning, too. Little thing like you, running that clinic all on your own. What is Mrs. Breckinridge thinkin? I know the times are tough, but a nurse alone is askin’ for trouble.”

“I’m not completely alone at the center, Cora. The couriers stop in and sometimes stay overnight. Truthfully most evenings are spent on the mountain or down at the river. It’s been a month and I’ve already delivered eight babies!”

“There’ll be more come good spring, mark my words.”
Shelagh and Cora rode on to the Johnson shanty, checking over Laurettie and the baby. Despite the three natal teeth the baby seemed fit and well and bonny, as Shelagh proclaimed, handing him back to his mother. Mrs. Johnson invited them to have dinner with she, her mother, and her children. Cora and Shelagh agreed, sitting down to a nooning meal of salt pork and cornbread. After leaving the Johnson’s they rode down toward the creek, Cora leading Shelagh to the best spot to cross the horses. Just ahead the Kenton house stood, the ramshackle building partially hidden in a grove of trees.

Cora hello’d the house and two young boys ran out, knobby knees dirty and scratched under their rolled up homespun trousers.

“Hello, Mrs. Tucker,” the older boy said to Cora. He nodded his head at Shelagh. “Ma’am. You one them nurses?”

“I am,” she said, looking down at him from her perch. “Is your mother available to talk with us? It won’t take more than a moment of her time.”

A woman stepped out of the front door. “Paul, Matthew. Run down there and tell your Daddy that I need more sticks for the fire.” She turned to Cora and Shelagh as the boys ran off. “What kin I do for you?”

Cora smiled and gestured to Shelagh. “Mrs. Kenton, I know you heard of the nursing service that set up down to Hyden. Well, this here is our own nurse, up and down this trail and down to Beech Fork. Her name’s Nurse Shelagh Mannion. I thought I’d bring her out here to talk to you, see if she could be doing anything for ya or the least uns.”

“I don’t think so. We’re not in need.” Mrs. Kenton pursed her lips. “Thank you.”

From inside the house a child yelled and another coughed. “A late winter cold?” Cora rubbed her hands to warm them. “Nurse Mannion can look in on him.”

“My family and I get by jus’ as we always have. You know that.”

Shelagh could see that Cora wanted to argue, so she cut in. “I understand, Mrs. Kenton. We only wanted to let you know of the service. We provide midwifery, nursing, vaccinations, and medical care. Our midwifery services are five dollars a year, if you’re so inclined. As Mrs. Tucker
mentioned, I’m stationed at Beech Fork Nursing Center, should you have need of me, day or
night.”

Mrs. Kenton inclined her head. “I’ll remember that. I got to get back to the young’uns. Thank you
for riding out.”

Turning their horses, Shelagh and Cora set off back down the trail. “It was a better welcome than I
imagined,” Cora said. “We weren’t met with a shotgun!”

“Oh, Cora,” Shelagh said, smiling at her new friend. “I know the young men in Hyden are rather…
overzealous with their firearms, but I’ve not met anything like that yet on the mountain.”

“And you won’t. You nurses are the best thing happened to use out here. These men would rather
shoot their own selves than to see a one of you hurt. Why when Mrs. Breckinridge first rode out
there in the twenties she found such a kind response that she decided to build a house for herself
here, over there to Wendover. Still, some places can be dangerous, especially if there’s a still set
up or if someone feels they’ve been wronged on their own land. Crossing unfamiliar land can be
dangerous, too. Stick to the paths.”

“I will.” They stopped the horses at a fork in the road. Cora turned her horse north, toward her
cabin. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Shelagh. Git some sleep. I been to your clinic. The women’ll be
there afore dawn. It’ll be a day!”

“You too, Cora. Thanks for your assistance.” Shelagh waved and began the long trek back down
the mountain as the sun began to descend in the sky. The day hadn’t warmed much and she
snuggled into her uniform jacket, thinking of the warmth of the clinic and the dinner that she
would have when she arrived. The home visits were her new daily routine and she found that she
enjoyed them, even as the ride up and down the mountain seemed to grow longer with each passing
day. Shelagh had taken to finding landmarks to orientate herself to the trail and also to pass the
time in the saddle. From the fork in the trail was a rock shaped like a turtle, and only a little further
was the tree split from lightning. After that leg of the journey there was the small pond and the
abandoned cabin and beyond that was the open valley, leading to the nursing center.

Arriving just as the sun was setting, Shelagh fed and sheltered Mrs. B, before heading inside.
Lighting the lamps, Shelagh went into the clinic kitchen to wash and sterilize her equipment. She
could never sleep with equipment that was not thoroughly cleaned, even if she had several kits to
use in the case of an emergency. Once the water began to boil, she dropped in the instruments and
retired into her small bedroom to remove her uniform. Gathering her notes, she went to the kitchen
table to keep an eye on the boiling instruments and to write up her notes. The evening loomed long
and lonely ahead of her, though at any moment a desperate father may mount the step at her door,
helloing for her to follow him back up the mountain to his family home.
She placed her pencil on the table, listening to the wind outside of the Center. She had not lied to Cora. She wasn’t alone in the Center, not always. In the beginning two nurses had staffed each Center. The downturn in the economy had lead to a dearth of the donations the FNS ran on, it had been decided that one nurse per Center would have to suffice. Many nights a young courier would bed down and stay for an evening to help with sanitation and caring for the horses. Though Shelagh was always kind to the young girls she never felt quite at ease when a courier would stay over. They were all still very young and eager to please, very chatty. It was far easier when two couriers might stay for the evening. Shelagh could then listen to their chatter and feel as if she were part of the conversation without having to entertain. It had been tougher than she imagined, leaving the quiet of her cloistered environment. She was used to long silences and though she enjoyed listening to the young Americans speak on fashion and Hollywood stars she didn’t feel quite comfortable enough to express her own opinions on topics she knew so little about.

Yet, as the evenings lengthened into night she sometimes found herself longing to hear a nervous father knocking at her door. She found that she longed to be in action, preferring to ride the trails and deliver medical care than to sit and wait for the next thing to happen. It seemed to her that she had already waited for her life to begin and she was impatient in waiting further. She prayed daily for the ability to slow her desire for action, to allow herself to center her thoughts and achieve the peace she had once found so easily.

Frowning at herself, Shelagh picked up her pencil and finished her notes before removing the cleaned instruments to dry. Standing at the small food prep counter she prepared a sandwich, chewing as she looked out the window and into the darkened night. She was tired and yet, couldn’t help a small, pleased smile. All of her life she had longed to make a difference in the world, to set things to rights for those who could not do so for themselves. The work was hard. Merely saddling up and riding straight up a mountain was daunting enough, yet delivering babies in all sorts of weather and home conditions added to the stress of the work. Learning the ropes, meeting the new patients, and growing accustomed to the new surroundings was exhausting. Providing vaccinations, delivering new life, and caring for the ill was as demanding as it was rewarding. The days and nights were long and full of work.

Shelagh loved it. She was in a unique position among the other nurse-midwives, having already dedicated herself to a life of solitude and service, only this time in a different guise. She often thought that Sister Bernadette, used to bicycling over Poplar’s cobbled streets, would not recognize Shelagh Mannion, uniformed and on horseback. Though perhaps it was the other way around. One evening in the convent she had removed her wimple and cap to let her hair hang free, looking at her reflection in the mirror. It was somewhat ironic that she now always wore her hair pulled back into a bun or braid, horseback riding and nursing hardly suitable for loose hair. Reaching behind, she pulled at the pins that held her workaday bun, shaking out the wavy strands, eyeing her reflection in the darkened window.

Shaking her head at her foolishness, she finished her meager meal and set about preparing for bed. She cast aside unnecessary thoughts and turned her mind ahead to morning’s clinic. She thought of Cora saying that it would ‘be a day’ and knew that she was right. Women would start lining up
before dawn. Whispering a prayer to ask for serenity in duty and a capable hand, Shelagh fell asleep, another day in Kentucky done and dusted.
Born in Old Kentucky

...we must follow where He leads. Though in my view, Nurse Mannion, there is plenty of work willed by the Lord right here in Poplar. Keep that in mind upon your return. As to 'unwelcome visitors' in the houses, I'm certain there's some type of soap available in America; perhaps even Lifebuoy? Lift rugs and rub between cracks in the floorboards to rid houses of them.... Until such time as you return, Sr. Evangelina

Cora had been correct. The line of women at Tuesday’s Clinic did start before dawn. Women with appointments, women without, children running back and forth, happy to be free of chores, and young babies crying thinly, awakened too early. Shelagh looked out of the Clinic’s window, mentally counting patients, trying to make a plan for seeing to each need. She boiled a kettle of water for tea and quickly consumed a packet of biscuits. The clock read ten minutes before eight and Dr. Turner had not yet arrived. The nurses at Hyden had laughed as they told her about Dr. Turner, how he was always late, disheveled, and somewhat absent-minded. A native Kentuckian, he had been raised in the Beech Fork area and was schooled at the University of Louisville. Officially licensed to practice medicine, he had once been the only actual doctor within a thousand square miles of Hyden, working in tandem with ‘granny midwives’ like Cora to provide any sort of medical care for the people in the remote mountains which he had called home. When Mary Breckinridge sought to set up the Frontier Nursing Service she had found him to be excited at the prospect, slowly drowning in the care that he could not provide for all in need.

The nurses had also said that he was a widower with a young son. Shelagh remembered her own father and his struggle after her mother passed and bristled at the laugh the nurses gave at the doctor’s expense. From the little she had seen of him at her first clinic at Hyden Hospital, he seemed to be caring and kind--qualities one didn’t often find in a doctor. The clock clicked ever-closer to eight and Shelagh decided to open clinic without him, separating patients into those who could be seen by only her and those who would need to wait for doctor’s care.

Smoothing her hands over her starched apron, she opened the door, smiling as Cora was the first to enter. “Good morning, Cora!” she stepped aside to let Cora pass and then nodded to the patients. “Hello, ladies! Right--please step inside and line-up at the desk. If you have an appointment please present the appointment card that I, or one of the nurses at Hyden, would have given you at your last appointment or home visit. If you do not have an appointment card please see me at the desk. I hope to have all of you checked in so that we may start appointments no later than nine.”

A group of women moved forward to the desk as young children settled in the floor. Older children stayed out on the front porch and a din filled the air as women chatted and children played. At the desk Shelagh took down patient information, setting the schedule for the day as Cora moved among the women, cooing at babies and complementing well-behaved children. An uptick in the women’s voices made Shelagh look up from her schedule.
“Good morning, ladies.” Dr. Turner stood in the doorway to the Center, his white coat bright in the morning light as he shrugged into it. He looked toward the desk and caught Shelagh’s eye. “Nurse Mannion?”

Shelagh nodded to the patient in front of her. “Excuse me,” she said. “Dr. Turner, welcome. I’m setting a schedule for the day.”

“It looks like we’ll need it,” he said, looking around at the crowd. “Before we begin, I overtook this young lady in the road. She was headed out here. One of your couriers.”

A young woman with a bright smile came into the center. “Hello, Nurse Mannion. I’m Lisette Dupree. I’m volunteering for the next few months. I did so last spring, as well. I was assigned to you here at Beech Fork for the duration.”

Shelagh smiled. “That’ll be fine.” She shook Lisette’s hand as Dr. Turner went into the kitchen to set up. “Perhaps you would take over the scheduling so that Dr. Turner and I might start seeing to patients?” When Lisette nodded her assent, Shelagh gave her an overview of the scheduling information needed and then stepped away, walking into kitchen.

Cora was there, laughing with Dr. Turner. “…the baby shot right out, like out of a canon! I’ve never seen alike.”

Dr. Turner smiled. “You’ve seen it all, Mrs. Cora.”

“Most of it with you!” She smiled at him fondly. “How’s your least ‘un? I ain’t seen him in an age. Your brother keeps him up there with him and his lot.”

“He does. You know that they’re right good people, Thomas and Anna Jane. It’s why I entrusted Timothy to them.” Dr. Turner finished unpacking his bag. “He’s well. Smart as a whip. I’m just as proud.”

Cora patted his arm. “Takes after his Momma.”

“That he does…” Dr. Turner noticed Shelagh in the doorway. “Nurse Mannion. I apologize for my lateness. I was seeing to an elderly patient this morning over to Hell-For-Certain creek. Afterward, I overtook Miss Dupree… I’m ready to begin when you are.”
“That’s quite all right, Dr. Turner,” Shelagh said, voice softening as she thought of Dr. Turner’s son living with his brother. After a beat she looked down, consulting the appointment cards that she held in her hands. “Several of our patients need only nursing care, though we also have several antenatal patients, including two that you’ve flagged as high-risk.”

“Given the number of women out there the two of ya mighten be at it all day.” Cora smacked Dr. Turner on the arm and left the clinical room.

Dr. Turner looked at Shelagh and smiled. “Should we begin?”

Shelagh smiled back. “Indeed.” Stepping to the threshold, she called their first patients.

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Sneaking in a break after several hours of clinic, Shelagh went to the kitchen, desperate for a cup of tea. She poured one and sat at the table, stretching her aching legs. They’d made decent progress, though at least ten more patients were left to be seen. She closed her eyes for just a moment, enjoying the brief respite and the hot tea.

“Oh, Nurse Mannion, I apologize.”

Shelagh’s eyes popped open at the sound of Dr. Turner’s voice.

“Dr. Turner.” She placed her teacup on the saucer and looked up at him. He stood in the doorway, rubbing his index finger and thumb together as he looked at her. “Won’t you have a cup of tea?” She nodded to the teapot. “I’d be happy to pour for you.”

He smiled slightly, as if unsure. “That would be much appreciated. Thank you.” He entered the room and leaned against the counter. “Busy day,” he offered, as he watched her pour the tea.

Outside of the room they could hear Cora speaking with the patients, cooing over babies and setting mothers at ease. “Thank goodness for Cora,” she said, handing him the cup. She gestured to the sugar and smiled as he added a few spoonfuls and stirred.
“Yes,” he said, after taking a sip. “Thank you for the tea. I generally prefer it cold, when we can get ice. But on a cool day and after a passel of patients…” He took another sip and smiled at her commiserating nod. “Mrs. Cora has always been a pistol. It took me three weeks of nonstop pesterin’ to get her to take me on a midwifery case with her when I was a kid.” He drank again and his brows raised at her questioning look. “Before medical school. I was desperate for any sort of medical training.”

Shelagh tried to imagine a younger Dr. Turner and Cora. “It took three weeks to wear her down?”

“He took another sip. “I believe I still owe her six months of that contract.”

Shelagh laughed. “When I met her at Hyden I wasn’t sure what to make of her. She pulled out her pipe and told me in no uncertain terms that she knew the mountain better than anyone and would be my chaperone. She really has shown me the ropes.”

“That’s Mrs. Cora,” he said, a fond smile breaking across his face. He drained his teacup and set it in the sink before taking out a pack of cigarettes. “Would you like one?” He took one and lit it, relaxing against the counter once more.

Taking a biscuit from her saucer, Shelagh shook her head. “I would, but not this time, Doctor.” She paused, taking a bite of her sweet treat. She contemplated the doctor as he quietly smoked, noticing the frays at his cuffs and the dark circles below his eyes. She had known many doctors but had never spent time speaking with one so openly as she just had with Dr. Turner. Now she felt awkward and almost as if she had overstepped some invisible boundary. She took another bite of her biscuit, eager to finish so that she could disappear back amongst the patients.

“Have you had any bit a trouble on the mountain?” Dr. Turner stubbed out his cigarette. “Mrs. Cora is a wonderful chaperone but these trails can be confusing.”

“Oh!” Shelagh looked back up at him. “Not really. I’ve set out several landmarks to remind me of where I am. The other nurses also gave me quite the course in learning each trail and home along our route. I shadowed several nurses the first few weeks so as to learn my way around. Truthfully the trails are very beautiful, even if they’re not in full bloom quite yet.”

“Hm.” Dr. Turner smiled. “There are some places about that are worth seeing. How do you find the patients? When Mrs. Breckinridge brought the idea out here I was concerned that the locals
wouldn’t be… they would never be unwelcoming, but I feared that they would prefer to keep to their own.”

Shelagh thought of Mrs. Kenton and the history Cora mentioned between the Kentons and Turners. “Most have made me feel extremely welcome! I especially enjoy the vaccination cases, though I suppose that might sound a bit odd. The children seem to welcome their jabs and never make a fuss. Knowing that a lasting difference is being made through the vaccination rates is very rewarding, not to mention the midwifery services.”

Dr. Turner’s eyes lit up. “Yes. Something that will go on working even after the Frontier Nursing Service has run its course… if, I should say. You nurses have provided a sterling service. Something we could not have provided ourselves. Too many people and not enough medical services. I could hardly believe our luck when Mrs. Breckinridge began her survey.”

Shelagh’s cheeks heated. “That’s why I’m here. I read Mrs. Breckinridge’s advertisement and wanted to make a difference in the lives of children.”

“You are, Nurse Mannion.”

“Thank you, Dr. Turner.” Shelagh finished her biscuit. “The advertisement offered a sense of adventure over a thousand miles of Kentucky mountains.” She gestured to their still packed waiting area.

Dr. Turner raised a brow. “Adventure is one word for it, sure.”

Biting back a laugh, Shelagh said, “It also promised my own horse and my own dog. I’ve a horse, a very good one, but no dog as of yet.”

“My son, Timothy, could probably find a dog for you. He’s forever after my brother to let him bring another mutt home. Anna Jane, that’s my brother’s wife, says that she no sooner gets used to one dog than another appears. Said she wished he brought in money like he brings in dogs.”

Shelagh laughed again. “I’ll remember--”

Lisette stuck her head in the door, cutting Shelagh off. “I’m sorry,” she said, looking apologetically at Dr. Turner. “There’s a woman named Mrs. Charles here, asking to speak with
you on a matter of some urgency."

“That’s fine,” he said, pushing off the counter. He looked at Shelagh. “Nervous mother. Though one can never be too sure.” He sent her a distracted smile. “Thank you for the tea.”

Shelagh watched as he left the kitchen, heading back into the fray. Placing her own teacup into the sink, she followed after him.

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The last of the women left the clinic, children following behind them as they saddled up or began the long walk back up the mountain. Lisette sat at the intake table finishing up a few notes and Dr. Turner buttoned his coat, reaching for his bag. “I’m off to supp with Tim. Anna Jane likes to serve right at six.” He looked at his watch and sighed. “We’ll see if I can still make it.”

“You go on, honey,” Cora said, waving him to the door. “I’m here to help Nurse Mannion and young Lisette. You tell Tim I’m waiting for him to come and help me with my canning.” She waved as Dr. Turner went out the door. “Tim purely loves to come up to my cabin and eat all the preserves I’m trying to save for winter.” She laughed. “He’s a good boy,” she said, looking out the window as Dr. Turner saddled up.

Shelagh wondered if Cora meant Tim or Dr. Turner. “Dr. Turner is very… different,” she said.

Cora turned to Shelagh. “He’s a good man. They always stand out in a crowd.”

With a smile, Shelagh began to clear up trays of instruments, heading for the kitchen to clean instruments. “I’m sure he is. He seems very kind and competent. He’s…” she trailed off, not sure of what she wished to say.

“He’s one of the few who left the mountains and came back. First for medical school and then for the war. Most who go don’t come back. But he did. He feels he’s needed here. And he is.” Cora picked up a tray. “Let me help you with these.”

In the kitchen Shelagh started a pot of water to boil and began pre-cleaning instruments. “Have you known him all of his life?”
“Oh, yes,” Cora said. “He was one of the first least un’s I ever caught. I’ll not forget it because he didn’t even need a spank on the bottom to start hollering. Had somethin’ to say right off.”

“He’s very easy to speak with,” Shelagh said, wiping a scalpel. “I’m not used to doctors being so…friendly. Or…” Shelagh’s cheeks pinkened as she fiddled with the cuff of her jacket, recalling the frays in Dr. Turner’s clothing.

“You can say it, honey. He don’t look put together. He’s rough about the edges.” Cora shook her head. “He wasn’t always like that, but you know how men are when on their own.”

Shelagh thought of her father, and the silence that took over their house after her mother’s death. “I suppose. I’m interested in his providing medical care before the FNS was here. How he….managed. Manages. Even with another doctor now at Hyden Hospital, there’s still so much work!”

“It weren’t easy. Even now, hit ain’t. But he’s got a call to it, honey.” She looked at Shelagh and nodded to the scattered instruments. “Like you.”

“And you?”

“Law, if I weren’t catchin’ babies I’d be taking care of the sick and infirmed. Do that sometimes anyway. I just like to be needed. Old woman like me, on her own? What good am I fer?”

“I wouldn’t have made it through this month without you, Cora.”

Cora smiled. “You would. Yer a strong woman.” She looked out at the approaching sunset. “That’s the Lord tellin’ me to stop my gums from flapping. You come to my cabin after yer rounds tomorrow and I’ll tell you all you want to know about me, Dr Turner, and the people on this mountain.” She washed her hands at the sink. “After all,” she said, as she turned back around, “you’re one of us now.” Taking out her pipe, Cora shuffled out of the room and Shelagh heard her give her regards to Lisette.

Shelagh began placing instruments into the boiling water, thinking on Cora’s words. She didn’t feel like a Kentuckian, but the words were kindly meant and she took them in the spirit Cora had intended them. Setting a timer for the instrument wash, Shelagh went to get Lisette set for the night and to finish up her patient notes. The sky was alight with dark pinks and purples as Shelagh
walked by the front door. She stopped and looked out over the valley. She was bone tired and ready for sleep, but still she stood at the window, watching as night came slowly to the valley that she, for now, called home.

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Next morning, Shelagh saddled up for her rounds while Lisette stayed behind, cleaning instruments and keeping an eye out for any patient that might need assistance. In the event of an emergency she could ride for Shelagh, or even out to Hyden Hospital. Staffing clinics with only one nurse was a strain on everyone. The couriers allowed for the nurses to have freedom of movement and the peace of mind that they could be found if needed.

It was another cool morning, bright sunlight breaking through a morning mist as Shelagh began her ascent. On Wednesdays she generally saw to preventative health, though today her first stop was the Sutherland family, to check in on their newest arrival.

“Hello,” she called softly from her perch on Mrs. B’s back. A little face appeared from behind a heavy curtain at the window.

The front door opened. Mrs. Sutherland stood with a hand to her back. “Come in, Nurse! There’s coffee set, if you’ve a mind to it!”

Shelagh took her midwifery bag inside, catching her breath in the warmth of the cabin. She accepted a cup of hot brew as she looked to the baby, who lay swaddled in the center of the bed she had been born in yesterday, sleeping contentedly. Mrs. Sutherland smiled fondly at the little one before looking at her brood. “Go on in the other room,” she said, hastening them on. “Nurse is here for me and Lillian.”

“Did you decide on Lillian?” Shelagh smiled down at the baby. She took a final drink and placed the cup on the table as Mrs. Sutherland directed. “What a lovely name!”

“It were my granmomma’s name.” Mrs. Sutherland began to unwrap the baby. “She’s eating well already. Kept me awake most of the night. She’s wet and shat…”

Shelagh smiled. “Her color looks fine; her umbilical stump, too.” She spent a few moments testing the baby’s reflexes before listening to her heart and lungs. “Absolutely perfect,” she declared with a smile. “Bonny and sweet.” She wrapped the baby back into a swaddle and handed
her to her beaming mother. “Before we move onto your checks, I’d like to speak to you about health prevention. Have you seen any sign of hookworm, any fevers among the children?”

“No, ma’am. Them nurses dewormed the least ‘uns las’ year,” Mrs. Sutherland said, holding Lillian close to her chest. “After that I told the least ‘uns to keep their feet clean out there on the hills and to stay away from privies. It’s better now that new ones have been put up.”

“I understand,” Shelagh said, standing to pull powders from her bag. She explained the administering of the agent and offered to do so that very day. “We’d like to keep all of the little ones worm free--I believe the new privies are helping us to accomplish that goal!”

“Last nurse said best to do it every spring, so go on ahead, while yer here.”

“That’ll be fine.” Shelagh placed the powders on the table. “I’ll proceed with your checks, and we’ll see to the children from there?”

Mrs. Sutherland climbed onto the bed. “Law, if it means I get to get off my feet a moment, you do all the checks you need.”

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It was late afternoon by the time Shelagh made it to Cora’s cabin. It was tucked back into a bend in the road, tidy and picturesque. Two rocking chairs sat under an awning off to the side of the cabin, and Shelagh frowned, thinking that Cora must sit alone most evenings, in silence.

She knocked on the door and Cora opened it with a grin, holding her broom in her hand. “Shelagh! Didn’t think you’d be so early. Come on in.” She looked at her, frowning. “Did you eat up on the trail? You look tired. Here…” she poured a glass of thick liquid and gestured Shelagh to a knobby chair at a small table.

“Thank you.” Shelagh accepted the glass. “Buttermilk?”

“It’ll stick to yer ribs.” Cora moved around the small cabin with her broom. “What’d you want to know about yesterday? Me, the mountain. Dr. Turner. He’s right different from others, ain’t he?”

Shelagh turned her glass and watched the buttermilk slide toward the lip, before placing the glass
back on the table. “He’s unlike other doctors I’ve met. He—”

“Well, there is that,” Shelagh agreed, hiding a smile by taking a sip of the thick buttermilk. “He’s not so self-important or dismissive, like the doctors at home often were. He’s very intelligent. Careful. Thorough, and kind with his patients.”

Placing the broom by the door, Cora sat across from Shelagh and took the glass. “I thought this would fatten ya up a bit.” Cora downed the buttermilk and wiped her mouth with the edge of her apron. “But I kin see that you don’t care for it.”

“Oh, no, Cora—” Shelagh tried to protest, but Cora only laughed and nodded toward the bucket of water on the counter.

“If you get thirsty, there’s well water aplenty.” Cora sat back against her chair and sighed. “It’s good to rest a minute.”

“I’m sorry if I’m keeping you from your chores.”

“Not at all. I like the company, honey. And besides, I offered to tell you about the doc.” Cora tapped her fingers on the rough wood of the table. “I’ve been knowing the Turners since I was girl, and my Daddy went way back with ‘em. They were good people. My cousin Earla married one of them. Doc Turner’s father’s cousin, I think it was. Every year they’d have us out for hog butcherin’, and it was a fine time.”

“Community is important to farming families.” Shelagh settled into her seat. “Did Dr. Turner work the farm as a boy?”

Cora laughed. “Law, honey. His Daddy had a time with him. He was a stern man, Mr. Turner. His family been farming here for generations and his sons was gon’ to do the same. And the other three was fine farmers, good boys. But Dr. Turner couldn’t seem to turn a plow, plant the corn, or pick a carrot. He’d complete his chores, there was no way round that, but Mr. Turner said that more often than not the boy would be found reading medical magazines in the hayloft. Where he got the magazines I can’t reckon, but he always had his nose in one.”

Shelagh remembered Dr. Turner saying that he was desperate for medical information. Desperate enough to join a midwife in her duties. She smiled faintly, thinking of her own childhood, and how she grabbed at any bit of medical knowledge presented to her. The nurses caring for her mother had witnessed her interest and introduced her to the Anglican nuns that would eventually become her family. Her heart squeezed as it did whenever she thought of her former sisters, and she looked back at Cora, noting the smile on her face.

Noticing Shelagh’s stare, Cora spread her hands as if in apology. “I like rememberin’ those days. Back when my Fount was still alive and we had our times together.” She looked around the small cabin. “Now I’m just an old midwife, good for little more than encouraging a woman’s huffin’ and puffin’.”

Shelagh reached out and touched Cora’s hand. “That’s not at all true, Cora. You’ve taught so many of us things that we might never have learned otherwise.” She squeezed the older woman’s hand. “And Dr. Turner told me that he thought you were the best midwife on the mountain.”

Cora’s smile returned. “Well, he’d best think so. I did learn him most all he knows! Imagine that, a young boy interested in women’s work. I never thought I’d see the day, but he was a natural.”
Delivered his first baby just as soon as we could find a woman a-willin’ to let him between her legs.” Cora again slapped her thigh and laughed at Shelagh’s wide-eyed and startled look.

“Did many women let him attend their births?” Shelagh tried to tamp down her blush.

“I think he was something of a novelty for them. They cooed over him and tried to ease his nerves stead of their own! One smile from him and they’d practically tie a ribbon into a pretty bow round the baby and hand it to him.” Cora laughed. But her eyes darkened almost immediately. “That is, until Nettie Day.”

Shelagh sat forward in her seat.

“I can see yer still interested.” Cora sighed. “Nettie was a good girl, too young to be a momma. Her Daddy let her out of the house to marry at thirteen, even though the neighbors tried to make him see sense. She was too young. Hips too narrow. Dr. Turner brought me along with him, and we even ended up calling for one of the salve doctors down in Hyden. But it didn’t make no difference. Nettie and her baby son died and it liked to eat both of us up, watching that little girl go.”

“There was a young girl at the first clinic I attended, only a day after I arrived. At Hyden Hospital,” Shelagh said, her head bowed slightly, almost as if she were about to pray. “She was maybe only fourteen. I noticed how gentle Dr. Turner was with her. He has a way with patients, but he was especially kind to her.”

“He would be,” Cora said, twisting her mouth in remembrance. “You know how it is to lose a woman and a baby. You never forget them, especially your first.”


Cora smiled sadly, and reached again for Shelagh’s hand. She squeezed it between her own worn fingers. “But that’s why we keep on going. For the mothers and their daughters and sons.”

“That is why I came to Kentucky. I wanted to make a difference with women who truly needed care. After I left the Order I was so unsure of where to go, or how to spend my time. All I knew is that I wanted to continue to nurse and to be a midwife.”
“It’s your callin’, honey. And you can’t ignore that.” She held up a finger at Shelagh’s glance. “And I know you had another callin’ once. I thank you for taking me into your trust on it. But you know what they say about the Lord and his ways.” She paused for a moment and then quoted, “The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his step.”

“Proverbs,” Shelagh whispered. “I wonder if it was in His plan for me to come here. Or if I misread the signs and laid my plan over His.”

“It’s a right good thing that you’re here to help us, Shelagh. We need you and the other nurses in these hills. Plenty of people up here claim to know medicine or doctorin’, but they ain’t lookin’ for nothin’ but to be paid. Until Mrs. Breckinridge came here and started to make changes we was all drowning in deaths and disease.”

Shelagh smiled. “I’ve listened to Dr. Turner’s thoughts on what he referred to as ‘salve’ doctors. The patients at Hyden like to listen to XERA on the radio and there’s this ‘doctor’, Dr. Brinkley?”

“Law,” Cora laughed. “I already know which story yer fixin’ to tell.”

“Dr. Turner said that the man was a fraud who is grafting goat glands onto men to restore their…” Shelagh blushed.

“Their ‘powers’,” Cora said, with an eye roll. “A man will try anything to get that thing up.”

“Cora!” Shelagh’s cheeks were bright red.

“I’m sorry, but hit’s true, honey. We’re only lucky that Dr. Brinkley himself is down Mexico way. But we’ve done dealt with all manner of salve doctors in town. Selling ‘restoratives’ full of gasoline and sugar, and offering false hope to patients in need.” Cora stood and walked to the washbucket, wetting her hands. “Why when Doctor Turner was away at medical school, and then again during the war, half the women on the mountain started seeing those frauds for their womanly complaints. Alva Cooley stuck something in an unmentionable area and hain’t ever been the same since.” She dried her hands on a towel. “It’s just good that now we have real nurses and another doctor to work with Patrick… that is, Dr. Turner.” Pulling down a covered jar, she looked to Shelagh. “I’m gon’ fix us up a mess of greens and some cornbread.”

“Oh,” Shelagh said, looking out the window to the dimming light. “That would be lovely. Can I help you with anything, Cora?”
Cora nodded to a bowl. “You kin mix up the meal, while I get the grease good and hot.”

Shelagh stirred the contents of the bowl as she watched Cora set about cooking a meal for them. She had been so welcomed by her new mentor, and the other nurses were friendly and competent when she saw them in passing or at Hospital. Yet, Shelagh still felt ill-at-ease, unsure at the path that took her from the religious life and brought her across the ocean to this foreign land.

The two year contract seemed to stretch before her as she continued to move the wooden spoon. When she had agreed to come to Kentucky it had seemed the answer to her simple prayer of *What now, Lord?* Two years in Kentucky as a nurse-midwife and she could return home, take work in any hospital of her choosing, and try to sort out her life. What had once seemed so set, and so right, was now already months behind her. This new life was exhilarating at times, and interesting almost always. Yet beyond Cora she had no confidant, no true friend, and she had trouble opening up to the other nurses, kind as they were. They seemed so much younger than she, though she knew her thought was unfair. They had their own trials and journeys that she was not privy to.

The patients she had worked with were not unlike the patients back home. She had been welcomed by most and had yet to meet with any true hostilities. In some places the Kentucky mountains looked so much like her first home that she could almost believe that her father could amble out of one of the cabins and greet her with a glad cry and a warm hug. It hardly seemed possible that he had been gone now for over ten years, and Mam for twenty-five.

Shelagh scraped at the edges of the bowl. “Would you like for me to fry these?”

Cora accepted the bowl. “I can do it right quick. You can get us each some water. The cups are behind the bucket.”

Shelagh set to filling the cups and carried them to the table, sitting back down into her seat. Cora bustled at the little stove, flipping the bread. The room smelled of grease and cornmeal, and Shelagh let her mind wander, back over the thoughts she was pondering, and then back into her day, tracking back over the events of their Tuesday Clinic. Dr. Turner had been the most interesting revelation about Kentucky. Before they left from port Mrs. Breckinridge had discussed the charlatan salve doctors, rife in the mountains. Even the granny midwives working the area weren’t all to be trusted. Some did little more than stick an axe or a pair of scissors under a bed to ‘cut the pain’, offering little in the way of care to laboring women but quick to take payment. Mrs. Breckinridge had known that physicians were needed to assist the new midwives, and though the bulk of the deliveries were made by midwife only, Dr. Turner, and Hyden Hospital’s other doctor, Dr. Gratz, were invaluable assets.
For many years, and facing seemingly insurmountable odds, Dr. Turner and granny midwives like Cora had been the only ones to care for the women and children of the mountains. Now they had help, and a real chance to offer a type of care and public health works that could continue for long after Shelagh left for home, the granny midwives were gone, and Dr. Turner stopped practicing. It was good work. Needed work. In Kentucky she could again find her purpose and realize God’s plan for her, hopefully setting her on the path toward her future.

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Lisette opened the door to the clinic as Shelagh rode up. “There’s an anxious father here,” she said, stepping aside to allow the man to step through the door. “Hiram Polly.”

“Ma’am,” he said, twisting his hat in his coal darkened hands. “Janie’s right nervous. I hied down here to find ya. Said yesterday our least ‘un was doin’ jus fine, but this day she ain’t feeling it move proper. She’s done in a tangle over it, Nurse.”

“Oh, dear,” Shelagh said, looking back to the mountain, already cloaked in darkness. “Let us go quickly.”

“Yes’m.” Taking up a lantern, Mr. Polly mounted his mule.

Shelagh looked back at Lisette with a nod before taking off up the trail with Mr. Polly.

Night creatures scattered through the underbrush as they passed, leaves and crunching under horse hooves in the cool of the early spring evening. Following the lantern’s dim light, Shelagh asked, “Has Mrs. Polly experienced any pains?”

“No’m. I come in from the mine and found her on the bed, looking for all the world like she was dead and gone. I cried out to her and she answered something’s wrong with the babe. I knowed I had to find ya. Our first one dyin’ nearly ripped her in half. I can’t bury the rest of her.”

“You did exactly the right thing by coming for me, Mr. Polly. We’ll get to your cabin, diagnose the problem, and make a plan.” Shelagh thought of the strong heartbeat she had heard from the Polly baby only the day before, and hoped that the little one had not gotten into any distress.

There was a lamp lit in the cabin when they arrived, and a small fire in the fireplace. Shelagh was
somewhat surprised to not see Cora darkening the doorway, holding a newborn in her arms. Cora was probably sleeping, however, lulled to dreams by her cornbread, buttermilk, and talk of the old days. Shelagh shook the thoughts from her head, stepping over the threshold. “Nurse calling. Mrs. Polly!”

Mrs Polly was prone on the bed. Shelagh turned to Mr. Polly. “Heat a kettle, quickly. I’m going to check her, but he ready to ride if I need further assistance.”

Mr. Polly looked at his wife for a moment, unmoving. Shelagh opened her mouth to speak again, but he moved before she could, rattling with the kettle on the blackened stovetop.

“Mrs. Polly?” Shelagh placed a hand at her arm. “It’s Nurse Mannion. Can you tell me what the problem is?” The woman sniffed, but didn’t answer. “Mrs. Polly. I need to examine you and make sure baby is well.”

Mrs. Polly buried her head in the pillow. “I think hit’s dead,” she whispered. “It’ll be dead like my last ‘un.”

Shelagh’s heart thudded. If the baby was indeed dead or in such distress that a surgical intervention was needed they would need to ride eight miles into Hyden. Sending up a quick, wordless prayer, Shelagh touched Mrs. Polly’s arm again. “I know you’re scared, but please, let me check. Babies get into all sorts of mischief but I must check you to know for sure.”

“Janie…” Mr. Polly’s quiet voice came from across the room. “Please.”

Mrs. Polly sniffed, and turned, looking up at Shelagh with wide, haunted eyes. Shelagh pulled up Mrs. Polly’s dress to expose her stomach. Taking her pinard from the bag, she placed it against the curved swell of abdomen. She listened closely, eyes closing in relief as she heard the heartbeat. “The baby’s alive, Mrs. Polly.”

Mrs. Polly gave a shuddering sob. “Hit ain’t dead?”

“No, the heartbeat is still strong, though I’m unsure as to why there’s a lack of movement. When did you notice that he was no longer moving?”

“This un’s movin’ all the time, Nurse. I don’t get no sleep from being hot all the time and hit
movin’ and jiggin’ all over.” Mrs. Polly looked at her husband, a tear rolling down her cheek. “Right, Hiram?”

“That’s so.”

“But today I noticed that there were a few kicks, but no jiggin’. Then I didn’t feel nothing and become scared.”

Shelagh nodded. She rummaged in her bag, pulling out her soft measuring tape. “I’m going to measure you again, Mrs. Polly,” she said, placing the tape against her stomach. “There’s a chance that you’re further along in your pregnancy than we first suspected. When babies grow larger, they have less room to move, and a mother feels less fetal movement.” She measured and nodded, pulling the tape away. “I’m still reading 33 weeks, Mrs. Polly.” She placed her hands against the lower abdomen, palpating the uterus. “I think there is still plenty of room for baby,” she said, “and the head is not engaged.” She turned to Mr. Polly. “I believe the well water would be nice and cold this time of evening, Mr. Polly. Sometimes a sip or two of cold water will wake baby from his snooze!”

Mr. Polly nodded, grabbing a pail. “I’ll fetch it.”

Mrs. Polly grabbed Shelagh’s hand as her husband left. “What’s gon’ happen, Nurse?”

Shelagh squeezed Mrs. Polly’s fingers. “You’ll drink the water and we’ll try to relax. We’ll see if baby starts to move. If not, given your history, I think we should leave for Hyden Hospital.”

Swallowing hard, Mrs. Polly nodded. “Thank you fer traipsin’ up the mountain at night.”

“Of course,” Shelagh soothed. “You did just the right thing, Mrs. Polly.”

Mr. Polly returned with the water, filling a cup for his wife. As he handed it to her their hands brushed and Shelagh looked away, feeling as if she were an intruder in that moment of loving comfort. Instead, she dug into her bag, pulling out a lamp and specimen jar to take urine after Mrs. Polly drank the water.

“My Granny always said a babe could see a light shinin’ through the womb,” Mrs Polly said, indicating the lamp. “Might could be the lantern light would wake hit up.”
“A fetus can detect light and dark fairly early on,” Shelagh mused. She took up a lantern and moved it around the uncovered stomach. The circle of light highlighted the tight skin and Shelagh watched closely for any sign of movement.

Mrs. Polly took another sip of water. “I can’t believe hit can see--oh!” Her hand flew to her stomach. “Hit’s moving!”

Shelagh placed her own hand on Mrs. Polly’s stomach, grinning as she felt the baby stretch and then roll. She silently sent a prayer of thanks. “Hello, baby.”

Choking out a sob, Mrs. Polly clutched her stomach. “I thought sure we’s done for.”

Mr. Polly cleared his throat and muttered that he was going to check on his mule and Shelagh’s horse.

As he left the cabin, Shelagh smiled at Mrs. Polly. “As baby is moving I think that we’re okay to keep you here for the night. I do want to check your urine before I leave. In the morning, I’m going to fetch Dr. Turner to visit and he’ll make a determination on whether you should be in hospital.”

“Yes’m. Anything for this least ‘un.”

Shelagh smiled. “Indeed.”

After monitoring Mrs. Polly for another hour Shelagh took her leave, Mrs. B slowly picking her way down the dark mountain. It was gone midnight and the forest was foreboding in the dim light of her lantern. Several of the nurses had said that they would sing to themselves on the darkened trails, but Shelagh listened instead to the sounds of the mountain and Mrs. B’s sure step. She thought of Mrs. Polly’s tear-stained face and of the love she had witnessed between husband and wife. Above all, she thought of the baby’s strong heartbeat and her desire to see him born.

In the morning she would send Lisette to fetch doctor. He would soothe Mrs. Polly and together they could make a plan for her continuing care. Nodding resolutely, Shelagh sagged in fatigue as she and Mrs. B stepped off of the trail, Beech Fork Center well in sight. A light was on in the window, beckoning her across the distance. Yet as she put up Mrs. B for the night she began to fear that sleep would not come easily to her, as Mrs. Polly’s haunted face took its place in her mind.
each time she closed her eyes.
...such was my fear that you had veered very far from course. Now it seems that you have found a new calling in the mountains of America. I am reminded of the Psalm we once sang: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. You now are the help needed in that wild place. Upon reflection, I can see that it was, in fact, your path all along.... Cordially, Sr. Monica

Joan

Shelagh awakened to rain pounding on the roof. It was still dark and she turned, squinting at the clock as lightning illuminated the room. It was too early to wake, and she snuggled into the warmth of the blankets, willing her mind to rest. The bed was cozy, the warmth of the quilts protective against the deluge outside of the Center. She imagined the trees, bent in the wind, and the rising creeks, and buried her face a little farther into her pillow. And yet, sleep would not come. Her mind alighted on her patients: Mrs. Polly, awake with worries as she listened to the rain, Mrs. Sutherland, feeding her baby, a patient from clinic suffering severe morning sickness… Shelagh’s mind cataloged and sorted each patient, seeking to make a plan for the dawn.

It was Thursday. Shelagh cast her mind back, trying to remember Dr. Turner’s outpost clinic schedule as it had been posted at Hyden Hospital. Tuesday was Beech Fork, Wednesday had been… Red Bird, Thursday…. Was it Brutus Center? Shelagh’s mind jumbled in the dark and she yawned and rolled, looking at the darkness, her eyes barely making out the shape of the window on the far wall. Still her mind worked through her morning plans. If Dr. Turner could not be easily located then perhaps Lisette could make haste for Hyden Hospital to seek further assistance. Again she pictured the doctor’s schedule, trying to remember… He had been standing next to it, a smile on his face…

Shelagh awakened as her alarm rang. She slapped it, sitting up in the bed. The rain was a patter on the roof now, the sky still dark before dawn. She stretched, taking a moment to awaken tired muscles. It was almost a relief to wake, to set in motion the plan for Mrs. Polly. Standing from the bed, Shelagh began to dress, ready to wake Lisette so that the day could finally begin.

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Shelagh saddled Mrs. B, the horse looking almost mournfully out into the rain. “I know,” she said, patting the animal gently. “I don’t want to be going out into it any more than you!” She reached into her pocket and removed a carrot. “Perhaps this will sweeten the pot?”

Mrs. B took the carrot, stamping her hoof twice. Shelagh laughed. “Is that a ‘thank you’? If so,”
she said, looking into the horse’s eye, “you’re welcome.” Mrs. B tossed her head, shaking her mane and Shelagh giggled, enchanted. “Let us go and meet our patients, B…” She mounted up, heading out into the rain.

The ruts in the path were filled with water and overhangs made spontaneous waterfalls as they ascended the trail. The rain was cold, but Shelagh snuggled into her jacket and wraps, the hot tea and warmth of home still clinging to her skin. She would begin her day with postpartum patients before making her way to the Pollys. Lisette planned to track down Dr. Turner and have him meet her at the Polly cabin before the noon hour. Veering off the main trail, she guided Mrs. B over a rush of water, the stream parallel to the path swollen from its banks. The canopy of trees did little to provide shelter from the rain, new buds only just sprouting after winter. The locals promised that the mountain would be lush in summer, as verdant as it was now bare.

The first cabin on her list was closed up tightly against the weather, shutters secured against the wind. Shelagh sheltered Mrs. B and tried not to slip in the mud soup in front of the rock stoop at the door. She knocked. “Mrs. Johnson? Nurse calling!”

“Lauriette! Nurse done here!”

The door opened, warmth spilling out as she stepped inside. She smiled at the elderly woman who admitted her. “Good morning, Mrs. Frost.”

“Law, you’s wetter than water. Let me take your wraps and hang them by the fire. It’s Lord’s aplenty hot in here. Lauriette likes to keep it that way on account of the least ‘uns. It’s her home so I don’t complain.”

“Of course not,” Shelagh said, straightening her jacket and removing her hat. She looked toward the cradle. “How is the little one?”

“Sucklin’ fat and happy, Nurse. Hit eats so much that Lauriette’s sore as a boil, what with them teeth. I mixed her up some cream for them raw teats, but she said ye’d best look at it first.” Mrs. Frost set a covered cup on the table. “Didn’t mix no scent in. Might irritate ‘er more.”

“Indeed. What did you use in it?” Shelagh removed the cover and inspected the cream as Mrs. Frost listed the ingredients. “I think it’ll work just fine, Mrs. Frost. It if can give her some relief I don’t see why she shouldn’t use it.”
“Cora done said you had sense,” Mrs. Frost said, recovering her cream. “I can see she was right. Lauriette’s in the privy. Still bleeding like a stuck pig.”

Shelagh nodded. “In that case, let me see to this one.” She went to the cradle, smiling at the sleeping baby. “Shall I?”

Mrs. Frost nodded.

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After leaving a smiling Lauriette Johnson, breasts attended to and breastfeeding advice given, Shelagh and Mrs. B continued through the cold rain to a small shanty, barely large enough for the family it contained. Holding her breath, Shelagh entered, managing to keep from wrinkling her nose at the stench in the air. “Good morning, Mrs. Lay,” she said, removing her outer wrap. “How are you getting along?”

“Tolerable,” Mrs. Lay croaked, switching her baby at her breast. “I kin see you’re having a time.” She indicated Shelagh’s wet uniform. “Least you wiped yer boots afore you come in.”

Shelagh strained to keep herself from looking at the piles of junk sitting around the room. According to the other nurses, Mrs. Lay’s husband was convinced that he might be able to sell the items, yet nothing seemed ever to leave the cabin. More only came in. “I’m pleased to hear that you’re doing well. The little one? Any trouble feeding?”

“Eats all the damn time, Nurse.” Mrs. Lay laughed. “I would too if’n I could get a reliable meal.”

Little eyes peered at Shelagh from around the room. She smiled at the children, but they didn’t smile back. “Is there anything that I can do to help you, Mrs. Lay? We do have some provisions—”

“Hit ain’t come to that, Nurse.” Mrs. Lay stood from the table. “Best get on with it. Ray be home soon and don’t like to see me in the bed if hit ain’t dark.”

Shelagh nodded. “We’ll be finished in a jiffy.”
The rain receded as Shelagh sheltered Mrs. B at the Polly cabin. Two dogs splashed through the mud, panting tongues indicating their friendliness as she stepped toward the door.

A horse whinnied behind her and she turned, smiling to see Dr. Turner’s approach. She waited under the overhang of the barn, the dogs nudging at her legs.

Dr. Turner hello’d to her, sheltering his horse. He took a moment to pull his medical bag from the saddle before turning to smile at her. “Which is yours?” He gestured to the dogs, a smile tugging at his lips, rain dripping from his hat.

Shelagh wrinkled her brow. “Which--oh!” She laughed, remembering their conversation about the FNS advertisement and how she was yet to be the owner of a dog. “Neither, though this one,” she indicated the dog nudging her leg, “seems quite keen!”

“Doesn’t he?” Dr. Turner smiled at the dog. “Had one like it as a boy. He’d run everyone off from the cabin, friend or foe!”

“I never had a dog. There were some cats about, but never one that was mine.”

“Well, I’ll help you find that dog one day, Nurse.” He gestured toward the house with his bag. “Lisette said that your patient was experiencing decreased fetal movement?”

“Yes, Doctor. Janie Polly, 22 years old; 33 weeks gestation. Her first was lost in the 8th month after preterm labor. This pregnancy appeared to be progressing normally, though her most recent urine tests have tested positive for elevated glucose. Last night, upon my arrival, I immediately found the fetal heartbeat and had some success with fetal movement after light and cold water tests. Her fundal height remains consistent with her dates.”

Dr. Turner nodded. “There is an association between decreased fetal movement and poor fetal outcomes. The high glucose could be a sign of maternal diabetes, and the management of that will take precedence.” He sighed, the thumb and forefinger of his right hand rubbing together at his side. “Let’s hope the lack of movement was a one-off. After you,” he said, relaxing his fingers and extending his arm for her to walk in front of him.
Mrs. Polly opened the door as they approached, throwing a few scraps into the yard for the dogs. “Sorry about them dogs, Nurse,” she said in a rush. “They’re hard to hold back oncet they git to runnin’.”

“There was nothing to worry about, Mrs. Polly.” Shelagh entered the warm cabin, chilled through as she was from the raw dampness of the day.

“Dr. Turner,” Mrs. Polly said, reaching a hand out. “Might I take yer hat, sir?”

“Do you have a hook here?” He looked at the wall to the right of the door. “Ah,” he said, placing his hat on it. “Is it fine there?”

“Oh, yes,” she said, easing herself down on the bed. “Thank you for coming out to me. I purely hate to take you from yer duties.”

“It’s no trouble,” Dr. Turner said, stepping further into the room. “We want to make sure that everything is healthy for you and your baby.”

Shelagh placed her bag on the table. “How was baby overnight? Did you sleep a wink?”

“Hit’s been movin’, Nurse. Maybe not jiggin’ like hit did but movin’.” She placed a hand to her forehead. “I don’t think I slept, but Hiram said I did a bit.”

“He in the mines this morning?” Dr. Turner availed himself to the water Shelagh had poured into a bowl for them to wash.

“Yes, sir. Wanted to stay with me, but it can’t be helped.”

“No,” Dr. Turner said in agreement. “I remember it well. Do you have anyone who can be here with you when Mr. Polly isn’t?”

“My cousin done gon’ sit with me, but she ain’t come by yet, Doctor.”
Shelagh finished washing her hands, drying them on a towel. “That’s fine, Mrs. Polly. As you know, I’ve asked Doctor to be here this morning so that we can make a plan for you and the little one. I think we should begin with a thorough examination so that we will be better able to see what baby’s been up to.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, moving toward the bed as Shelagh gestured. “Hiram told me to rest today. I feel the baby movin’ more when I’m prone.”

“That’s often the case,” Shelagh said, unbuttoning Mrs. Polly’s dress to expose her stomach. “Doctor is going to examine you and perform some of the same actions that I did just last night. It will allow him to make a better diagnosis.”

“All right.” She looked up at the doctor, eyes wide with fear. “We’ll do whatever you say, Dr. Turner. I know you’ll tell me plain.”

“Yes, I will,” he promised, smiling at Mrs. Polly. “Now,” he said, looking at a large lard can sitting by the fire. “Would it be all right if I sat on that can? It’ll help me to be closer for you examination.”

A smile cracked over Mrs. Polly’s face. “I’m sure hit ain’t the first lard can you done sat on, Doctor!”

He grinned back. “What would we do without them? My Momma would set us all on them. Cheaper than a chair!” He laughed. “My brothers and I used to poke string through the small ones to make them into stilts.” He pantomimed stepping high as if cans were attached to his feet.

Shelagh looked from Dr. Turner to the now smiling Mrs. Polly. A small smile edged up her lips as she fetched the lard can. “Here you are, Doctor.”

“Thank you, Nurse Mannion.” He sat and pulled his measuring tape from his bag. “I’m going to start by measuring you. I’m certain that Nurse Mannion has the correct height, but it can’t hurt to check once more.”

Shelagh nodded, smiling encouragingly at Mrs. Polly as they both watched Dr. Turner work. He measured and then palpated before taking his stethoscope and listening to baby’s heartbeat. He nodded, hanging the instrument from his neck. “Baby’s heartbeat is fine, Mrs. Polly. I hear no distress there. Sometimes a baby’s movements can seem to lessen as a pregnancy progresses.”
There’s less and less room for the least ‘un to squirm!” His smile eased off into a contemplative gaze. “Have you experienced any bleeding? Cramps?”

“No,” Mrs Polly said. “I hain’t bled since I was caught.”

“The lack of cramping and bleeding is a good sign. Have you felt the baby move in the past hour?”

“I thought I felt a little kick just after I eat some vittles.”

Dr. Turner nodded. “Nurse Mannion told me that last night the baby moved after a drink of cold water and light was shined on you?”

“Yes. Hit rolled.”

“Let’s see if we can’t recreate some of that.” He looked toward Shelagh, already pouring water into a cup.

Shelagh handed the cup to Mrs. Polly, and Dr. Turner looked to his watch, placing a hand on Mrs. Polly’s stomach. “If baby is sleeping we might have to wait awhile, but I am going to place my hands in different places on your belly to see if I can feel anything.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, and they waited. After fifteen minutes passed, Dr. Turner removed his hand. “I felt a small nudge. Let’s get you something to eat. You tell me if you feel any movement after that.”

“The rest of my vittles are just there, Nurse,” Mrs. Polly said, pointing to the table.

Shelagh fetched the plate, bringing it to Mrs. Polly. “I know it’s probably a bit odd to have us watching you as you eat!”

With a nod, Mrs. Polly took a bite of cornbread. “Hiram don’t know how to cook much,” she said, holding up the slightly overdone bread. “But he can fry some cornbread now and again.”
Dr. Turner laughed. “My son says that about the only thing I can make for him is fried bread.”

As they waited for Mrs. Polly to finish her meal, they chatted about the weather until Mrs. Polly placed a hand to her stomach. “Here, Doctor!”

Placing his hand at the spot she had indicated, he felt the movement, his eyes narrowing as the movement slowed. A moment later there was a nudge just below his hand and he followed the movement. “That’s an elbow,” he murmured, watching the tight skin before him.

Mrs. Polly smiled before taking another bite. Over the next hour, Dr. Turner and Shelagh monitored the baby’s movements, each taking a turn on the lard can at Mrs. Polly’s side.

After the hour was finished, Dr. Turner looked to Mrs. Polly. “The baby is moving, though perhaps not as often as we would like. It may be due to baby’s increasing size or to excess fluid in the womb. However, as you have suffered a preterm loss before, and you’ve had high urine sugar results, I believe that we should monitor you over to Hyden. How do you feel about that?”

“I want to go,” Mrs. Polly blurted out. A tear ran out of her eye. “I was hoping you’d say that, Dr. Turner. Hiram wanted it, too. I can’t sit in this cabin and--” she broke off, more tears rolling down her face.

Shelagh took Mrs. Polly’s hand and squeezed. “There are many reasons that a baby might move less as a pregnancy progresses. If you’re in hospital the nurses can monitor you and baby, just to be safe.”

Dr. Turner nodded in agreement. “It doesn’t necessarily have to be for the remainder of your pregnancy. If the nurses can ascertain a normal amount of fetal movement you might be back home in just a few days. I believe, though, that this is the best course of action, just to be safe.” He stood from the can, taking it up to place back beside the fireplace. “I’ll see you there daily, as well.”

A knock came at the door. Mrs. Polly, buttoning her dress, called out a hello.

A slight woman bustled in, unwrapping a scarf from her head. “The rain’s done stopped, but the wind is keen!” She looked up at Dr. Turner and Shelagh, nodding her head at them. “I’m glad to see the pair of you here. How’s our Janie?”
“Said they’re sending me to Hyden, Mary,” Mrs. Polly said, wiping her face and looking around the cabin, eyes resting on the table and the dirty dishes piled there. “But I don’t know who’ll take care of Hiram.”

“Don’t you be worrying. Hi will be fine. You worry about that one there.” Mary took up the dishes, placing them in a washing tub.

Mrs. Polly placed a hand to her stomach. “He’s all I think about.”

Dr. Turner looked to Shelagh. “Might I speak with you, Nurse?”

Shelagh nodded, moving toward the fireplace where he stood. “Yes, Doctor?”

“I was thinking that instead of sending a courier up here that we might accompany her to Hyden. I’m not so sure she would be comfortable riding with only me, and the sooner we get her monitored, the better.”

“I agree. I do have other patients on the trail, but I can have Lisette ride to find if any need immediate assistance. Otherwise, I can see them tomorrow or over the next few days to make up the difference.”

“I don’t wish to make more work for you. You nurses are swamped already.”

“I’ll manage. I always do. Besides,” Shelagh said, looking back to Mrs. Polly. “She’s my patient.” She looked back to find Dr. Turner smiling at her.

Something in his smile and nod made Shelagh feel as if he understood.

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Hyden Hospital stood on Thousandsticks Mountain, just above the town of Hyden. A heavy fog obscured the few bare trees that stood to the back of the building. The front seemed unfinished; not yet softened with flowers or bushes in bloom. The ground at the step was muddy and pockmarked with puddles of standing water from the day’s rains. All the same, Mrs. Polly sighed and said, “Thank the good Lord,” at the sight of the building, and privately Shelagh offered up her
own prayer of thanks. The sky had darkened and rain had started again before they had barely cleared the mountain trail, following them over the slow eight-mile trek. Mrs. Polly kept well to her mule yet Shelagh’s mind had been only on the stress that the ride might be causing both mother and baby. It was a relief to hand the bridles over to the young couriers who pushed from the front door to splash through the muck. Dr. Turner took hold of Mrs. Polly’s arm and small suitcase, helping her across the slippery mess. Seeing his bag still slung over his horse, Shelagh stopped the courier and took it in hand, carrying it and her own bags to gingerly step over the mud and onto the porch.

The warmth of the entrance hall shocked her as she removed her soaked wrap and overcoat. Her glasses were wet and fogged over. She placed Dr. Turner’s bag on the floor to discreetly wipe her glasses with her slightly damp handkerchief. Her fingers were sore and cold as she removed her gloves, and she moved them to stimulate blood flow. Mrs. Polly was looking around at the stone walls, leaning heavily against Dr. Turner. Shelagh started to move forward when a nurse dressed in hospital whites approached the front desk. “Goodness me,” she said, looking at the trio. “An admittance, Doctor?”

“Yes,” he said, steadying Mrs. Polly. “Thank you, Nurse Parrish. This is one of Nurse Mannion’s patients, Janie Polly. I’d like to admit her for observation and fetal monitoring. Perhaps you could see to getting her settled before we see to the intake form?”

“Of course, Doctor.” Nurse Parrish stepped forward, taking Mrs. Polly’s arm. “You look as if you brought the rain with you,” she said, accepting Mrs. Polly’s bag from Dr. Turner. “Let’s see if we can’t find you something dry and warm to change into…”

Watching Nurse Parrish walk Mrs. Polly toward the ward, Shelagh turned to the doctor as he blew out a relieved breath. “The last mile was the hardest,” she said, thinking back to the drenching rain that had soaked them on their approach to Hyden.

Dr. Turner pulled his hat from his head. “I’m sure the rain will stop now that we’re here.” His lips edged up on one side. “Nurse Parrish will be a right moment settling Mrs. Polly. I’m sure you could avail yourself to the Nurses Quarters. I’ll be on the ward with Mrs Polly to prepare a plan of care once I wring out this hat.”

Shelagh smiled. “One of the patients said that I was ‘wetter than water’ this morning. She was right!” Another nurse passed them on her way to the laundry. Shelagh looked to the doctor. “I’ll clean up and look to the form. Thank you for your assistance today, Doctor.” She started to walk away, startled to nudge his medical bag with her foot. “Oh!” Her face flushed as picked up the bag and held it out to him. “I thought you might want this and brought it inside.”

He smiled, taking the heavy case from her. “Thank you, Nurse Mannion.” He nodded with
another smile and turned to leave, boots heavy in the quiet hall.

Shelagh watched him go before turning to the opposite hall, toward the Nurses Quarters. Her stomach growled and she looked at her watch, not surprised that it was gone four in the afternoon. She hadn’t felt the hunger for the sting of the rain while bringing her patient in, but now she felt uncomfortable and cold in the damp clothing and longed for a hot meal and an even hotter bath. She cleaned up as best she could, toweling dry and combing her hair and borrowing a dry uniform jacket from a sympathetic Nurse Barron, who immediately hung the soaked jacket to dry. Nurse Barron also offered leftover soup to Shelagh, who responded eagerly, heating the meal on the nurses’ cookstove. The warm, hearty soup fortified her and she thanked Nurse Barron as the other nurse went to bed after a long shift. Closing the door to the nurses’ quarters, Shelagh smiled to see Nurse Parrish manning the intake table once more.

“How is Mrs. Polly? We had quite the ride in.”

Nurse Parrish stuck a pencil behind her ear. “She’s settled, poor thing. I believe she’s worn out from worry more so than the trek from Beech Fork.”

“Quite. Dr. Turner felt that hospital was the best place for her. I only hope the news will be good.” Shelagh drummed her fingers on the counter and looked out the window at the grey, foreboding sky. “I’ll check on Mrs. Polly before beginning my ride home. I’ve been rained on all day long. I suppose that I can handle a few more drops!”

Giggling, Nurse Parrish shuffled a pile of papers into a folder. “You looked half-drowned when I turned the corner. Dr. Turner’s hat was as long as his face!”

Shelagh bristled slightly at the comparison. “It’s been a trying day.”

Unaware of Shelagh’s annoyance, Nurse Parrish gestured toward the window. “The rain makes me homesick. My Mum used to turn us out in rubbers and slickers to play in it.” The nurse looked to Shelagh’s damp uniform. “I daresay it’s not as fun when you have to be out in it!” She took her pencil from her ear, tapping it against the desk and rolling it between her fingers. “Before I forget, I’ll be at Beech Fork next week for your clinic. Mrs. Breckinridge has decided that, as only one nurse is now at each clinic, that a ‘floating nurse’ should lend a hand when possible. I start at Brutus on Monday, and that puts me at Beech Fork on Tuesday.”

“Wonderful!” Shelagh’s spirits lightened. “Between Dr. Turner, Cora, Lisette, and myself we managed last clinic day, but another pair of skilled hands is always welcome.”
“Cora’s still coming to every clinic, then?” Nurse Parrish rolled her eyes good-naturedly. “She’s a deft hand, but all that pipe smoke!”

“It’s so thick in some cabins that one can barely breathe!” Shelagh shook her head, looking at the ward door and then at her wristwatch. “Has Dr. Turner gone through? I’d like to go ahead and check on Mrs. Polly.”

“He has. Go on through. We’ve a packed house this evening--every bed taken!”

“Busy night! I’m certain my clinic will be just as packed on Tuesday. We’ll see you there.” Shelagh smiled her thanks as Nurse Parrish made a face before smiling back in a gesture of farewell.

Inside the ward the twelve beds were indeed filled, several patients dozing and others chatting, a light din in the air as Shelagh walked past a few drawn curtains to find Mrs. Polly situated in a far bed, near the nurse’s station. Dr. Turner stood with a chart in his hand, filling out some notes. His hair was slicked back and his white coat was dry over his damp clothing. Mrs. Polly smiled as she noticed Shelagh, though it didn’t quite reach her eyes. “Hello, Mrs. Polly,” Shelagh said, reaching the bed and nodding to the doctor. “Have you settled in well? Is there anything I can be getting for you?”

“Well, not now, thank ya, Nurse Mannion.” Mrs. Polly’s hands draped her stomach. “Hit moved just a moment ago, but now I’m just gon’ be sittin’ here, waiting on hit to let me know hit’s alive.”

“We’ll be monitoring you, Mrs. Polly.” Dr. Turner looked up from his notes, passing the clipboard to Shelagh. “I’ve requested that we start with the nurse on call checking for fetal movement and heart rate every hour. I’d also like it if you might help us out, too.”

Mrs. Polly looked at Dr. Turner. “Me?”

“Let us know if you notice any patterns of movement. Is he more likely to move after you’ve walked the ward? Or after you’ve eaten?” Dr. Turner looked at Shelagh over Mrs. Polly’s head before looking back to smile kindly at the young patient. “I know you’re right scared, Mrs. Polly. But we’ll see you through.”

“Thank you, Doctor Turner. Yer one of the good’ns.”
Dr. Turner nodded his thanks and smiled at Shelagh and Mrs. Polly before moving on to the next bed, speaking in low tones with the patient. Shelagh looked to Mrs. Polly. “I’ll ride out to check on you in a few days. If you have need of me before then, ask Dr. Turner or one of the nurses. I’ll ride over. Will Mr. Polly be able to visit?”

“I reckon. Tomorrow, hit might be.” Mrs. Polly reached for Shelagh’s hand, squeezing her fingers lightly before letting go. “Thank ya, Nurse Mannion. Now we’re here, we got a chance.”

On the ride back to Beech Fork, Shelagh lifted up a prayer for Mrs. Polly and her unborn child, beseeching the Lord, in His wisdom, to carry the mother through. She lifted each of her patients before the Lord, finishing her prayer with an intercession on behalf of Dr. Turner, that he may help her to ease Mrs. Polly and her family through whatever trial or jubilation that may come next.

Chapter End Notes

The lard can stilts are my homage to Ramona Quimby and her tuna can stilts. <3
Single Girl, Married Girl

...doing well, and can hardly believe myself that it’s been so many months since I left for America. In answer to your questions, there are two doctors at Hyden Hospital, both fine physicians. Doctor Turner presides over my clinic on Tuesdays and is a deft and caring hand with all, but especially the children. As to the nurses, there are several, all committed to this worthy cause. Even as we make shift, I feel blessed to be part of such a community. It is not unlike the one I left in the East End... Yours Faithfully, Shelagh

The rain cleared as the week ended, and by Friday Shelagh was happy to step out into a warm morning, the sun bright in a clear blue sky. Mrs. B was eager to be let out of her stall, the scent of the wind and the warmth seeming to beckon her. Shelagh felt the same call and together they climbed the trail, Mrs. B forging ahead as Shelagh recalled each patient due to be seen that morning. The Smith cabin was first on her list, further out than any other family she visited. The trail broke off before reaching the remote homestead, and Shelagh followed a worn footpath, Mrs. B carefully picking through the rough terrain. Outside of the cabin Shelagh hitched Mrs. B to a fencepost, pulling her midwifery bag from the horse’s back.

“I’ll see to yer horse, ma’am.”

Shelagh looked down at a skinny slip of a boy who kicked his feet in the dust path leading to the cabin’s front door. “Thank you,” she said, smiling at his kindness. “Is your mother just inside...?”

“Jack,” he answered, before shaking his head. “No’m. Momma done walked down to the creek. Said she felt fer too hot after cooking some vittles, carryin’ as she is. She set me to lookin’ fer ya. Said you’d have a uniform and everything.” He eyed her clothing with what seemed to be pity. “It’s not what I thought it’d be. But yer horse sure is nice.”

Shelagh tried to keep her lips from twitching. “Thank you. She really is a nice horse. But she’s sneaky. Be careful when you water and feed her.” The boy grinned and went to gently pat Mrs. B. Shelagh looked into the darkened cabin. She could well imagine an expectant mother would rather be in the cool shade near the creek than inside the stuffy, hot cabin. She caught Jack’s eye and nodded down the path, toward a stand of trees. “Is the creek over through there?”

“‘Tis. Just walk till you see my Momma and sisters. You can’t miss ‘em. Are you aimin’ to examine her down there?”

“Oh,” Shelagh said, trying to hold back a laugh. “No, I couldn’t examine her there! I’m sure I’ll bring her back to the cabin, Jack. Thank you for pointing me--oh, hello there,” Shelagh said, to
another little boy who ambled up to them on the dusty walk.

The boy greeted her with a grin. “I’ve come to play with Jack, if his chores are finished.” He eyed Shelagh more closely. “You must be new. Your uniform is still very neat.”

“My uniform is neat?”

Jack slung his arm around the other boy’s shoulders. “You oughta know this ‘un, nurse ma’am. He be knowing all the nurses.”

“Not this one. Not yet,” the boy said to Jack, before turning to Shelagh and sticking out his hand. “Timothy Turner. Pleased to meet ya.”

Shelagh grinned, taking his hand. “Timothy! This is a surprise. Your father speaks of you often.”

Tim dropped her hand with a mischievous smile. “Is that good or bad, Nurse?”

Shelagh couldn’t stop a laugh. “Your father is very proud of you. He says only good things! All true, I’m certain.”

Jack hid a snort in a laugh. “Come on, Tim--”

“Hi-dee!” Jack’s mother, Mrs. Smith, cut into the conversation, moving slowly up the path. “Y’all children clear out. Nurse Mannion done come to see me.”

Jack and Tim ran over to Mrs. B, who whinnied, nudging at Tim’s shoulder. “Hello, Bailey B,” Tim said, gently touching her nose.

Shelagh shared a smile with Mrs. Smith. “How are you feeling today?”

Mrs. Smith walked toward the cabin door. “Hot. This weather done changed with this warm wind. Course, I was hot when it was rainin’, too.” Inside the darkened cabin she settled herself on to the bed with a sigh. “There’s Lord’s aplenty to do afore this one gets here. I’d just as soon git it over
Placing her bag on the table, Shelagh took out a pan to wash her hands. “Let’s see what little one is up to, shall we?”

After what Shelagh termed an ‘unrewardingly normal’ checkup, Mrs. Smith called in her eldest daughters to help her to prepare the noon meal. As Shelagh placed her bags back onto Mrs. B’s back, she looked at the horse, thinking of how Timothy had referred to her as “Bailey B”. He must have known the horse now for many years, just as he knew the other nurses and midwives. He looked very much like his father, skinny and angular, with the same dark hair. It was nice to put a face with the stories she had heard of the boy. As she readied to mount the horse’s back she heard laughter just beyond the cabin, toward the creek. She turned to see Jack, Tim, and Jack’s younger sisters running after a butterfly, laughing and yelling as they tried to catch it.

They ran up the path toward her, and she held out her hand to stop the children from running into Mrs. B. The butterfly landed softly on her finger. Holding her breath, she realized the children were silent as the insect opened and closed its crimson wings before taking flight again.

“How’d you do that?” Jack’s mouth was open wide. “I never done that.”

“You’re more like to step on one, Jack Tobias,” one of the little sisters huffed.

Another little blonde grinned at Shelagh. “Was that the first butterfly you done seed this spring, Nurse ma’am?”

“It was,” Shelagh answered.

“Then you’ll soon have a purty new dress the color of them wings!”

The little girls started running again, but Timothy and Jack stayed by Shelagh. “That was an Anaea andria Scudder,” Timothy said.

“A goatweed leafwing,” Jack clarified. “We done read that other name in a book! Wanna see?”
Tim nodded. “My Dad brung it to me from Louisville. It’s got all sorts of butterflies in it.”

“I’d like that very much.” Shelagh smiled. “I’d never seen a butterfly like it! It looked almost like an autumn leaf.”

“It’s how they hide from those that’ll eat ‘em up!” Jack sounded delighted at the prospect. “Come on, the book’s down to the creek.”

Shelagh looked at her wristwatch. “For a few moments, then.”

The little girls were singing a song about a group of pigs and enthusiastically falling down as Shelagh followed the boys to the creek. The sun cut through the small stand of trees and the water glittered invitingly, flowing over a pebbled bottom. The book sat on a rock, and Timothy picked it up, turning pages.

“Here it is, Nurse Mannion.” He handed her the book, grinning. “Might be that you’ll see more of them now that spring’s coming on.”

Shelagh read over the entry on the insect. “I’ve yet to see a butterfly on my travels, but even if I did, I’m not certain I’d have the time to stop and look at it very closely before it fluttered away!”

“My Dad never has time either,” Timothy said, looking to Jack who had jumped out onto a flat rock sticking out of the water. “He’s run from pillar to post all day long. Always someone in need.”

“Indeed,” Shelagh said gently. “Your Dad does wonderful and very needed work.” Not wanting to overstep any boundaries, Shelagh smiled. “I’m sure he’d be very happy to know how much you love your book!”

“Sometimes we read it together when he comes up to sup.”

Before Shelagh could respond, Jack hopped to another rock. “Tim! There’s a huge crawdad just ready to eat my toes!”

Timothy jumped immediately to the rock Jack had vacated. “Look at ‘im!” He looked at Shelagh
with a bright grin. “Do ya want to see?”

Enchanted by the tableau, Shelagh walked from the muddy bank and into the creek, her boots more than enough barrier between her and the muck. “I don’t believe I’ve ever seen a crawdad. Where is he?”

Shelagh waved at the boys as she and Mrs. B started the long trek back to the trail. She smiled in remembrance of their lively chatter, thinking to tell Dr. Turner how much she enjoyed her time with his young son and with Jack. Timothy’s comment about Dr. Turner being torn between his job and Timothy gave her pause. She felt almost guilty for spending time with Timothy, seeing the joy on his face as they spoke about butterflies and crawdads. A corner of her mind wondered if Dr. Turner ever waded out into a creek with his son, but she shut off the train of thought before she could ponder it much further. Dr. Turner and Timothy’s private life was their own affair. She had only passing knowledge of the youngster, though he did seem to be very dear.

As she and Mrs. B emerged out onto the trail, they passed a logger who tipped his hat before hurrying down the path. From Beech Fork the mountain seemed so still and quiet, but on the trails one found more than they could ever really imagine. Kentucky had been little more than a fantasy to her as she had written to Mary Breckinridge from her lodgings in London. The books she read couldn’t have readied her for the reality of mountain living. Not even the information pamphlets and meeting with Mrs. Breckinridge had readied her for this new reality. In many ways the work was the same as it had been in Poplar. Women seemed to hold the same joys and fears when it came to childbirth. The outer trappings were different and though there had been poverty in Poplar it wasn’t as abject as it was in the Kentucky mountains.

She was finding her feet in this place. Making friends, earning the trust of patients, and relying on her instincts were all thrilling, if daunting, tasks. As in Poplar her blue uniform denoted her status to patients, though the sky blue trouser suit seemed far different than the dark blue woolen habit that she had once worn. And yet, it was another utilitarian livery, one that allowed her to blend in with a crowd of like-minded individuals. The uniform kept her apart from the people of Beech Fork, the women who frequented clinic and their children. Once more she was among a community but held apart from it, too, and a piece of her was glad for the separation. It would make it easier to go back home once her contract ended. The thought of London and beginning life anew once more was disconcerting as Shelagh and Mrs. B picked through the rocky Kentucky trail, and Shelagh shook her head to dislodge the disorderly thoughts. Splaying her hand against Mrs. B’s neck, she rubbed the warm hide of the animal, looking up into the swaying and just budding branches above. She breathed in deeply, anchoring herself to the horse, the mountain, the work.

The next cabin on her daily rounds was empty. Shelagh frowned, glancing at her watch. Just gone
the noon hour, she thought that the family should be home. She knocked and received no answer. Only two weeks before she had visited with the woman of the house, offering advice on morning sickness and fatigue. “I’ll try again tomorrow, Mrs. B,” she said, mounting the horse once more.

Further down the trail she stopped at a curved tree, sitting against it to eat a small lunch while Mrs. B enjoyed her own. It was quiet with only the warm wind blowing. Shelagh took a notebook from her jacket pocket, flipping it open to record notes on Mrs. Smith and the empty McMillian cabin. The next home on her daily rounds was the Slone cabin. Mrs. Sloan was an old hand at childbirth, currently expecting her fifteenth birth. “Law,” she’d said, the first time Shelagh rode in, “if I can’t give birth to this one by now, I’m not good for spit!” Still, she had been willing to listen to Shelagh’s advice, peppering in advice on how Shelagh could win over other families. “Listen to ‘em. If they feel you heerd ‘em they’ll done listen to you, honey.”

Shelagh thought of Mrs. Polly’s fears, Mrs. Sutherland’s labor, Cora’s assistance, and Dr. Turner’s professionalism. She was learning much of the way of the mountain people through trial and error and in being willing to hear their stories. Taking a moment for a small prayer, she headed off on Mrs. B’s back, ready again to listen.

--

Next Tuesday the line of women and children outside of Beech Fork’s door was even longer than the week before, the warm weather encouraging more families down from the mountain and up from the river. Some women had brought blankets and picnic lunches and children ran around the trees and field, their chatter and laughter a backdrop to the bustle of clinic. Lisette efficiently checked in and directed patients, and Nurse Parrish was more than welcome, two nurses shortening wait times considerably as they waited for Dr. Turner’s arrival. He had been involved with an unexpected breech as Nurse Parrish had left Hyden Hospital, though she reported that he still expected to make it to the outpost before the end of clinic.

Shelagh took her clipboard to the waiting room, calling for her next patient. Pregnant, the patient stood with some difficulty, blowing out a breath as she gained her feet. “It’s about time you lot called me back,” she huffed. “Been waitin’ near all day.”

Looking out at the morning sun, Shelagh bit her tongue. “I apologize for the wait, Mrs. Maitland. In here, please.” She gestured to her small working area, closing the curtain as she stepped in with the patient. “How are you feeling today?”

“Like hell.” Mrs. Maitland eased onto the examination bed. “From here on out you kin come to my cabin like you do them hoity toity women.”
Biting her tongue harder, Shelagh set down the clipboard. “Home visits are for those who cannot make it to clinic, Mrs. Maitland, or for those far enough along that we must visit weekly or every two weeks. Let’s be examining you to see how you’re progressing. You’re probably right at the cusp of two-week visitations.”

Mrs. Maitland sniffed and crossed her arms. “You know how to get to my cabin? I’m up there near that Cora Tucker. I knowed for some time you buddied up with her. Keeps runnin’ her mouth, don’t she?”

“Mrs. Maitland, I’m sure that I can find your cabin or that Cora can direct me.” Mrs. Maitland’s cheeks reddened slightly. “Now, can you tell me what you mean when you say that you feel so poorly?”

--

As usual, the titter of the women first alerted her to his presence. Dr. Turner pushed through the Clinic’s door just after the nooning hour, tie askew, beads of sweat on his brow. “Hello, ladies,” he said absently, moving through the crowd and nodding at Lisette and Cora. Shelagh looked up from the baby she was weighing, watching as he walked into the kitchen to wash his hands.

“He runs all over the county, don’t he?” The young mother held her arms out for her baby. “My Pappy said he always been that way. Never could set still.”

Shelagh’s cheeks flushed. “That’s part of what makes him quite the doctor.”

“I always liked him. Used to give us least ‘uns candy for Christmas. His wife sure were nice, too. Real lovin’ with one another and with their boy. A pure shame, her dyin’ like that, leaving them two to fend for themselves. And you know how men are without a woman. Don’t think he had any idea of how to raise that boy.” She shook her head. “A damn shame.”

With a polite nod, Shelagh gave the baby’s weight, attempting to change the subject. “It would seem that Alice is eating and gaining weight just as she should. You’re doing wonderfully with her.”

“Thank you, Nurse. She’s been better ‘an gold.”
Shelagh smiled as the mother walked away, the baby’s bright blue eyes watching over her mother’s shoulders. Cora had her hands on her knees, leading the youngest children in a song about an old hen, the children imitating her crackly voice. Nurse Parrish disappeared behind a curtain with a patient and Shelagh moved toward the kitchen to boil urine for sugar testing. Opening the tap to wash her hands, she looked out through the kitchen hatch at a child’s delighted laugh. Sitting with a young child at the vaccination table, Dr. Turner was holding a tongue depressor, dancing it around. She smiled at the delight in the little boy’s eyes, but as Dr. Turner placed the depressor on the table and reached for the needle, the boy’s eyes closed and he pressed backward into his mother.

“I’ll jus’ hold his arm for ya, Doctor,” the mother said, looking frustrated.

Dr. Turner shook his head. “Let me try this, Mrs. Bell.” He took a pen from his coat pocket and marked on the tongue depressor. “This is for you, Benny,” he said, holding the wooden stick out to the boy. “What do you think of him?” He tilted his head with a smile for the youngster.

The little boy looked at the stick, grinning at it. Mrs. Bell admired the depressor. “Eyes, nose, and mouth. Yer own little stick-man. Look, Benny!” Her eyes met Dr. Turner’s as she spoke and he quickly gave the injection to Benny, who flinched slightly but held tightly to his stick.

A bandage was placed on the boy’s arm and Benny and Mrs. Bell stood to leave. Shelagh released a breath, her heart pounding in her ears as she seemed unable to tear her gaze away from the doctor. He sat now in profile, filling out Benny’s vaccination record. As if seeing him for the first time, she noticed the line of his jaw, the curve of his lip, and the dark hair that spilled over his forehead as he worked.

The children singing with Cora burst into laughter and Shelagh colored, the moment broken. The sink water ran cold over her hands. Snatching them back, she hurriedly closed the tap and dried her hands on a clean flannel. She turned and picked up a spirit lamp, swallowing hard as she became intent once more on her task, denying herself one last look out of the hatch.

There was work to be done. Pushing all other thoughts from her mind, she set about doing it.

--

Dr. Turner apologized as he left clinic early. He was needed at a cabin on Greasy Creek to look in on a widow, heavy in her ninth month of pregnancy, suffering from pleurisy after a bout of spring flu. Shelagh watched the door close behind him before turning to the patients left in the waiting room. She called to a young mother who nodded with a distracted smile, picking up her youngest
while warning the older children to behave. The children didn’t seem to notice, too busy playing at stacking and knocking down wooden blocks. Cora smiled at the woman as she and Shelagh entered their curtain.

“Jus’ soon as yer done there I’ll flip on the radio set, Mol’,“ she said with a grin. “It’s almost time to hear them Carters. I do purely love ‘em.”

“Oh, I do too,” the young patient said, placing her baby on the examination bed. “I hear *Single Girl, Married Girl* and I could just weep over it’tall.”

Shelagh twisted her mouth sympathetically. “I’m afraid I don’t know that song, Mrs. Ellis.”

“Don’t ya? I reckon you haven’t had time to listen to no music, busy as you be.” Mrs. Ellis shook her head. “Jus’ listen. It’ll be sure to be played today. Mrs. Carter done said so last week. All the women write in, jus’ for that one. I would, too, if I could write.” She ran a hand over the baby’s scalp as he began to fuss. “And if Randall’d let me.”

Shelagh smiled, trying to cheer the patient. “I’ll be sure to listen, then. How is baby today?”

--

Cora flipped on the radio, turning the dial until the station picked up out of the noise. The women in the waiting room paused in gathering their children and belongings, some humming along to the sound of Sara Carter’s haunting voice. “She tells it like it sure is,” one woman murmured, swaying back and forth with her daughter. “I wished we could get a radio for up home. I almost wouldn’t mind doing the warsh if I could listen to this all day while a-doing it!”

The other women laughed, one crowing that it would be a pure difference from singing her own songs to break the loneliness. Shelagh smiled at the chatter, beginning to pull trays toward the sink for a pre-wash. She set large pots of water onto the stove to boil, enjoying the music and talk that filled the center.

Nurse Parrish came in and started on a tray, shaking her head conspiratorially toward Shelagh as the women in the outer room began debating over which song should play next. “I don’t know about you, Shelagh, but most of those songs sound the same to me! It wasn’t what we were listening to back home!”
Shelagh thought of plainsong and the way her voice used to rise with her Sisters’ in supplication. “No,” she said, placing syringes into a pile, “it’s not.” She cleaned a scalpel carefully. “Molly Ellis mentioned a song that she wanted me to listen for in today’s broadcast. She said that the song makes her want to shed tears.”

Nurse Parrish looked out into the crowd, nodding her head toward Molly. “The redhead?”

“That’s her. Twenty-one years old and five children already!” Shelagh picked up another instrument to clean, stopping herself before she could say more. Molly Ellis’s husband seemed decent, though the comment on being allowed to write a letter bothered Shelagh.

“It seems most of these women are old before their time,” Nurse Parrish agreed with a small shake of her head. “One patient at Red Bird is barely fifteen and nearing her ninth month.”

“How old is the father?”

“Sixteen. I delivered his baby sister two weeks ago.”

Shelagh looked out into the waiting room once more. “It is a hard life.”

Nurse Parrish didn’t comment further as they both pre-cleaned the instruments before placing them into the boiling pots. Lost in her own thoughts, Shelagh noticed the women had gone quiet. She concentrated on the words of the plaintive song that played:

**Single girl, oh single girl**

*She goes to the store and buys*

*Oh goes to the store and buys*

**Married girl, oh, married girl**

*She rocks the cradle and cries*

Shelagh’s eyes instinctively sought out Molly Ellis. She stood at the door, squalling baby in one arm and her small children gathered around in a huddle. As Mrs. Ellis pushed the door open, she ran the back of her hand under her eye.
Stomach clenched, Shelagh walked out into the waiting room just as the song’s final verse faded away. She flipped the switch and turned it off, smiling at the women and nodding goodbyes as they left for the long journey home, another Tuesday clinic concluded.
Little Mountain Church House

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

...the hospital is accessible via riding and walking paths and also by a steep staircase built into the hillside. It is as modern as our rural location allows, housing the only autoclave in FNS possession. The lights often flicker, however, when the autoclave cycles. I made mention in my last letter of the doctors and nurses who work so assiduously, but realize that I did not tell you of Hyden Hospital’s most infamous resident - October the Cow...

Wiping at the line of sweat on her brow, Shelagh led Mrs. B into a stall. She removed her bags, heavy with instruments, and set about caring for Mrs. B, patting the horse gently as she left the stall. A patient rode side-saddle on a mule as Shelagh exited the barn, shading her eyes to wave at the beaming new mother and the father who grinned even as he led the mule down the side of the rocky hill. At the entrance to Hyden Hospital Shelagh laughed as she squeezed by a cow standing at the steps. She looked to the young man at the hospital door who was sheepishly hiding a hand behind his back. “Henry, are you feeding October tea cakes?”

Henry’s eyes widened. “No, ma’am!” He faltered under Shelagh’s amusement. “It’s pie crust,” he said, bringing his hand out from behind his back. “She done eat her tea cakes with Mac today.”

“It’s little wonder she puts out so much milk with treats like pie and cake awaiting her!” Shelagh laughed at the pair as she dashed inside. October was known for her milking prowess, keeping all patients in a plentiful supply. The nurses and Henry spoiled her, October following them around as a dutiful pet. Looking out of the hospital doors she could see October turning to walk after Henry, no doubt hoping for another treat. Shaking her head with a small smile, she walked toward the preparation room, a bag of instruments ready for the autoclave. Boiling the instruments as they did multiple times a day at Beech Fork and on home visits was a perfectly efficient method of sterilization, but Shelagh never turned down a chance to use the autoclave. Coming into Hyden to check on Mrs. Polly gave her just the opportunity.

She stopped abruptly as she entered the room, eyes wide as she took notice of Dr. Turner removing instruments from the machine. He looked up as he heard her enter, and a smile spread across his face. “Oh, Nurse Mannion. It’s nice to see you here in Hyden.”

“Dr. Turner. Greetings.” Shelagh looked out into the corridor. “Shall I come back?”
“Not at all. I’m almost finished here.” He picked a pair of clamps from the autoclave, looking at her with a smile. “I’ve been meaning to say, you made quite an impression on my boy.”

Shelagh smiled, thinking back to her afternoon with Timothy and Jack. “It was lovely to meet him.”

“When I went out to my brother’s to have supper with Timothy, you were the only thing he could talk about. He was sure impressed with your skills. I believe that catching a butterfly on your finger would have done the trick, but not running from a crawdad and not minding the mud and the muck? I think you’ve won his little heart.”

Blushing slightly, Shelagh placed her bag on the counter and turned to the sink to wash her hands. “I don’t think it was nearly so impressive, Dr. Turner. He seemed very joyful. He and Jack were both quite exuberant.” She busied herself with thoroughly scrubbing her hands, trying to control her heart rate.

Turning from the sink, Shelagh watched as the doctor placed the last of his instruments in his bag. He looked thoughtful, his fingers twitching as he closed the lid to the autoclave.

“Joyful. I reckon he is that,” Dr. Turner said. His instruments clattered as he tied off his bag. He glanced at Shelagh. “I’ve done nothing but worry about him, not having a mother, and living over there with my brother and his lot.”

He pressed his lips together as if he had said too much. His eyes flickered at Shelagh, and she got the impression that he was going to apologize for speaking out of turn. “I lost my mother when I was very young,” Shelagh said, before she could stop herself. She wanted to let him know that she understood in some small way. She thought of the light in Timothy’s eyes as he had jumped from rock to rock, laughing. “Children are more resilient than you think.” Shelagh met his eyes, heart pounding once more.

His eyes widened fractionally, and seemed to warm as if in sympathy. “I’m sorry.”

Shelagh bowed her head, flickering her gaze to meet his before pulling on a pair of gloves to sort her instruments. “It was long ago.”

He didn’t press further. “Well, Timothy was very impressed with you. Not as much with me, I’m afraid.” Dr. Turner signed, running a hand through his fringe. “I was late for supper and then
called out before we’d even had the apple betty.”

Shelagh could well imagine a neighbor or another nurse seeking him out at his brother’s cabin, and the disappointed look on Timothy’s face when his father left. *My Dad never has time either*, Timothy had said, and Shelagh’s pounding heart squeezed in sympathy.

Nurse Parrish breezed in before she could reply. “Dr. Turner, we’ve a laboring mother in need of a consultation, should you have the time now before your rounds begin.”

Dr. Turner placed his cleaned bag of instruments onto a ready tray. “I’ll be right with you, Nurse.”

Nurse Parrish nodded. “I’ll wait for you outside of the ward, Doctor.”

Glancing at the autoclave, Dr. Turner smiled at Shelagh. “It’s all yours, though I apologize that I didn’t get to turn it around for you.”

“It’s no matter,” Shelagh answered, smiling at him. “I can turn it around and clean my instruments before meeting with Mrs. Polly. She’s the reason I’m here, though I never turn down an opportunity to use the autoclave!”

“Perhaps one day each outpost will have one of its own.” He returned her smile before turning to the sink to wash his hands. “Mrs. Polly is as well as can be expected. She’s concerned and far from home. We’ve monitored the fetal movement closely, and baby is responding to stimuli. I do still fear a pre-term labor, however, given her history.” He shrugged into his white coat. “I believe that she’ll be glad to see her midwife.”

Shelagh smiled. “Thank you, Doctor. I’m looking forward to seeing her as well.”

“I must meet with Nurse Parrish and our patient.” He stepped towards the door, but turned back. “Thank you for your words, Nurse Mannion. You’re very kind.”

His dark eyes met hers and Shelagh’s cheeks warmed. “Think nothing of it, Dr. Turner.” He smiled and left the room. Shelagh released a breath before turning to the autoclave, attempting to remove the image of his warm gaze from her mind.
Mrs. Polly’s eyes brightened as Shelagh entered the ward. She sat up straighter in the bed, one hand curled protectively across her abdomen. “Nurse Mannion! It sure is nice to see you.”

“Hello, Mrs. Polly!” Shelagh sat in the chair next to the bed. “How are you feeling today?”

The brightness about her face dimmed somewhat at the question. “I had some painin’ in my back, Nurse. Earlier today. The least ‘un keeps a-movin’ some, but no more jiggin’. I keep wishin’ there was a way to see inside… I sound a fool.”

“Not at all,” Shelagh said, gently patting Mrs. Polly’s hand. “You sound like a mother.”

Mrs. Polly’s lips trembled. “That’s what I keep sayin’. Hit don’t matter if he ain’t borned yet. I’m still his Momma.”

“You’re taking such good care of him.” Shelagh noticed the dark circles under Mrs. Polly’s eyes. “Are you not resting?”

Picking at the bedspread, Mrs. Polly grimaced. “I try. I keep worryin’, and when I’m not frettin’, I’m put out by all the other women in here.” She lowered her voice. “I don’t know how their husbands stand ‘em. Can’t a one of them keep quiet up in the night.”

Shelagh pressed her lips together to keep from laughing. “It sounds very frustrating!”

“I shouldn’t say nothin’ like that, Nurse Mannion. They’re all so nice to me. But I’d rather be home with…” Mrs. Polly’s cheeks flushed red.

Shelagh smiled. “How is Mr. Polly?”

“Lord, I don’t think he’s been a-eatin’. He don’t like my sister’s cooking, barely tolerates my cousin’s. He’s been taking extra shifts in the mine to make some money for my stay here in Hyden. Them nurses say not to worry over the costs, but I do.” Mrs. Polly hung her head. “I don’t think he’s sleepin’ no more ‘an me.”
“You’re both under an immense amount of stress at the moment, Mrs. Polly.”

The young woman held up her head. “We’ll make do,” she said, seemingly ready to change the subject.

Shelagh stood and picked up Mrs. Polly’s chart, flipping through the notes made by the other nurses. “Is there anything I can do to be of help to you or baby?”

Mrs. Polly pressed her lips together. “I don’t want to be a bother.”

“I’m certain that you could never be a bother!”

“Would you check me over? Them other nurses are nice an’ all but they don’t know my baby like you do.” Mrs. Polly’s fingers clenched over her stomach before relaxing.

“Well, of course. It must be so difficult to sit and wait on your checks each day.”

“I never knew a day to be so long.” Relaxing back into the bed, Mrs. Polly lifted her hospital gown to expose her stomach. “Dr. Turner said that the baby was a growin’ still. I’m bigger than I was.”

At the doctor’s name, Shelagh flushed. “Does he check you daily?”

“He does, along with them nurses, and sometimes that other doc, too. I’m not lacking for checks or company. Cora Tucker comes some days and sits with me, and my sisters and cousins do, too.”

“I’m glad.” Shelagh bent over the bed, placing her hands on the distended abdomen. “Tell me if anything is uncomfortable or painful.” She palpated the uterus slowly, feeling for baby’s position. “He’s not head down just yet,” she murmured, before her face lit in a grin as a small knee or elbow jabbed at her. “I believe I may have awakened him or interrupted his elevenses.”

“Eleven--what?” Mrs. Polly laughed. “Whatever it is, I’m always purely happy to feel hit move!”
Her eyes filled with tears. “I hope soon we can git home to Hiram.”

Shelagh smiled softly, pulling Mrs. Polly’s gown back over her stomach. “I hope so, too, Mrs. Polly. Very soon.”

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The warm wind cooled as the afternoon approached, cloud cover blocking the warmth of the sun. Shelagh entered through Beech Fork’s back door, depositing her newly sterilized equipment in the ready room. The chart on the wall reminded her that an inventory would soon need to be taken and she thought that perhaps if the evening were quiet that she might start on that tedious, but necessary, task. The Center was quiet in the early evening. Lisette was off to Hyden to meet up with another group of Couriers who were to meet the train in Hazard. A dental clinic was to be held at Hyden Hospital over the coming weekend and the couriers were tasked with bringing in the dentist and his supplies over the long trek. Shelagh picked up a few pamphlets on dentistry and placed them into her saddlebags, thinking perhaps that a few of the patients on her morning rounds might wish to bring their children to the event.

Alone with her thoughts as she exited the ready room, Shelagh drifted through the Center, knowing that she should rest, but tense and cagey. She was relieved that Mrs. Polly’s pregnancy continued, and that the little one was moving enough to respond to stimuli. Yet the change in fetal movement and the worry over pre-term delivery tugged at her. Her prayer list was as long as her arm and growing longer by the day, but as far as patients went, Mrs. Polly was dear to her heart and one that she prayed for most often. Dr. Turner and his son were now in her prayers, as well, but her mind stuttered at the thought of the doctor and she sat on the sofa in the waiting room, looking at the large stone hearth that dominated the room.

Beech Fork had been the very first FNS Outpost built almost ten years before. It was homier than the other Outposts, the hearth and plumbing the envy of the other Centers. “It’ll give you a feeling of home,” Mrs. Breckinridge had said to Shelagh as she accepted the post. The exterior of the Center did look like a pleasing valley cottage. The rustic interior was also appealing, if not exactly what Shelagh would pick in a home for herself. It sufficed for her patients’ needs, however, and there was really very little more she could ask of the Center except the electrical capability to run an autoclave and more reliable lighting.

Home. Mrs. Breckinridge’s smiling face had given her a sense that perhaps she could make the Outpost feel like home. Home was an abstract idea to her mind. Nonnatus House was no longer home, though she could hardly stop expecting to wake to Sister Julienne’s warm voice alerting to her to an early-morning delivery or to sing in the chapel with her sisters, raising her voice in supplication. She did not long for the life left behind so much as for the people she had known in it, though their letters brought them near to her heart once more. One her desk was a half-written letter intended for Sister Evangelina. She could easily imagine the dauntless nun among the
Kentuckians. With her frank wit she would fit right in, making friends, and bringing the rural Outposts to her exacting standards. Sister Monica Joan and Cora would become fast friends, Shelagh was certain. Cora held many folk beliefs that Sister Monica Joan would enjoy learning about, though Cora’s love of mashed up cornbread in a glass of buttermilk wasn’t quite as sweet as Sister Monica Joan’s overwhelming hankering for cake. Sister Julienne would be a balm to the souls of the Kentuckians, her calm and understanding demeanor endearing her to the clinic mothers.

Shelagh’s eyes misted briefly as she thought of her former sisters, but she sniffed, looking once more to the hearth. Her two-year contract felt longest when she was alone at Beech Fork in the evenings. It seemed that making the Center feel more like home could help her homesickness, but though Mrs. Breckinridge did not mind if the nurses decorated the Centers, Shelagh wasn’t sure where to begin. Even if she wished to decorate there were few shops in which she could purchase items and she had so few mementos of her own with which to make her mark on Beech Fork. In packing for America she had brought her few possessions; a handful of photographs and books, clothing, toiletries, and her Bible. Her trunk had been noticeably smaller than the nurses she had travelled with, and now she found that though she did not wish for more material things, she did wish for a way to make Beech Fork feel like her home and less of a stop-over or gap year in her life. When she had first stepped into Beech Fork she had not intended to become so involved, to feel so close to the patients and her colleagues. Now she found that she wished to make a place for herself among them.

Opening her trunk she thumbed through the photographs, looking again at her parents on their wedding day, her father in front of his store, a photo from her schoolgirl days, and finally one of her dear Sisters. She placed them on the bed before pulling from the trunk each book and her Bible, standing them upright on her dresser. Pressing her lips together in thought, she stepped briefly out to the porch, collecting two rocks that were often used as doorstops. Back in the bedroom she pressed them to each end of the set of books, as temporary bookends. She carefully placing her hand mirror, brush, and comb next to the books. A small vase of flowers would be lovely next to the comb, and she resolved to find one under the counters of the kitchen.

Tucking the photographs back into the trunk, she closed it, finding that the room was little changed from when she had first entered it, but that it felt a little more like hers. Each day that passed gave her a new foothold in this place and as she turned out the light to begin the inventory she looked at her books and smiled.

Sunday morning was warmer still than the days before. Shelagh couldn’t believe how quickly the seasons changed. Where she and Mrs. B had picked through hoarfrost only two weeks before, the days were now warm with a wafty wind. The locals had told her not to get used to it, that there was cold and dreary weather yet to come. Winter extended out into April and sometimes May, they told her, with the appearance of Redbud, Dogwood, Locust, and Blackberry ‘winters’-- weeks in which the weather grew unseasonably cold once more. Looking out into the bright sunshine and blue...
skies, Shelagh could hardly remember the slate grey of the mid-April sky, and hoped that all the winter she would see in Kentucky was over until much later in the year.

It had been a quiet night in the Center and for that, Shelagh was thankful. The dental clinic at Hyden Hospital had been a rousing success, but also a trying day full of crying children and worried patients. One bright spot to the day had been Timothy Turner plopping down in front of the dentist with a smile, opening his mouth very widely to find that he had no cavities. “I didn’t think I would,” he informed Shelagh shyly afterward. “Dad always harps on me ‘bout my teeth. My cousins can’t stand it, neither, but we all listen. We don’t want to up and lose our teeth!”

It had been lovely to see Timothy again. It seemed the entire county had shown up for the event. Timothy ran off after speaking with her and Shelagh’s heart fluttered as she watched him run to his father. Dr. Turner’s smile was bright for his son and she smiled to watch him listen so intently to the small boy. Moments later Timothy ran off with Jack and a few other boys. Shelagh watched Dr. Turner walk through the crowds, stopping to talk to people he knew, friend and patient alike. Though he smiled and shook hands the brightness that had been evident in him while speaking with Timothy seemed to be missing as he made his way through throngs of people. Eventually she caught sight of him slipping into the hospital’s side door, and thought to follow him, to seek out an update on Mrs. Polly’s condition. Once she gained the steps to the hospital she saw him riding away, his horse headed down Thousandsticks toward Red Bird’s district. Mrs. Polly had been well, though false labor had given her a fright the evening before. Shelagh sat with her and offered what comfort she could, remembering Dr. Turner’s face when he had said that decreased fetal movement often led to poor fetal outcomes.

She had prayed on her own for the Polly baby and decided now, as she pinned her hair to attend church with Cora, to add the baby to the church’s prayer list. She had not yet found a congregation in Kentucky, there being no Anglicans for many miles. Cora had invited her to services many times, and though Shelagh appreciated Cora’s candor and canny ability to discern the sincerity of a person or group of people, she had as yet been unable to attend. As she finished dressing, she found that she was excited to once more worship with others and with her dear friend.

Cole Fork Assembly of God was a newer church, built down a dirt road near a fork in the river. Cora had explained that an English woman established the church in early 1932, having been called by the Lord to the Kentucky mountains to preach the Word and build churches. A former nurse, Marion Wakeman felt deeply moved to provide churches to the people of the mountains and was even still establishing new Assemblies throughout the region. “It’s good people here, Shelagh,” Cora said. “I would not do you wrong.” Cora had been sitting in her rocker, puffing on her pipe as she had invited Shelagh to church. Once Shelagh agreed, Cora smiled. “And I won’t bring no buttermilk to the picnic,” she said with a wink, leaving Shelagh shaking her head and smiling.
Cole Fork’s congregation met three times on Sundays. Cora said that she didn’t hold with going to church all day on the Lord’s Day. “Women have got to have time to rest,” she said, puffing out pipe smoke. “But most of them men don’t care none for that, do they?” Privately Shelagh agreed that rest would do most of her patients a world of good, but she could also understand the need to meet with fellow parishioners to praise and worship and feed one’s spirit. Shelagh led Mrs. B up the dirt road toward the church, joining a queue of other church members as they rode in. She recognized many of them and smiled and nodded. She wore her uniform, as Mrs. Breckinridge expected of the nurses when they interacted with the community. The uniform granted her instant recognition among the people of Leslie County, but also afforded her respect and dignity. Yet looking at the young mothers turned out in the Sunday best, Shelagh felt even more out of place than she would have done in her own clothing.

Cora waved at her from the church door, where she stood talking with each person as they entered. Next to her was an older gentleman who slapped men on their backs and gently took the hands of women and small children. His face beamed red with delight, and Shelagh couldn’t help but smile when she finally stood before him and Cora.

“Oh, Brother Sean, this here is Nurse Mannion. She’s a Godly woman, and a good friend. I’m happier than you know to have her here with us today.” Cora took Shelagh’s hand and patted it.

Brother Sean smiled his wide grin and took Shelagh’s hand when Cora finished. “It’s a plum pleasure to meet ya, Nurse. My wife and least uns will be pleased to meet ya at our Sunday School. Sister Cora tells me that you have been looking fer a congregation since you’ve been in Beech Fork. I do hope you’ll like what you see here today, ma’am.”

“It’ll be a mite different than what she’s a-used to, Sean!” Cora laughed, slapping her leg. “Come on, now. You kin sit right in aside of me.”

Shelagh smiled at Brother Sean before following Cora inside. The church was still new, and obviously well cared for, the pleasing scents of wood and polish surrounding the happy bustle around the pews. Inwardly Shelagh worried that Cora might march her around, introducing her to the people she didn’t know, but instead Cora led her to a middle pew, sitting with her amidst the movement. “It’s a large congregation,” she said, noticing a few patients and smiling at them.

“We were jus’ as pleased to get our own church building,” Cora said, waving to an elderly woman in another pew. “Makes it easier to hear the Good Word.”

“That makes it wonderful, indeed!” Shelagh looked around at the people sitting in the pews. “Will we start with Sunday School?”
Nodding, Cora picked up a hymnal. “We’ll start with a prayer, a song, and then break into Sunday School. The children love it. See them all there, lined up.”

Shelagh turned to see the children in line, startling to see Timothy Turner laughing with Jack. “Oh,” she said, heart pounding, “I didn’t realize the Turners came to church here, too.”

Cora looked up at Tim, catching his eye. He smiled and waved as Jack tried to take advantage of his inattention to poke him. Cora laughed. “Them two. Thick as thieves. You’d almost think Jack was his brother. Them behind Jack, those are Timothy’s cousins.”

Shelagh looked at the dark-haired girls and boys lined up behind Jack. “I’ve not met Dr. Turner’s family beyond Timothy.” She pressed her lips together before asking, “Are Dr. Turner and his brother here today?”

J jerking her head back, Cora nodded. “Dr. Turner’s brother, Thomas and his wife Anna Jane always sit in that corner. But you’ll not find the doctor with ‘im. If he’s here, he’s outside with the horses or under a tree. Doesn’t darken the church-house door.”

Shelagh’s forehead creased. She started to ask Cora for more information, but Brother Sean took to the pulpit as the children followed their Sunday School teachers from the building.

“It’s a beautiful day before the Lord,” Brother Sean said, holding out his arms and smiling at the congregation. “Will someone say ‘Amen’?”

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The sun was warm as they exited the church. Several patients stopped to speak with Shelagh and Cora, Cora kissing each baby’s cheek with an exclamation of how well each child looked. Shelagh laughed and waved at a towheaded toddler who blew kisses over his mother’s shoulder. Cora touched her arm. “Shelagh,” she said, nodding to a couple who stood before them, “this here is Dr. Turner’s brother, Thomas and his wife, Anna Jane.”

Shelagh blinked for a moment at Thomas. “Oh!” she said, smiling to cover her momentary pause at his resemblance to Dr. Turner. “Greetings. It’s lovely to meet you.”

Thomas inclined his head and returned the smile. “And you, ma’am.”
Anna Jane smiled too, eyes bright under her Sunday bonnet. “I’ve been wanting to meet you, Nurse Mannion. Timothy was sure taken with you.”

Shelagh smiled. “He’s a dear little boy. Jack, too.”

“They’re good uns,” Anna Jane agreed. “Tim always helps me around the house and never shirks his chores.” She looked at Cora with a conspiratorial grin. “But the two of ‘em sure know how to make their own fun.”

Cora slapped her leg. “Reminds me of you and Patrick, Thomas. Always going from dawn to dusk and thereafter.”

Thomas’s smile was faint. “That we did. But Timothy finds time to up and finish his chores before stickin’ his nose in them medical magazines.”

“He’s Patrick made over,” Anna Jane said, placing a hand on her husband’s arm. “Always findin’ somethin’ of interest to learn about.”


“Yes.” Anna Jane smiled. “We’d love to have ya to supper one evenin’. Being new still, you haven’t had much time to settle, I’d imagine.”

Shelagh smiled, nodding to Cora. “I’ve had help.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Thomas said, smiling fully. “Mrs. Cora knows everyone ‘round.”

“Whether they want to know me or not.” Cora laughed. “Nurse Mannion is one of the finest I’ve yet had the pleasure to be knowing.”

“Yes,” Thomas answered. “From what Patrick says, I’d say she is. Just the other night he told us-.” he was cut off when a young woman holding an infant interrupted.
Anna Jane grinned, taking the baby. She gurgled at him, tickling his chin. “My newest grandyoung’un.” She expertly settled him at her waist. “I expect we’d best get these children fed.”

“I’ll pack over the baskets, Annie.” Thomas nodded to the ladies before walking toward his horse.

She looked to Shelagh and Cora. “Would you like to sup with us?”

“We might head over your way later, Anna Jane, thank ya. I’m gon’ let the girl eat then meet some more people.”

Anna Jane nodded. “Come to supper one evening,” she said to Shelagh. “Whenever you can. We’d all like it if you did.”

Shelagh fought the flush in her cheeks from Thomas’s unexpected comments. “I will,” she said to Anna Jane. “Thank you.”

The other woman grinned, taking her grandchild and walking toward her family, gathered around their blanket.

“Thomas never was as sweet as Patrick,” Cora said. “But there’s something about them Turner boys.”

Shelagh flushed red, glad that Cora had turned to her saddlebag, pulling from it several wrapped packages.

“I brung food enough for us two, maybe a few more, if any are so inclined,” she said. “But we might be a-looking over there at Maudie’s basket. Can’t nobody bake a better dessert.”

Shelagh smiled as her cheeks cooled. “I’m not much of a hand in the kitchen. Thank goodness for Mrs. Soard and Mrs. Wilkerson. If they didn’t cook and tend to the Center I believe that Lisette and I would starve!”
Cora nodded approvingly. “You girls shouldn’t have to cook for yourselves. Up the hills and down on the river all day and night delivering babies. You’d have a hell of a time fryin’ up something to fatten ya.” She looked down at Shelagh’s waist. “Shame you don’t like the buttermilk. It would fortify your bones.”

With a laugh, Shelagh began to relax as she took the parcel of lunch from Cora. “I’m afraid buttermilk and I will never agree, Cora,” she said, “but I do find myself quite keen on your cornbread!”

Cora’s smile was wide and delighted. “That’s why I packed some extra!”

“Mrs. Cora!” Timothy Turner ran and threw his arms around Cora. “Did you bring me some, too?”

Grinning wider, Cora patted Tim’s back and winked at Shelagh. “Listening to others’ conversations, Tim? Your Aunt Anna Jane was just here talkin’ with me and Nurse Mannion. What would she say?”

“That she also wants some of your cornbread!” Tim’s smile was mischievous as he accepted a thick wedge from Cora. He turned. “Dad! Mrs. Tucker done brought us cornbread!”

Shelagh’s heart began to pound as Dr. Turner grinned, walking through the church crowd with an overflowing basket in his hands. Her recently cooled cheeks flushed again.

He shifted a rolled magazine from under his arm and held the basket up for Cora to inspect. “Should be enough here to keep me for the week. But--” he smirked at Tim, before looking back at Cora, “there isn’t a woman here who can make cornbread as good as yours.”

Pursing her lips, Cora gave a wrapped package to Patrick. She sniffed. “There’s salt pork in there, too.”

“Thank you,” he said, tucking it into his basket. His eye caught Shelagh’s, and he smiled again. “Nurse Mannion.” He looked down at the basket and ruefully met her eyes. “The Beech Fork women keep me well fed.”

“They do the same for me.” Shelagh ducked her head slightly as Cora and Timothy stepped away.
to spread out a blanket.

“I’d imagine you’d have a spot at any blanket here,” Dr. Turner said, looking around at the crowd. He leaned in slightly. “Some are better at the stove than others,” he confided. “Yet all come at it with the same desire to help. To be neighborly.”

Shelagh smiled at his words, but found herself interested in the fringe of his hair as she dared to look up at him. It fell into his eyes as he leaned in, and Shelagh could not look away. “They’ve been very welcoming,” she said, faintly, startling when Tim crowed over something Cora said.

“Sit down,” Cora tutted, patting the blanket. “You too, Patrick. None of this sitting by yourself under a tree to read your book.” She nodded at the rolled up magazine.

With a sheepish look, Dr. Turner placed the magazine on the grass and folded his long legs to sit on the blanket. Shelagh sat next to Timothy, smiling as he began to tell a story of he and Jack evading being sprayed by a skunk. Dr. Turner laughed as he ate his lunch, and Shelagh smiled, tuning the story out to enjoy the happiness on Timothy’s face. She ate slowly, looking around at the crowd, acutely aware of Dr. Turner’s presence on the small blanket. He was tall even when he was seated, his hair still falling across his forehead. Shelagh’s eyes flitted toward him and her stomach clenched as he smiled at Timothy. She quickly looked away, eyes alighting on the partially rolled journal on the grass. “Oh,” she said, reaching out to touch a furled edge, just as Timothy finished his story. She thought of Thomas’s comments about both Patrick and Tim having their noses buried in medical magazines. "The Lancet.”

Dr. Turner turned to her. “Yes, I try to keep abreast of pertinent articles. I keep up with it and The Journal of the American Medical Association, as I can. Well, when the mail sees fit to deliver them.”

“I used to read through The Lancet every Saturday for any midwifery articles, though the Midwives Chronicle was really more my choice of reading material.” She paused, setting the wrap from her meal onto the blanket. “Now, of course, there is Mrs. Breckinridge’s publication.”

“Yes, I quite enjoy the news and stories that she publishes.” He picked up the journal and handed it to her. “I’m finished with it, if you’d like to take it to read.”

“Oh,” Shelagh said, looking down at the table of contents. “I couldn’t--”
“Dr. Turner!” The doctor turned as his name was called, standing from the blanket when he recognized one of the FNS couriers.

“Hello, Eula,” he said, gathering his basket. “Am I needed at Hyden or a house-call?”

“It’s Mr. Jones at Wolf Creek. His wife rode up to Hyden and said it’s bad. Nurse Parrish is on her way but asked me to find you.” Eula panted slightly, leaning over to catch her breath.

“Thank you,” Dr. Turner said, before turning back to Timothy. “Tim--”

“I know,” Tim said, dully. “You have to go.”

“I’m sorry, Tim. Really, I am…” he trailed off, looking back toward Eula. “I’ll try and make it out for supper this week.”

“Alright.” Tim took a large bite of cornbread.

“I’ll see him back to Anna Jane,” Cora said to Patrick. “Go on.”

Shelagh stood from the blanket. “Eula,” she said to the courier, “does Nurse Parrish need me to cover for her?” She noted the girl’s negative head shake before looking at Dr. Turner. “Do you need assistance with Mr. Jones?”

Dr. Turner also declined. “Thank you, Nurse. Stay, enjoy the picnic. You may be called back to Beech Fork before it’s over.” He took his basket and looked one last time at Timothy. “I’ll see you soon, son,” he said, before hastening away.

Timothy didn’t answer. Cora shook her head. “Won’t you stay, Eula?” She gestured to the blanket. “There’s plenty.”

Eula settled onto the blanket in Patrick’s spot. Timothy noticed Jack in the crowd and, receiving Cora’s permission, ran after him. Tidying the remains of the lunch in the quiet aftermath, Shelagh listened idly to Cora and Eula’s pleasantries before noticing the forgotten copy of *The Lancet* in the grass. Feeling somewhat secretive, she tucked it into her handbag before tuning back in and joining the conversation.
Sweet-toothed October the Cow and Mac were real friends at FNS. According to Mary Breckinridge's autobiography, October lived 12 years and was buried with honors with the horses for her service.
...many things I wish to share with all of you! I plan to include a copy of our Quarterly Bulletin with this letter. A particular article of interest outlines a Frontier Nurse’s daily time and how it is spent. I was surprised to find that, on average, slightly more of my time is spent in tending my horse than is spent in midwifery care! It surely seems those numbers should be flipped. My horse, Mrs. B, is very sweet and small, a perfect companion to take into the hills and down along the river--and sometimes through it!...

At the toll of a handbell, Cora stood from the blanket. “That’ll be the call to afternoon church. You’re welcome to go back on in if you’d like.” Around them many members of the congregation started to pack up their lunches and some were already mounting the church steps while others rode off for home or relatives’ homes.

Shelagh started to help Cora with packing up the blanket and the packages. Eula had left for Beech Fork, to see if Lisette needed to be spelled. “What are your plans for the afternoon, Cora?”

Cora cut her eyes to Shelagh and smiled. “I was a-hoping you’d ask me that.” She paused as friends called out greetings as they walked toward the next service. “I’d like to ride out to see to my friend Wilma Williams. Like me, she’s getting on in years. Was once the best midwife out here, though you’d never know it as she only worked over in Jettown.”

“Jettown?” Shelagh handed the blanket to Cora as they reached their horses. “I’ve not heard of it.”

“I’m not surprised.” Cora packed the saddlebag. “All her people lived over in Jettown, her kin and others. Had to set up their own place, so’s they could live free. But now they’s all but gone. Done moved on. Can’t blame ‘em if there’s nothing here for ‘em.”

“Moved on?” Before coming to Kentucky Shelagh and the other nurses had been given a local history, though nothing prepared her for such a separation of peoples by their skin color once she entered the States. Leslie County itself seemed almost completely settled by only white families and Shelagh had never heard of Jettown. “Is Jettown near Beech Fork?”
“It was never more than a small community.” Cora nodded her head. “Just down the river a piece. Most everyone there’s done moved up to Ohio or Michigan. There’s work there, I reckon. Wilma’s family’s going, too. But not until her granddaughter births her baby.”

“Are you looking in on her, Cora? Why isn’t she on our roster?”

“You know why, Shelagh.” Cora shook her head. “I reckon I can’t say I wouldn’ta been the same way as some of these if it hadn’t been for my Daddy running moonshine with Wilma’s father.”

“Moonshine?” Shelagh raised her eyebrows, nodding her head forward.

“Oh, Lord, yes. My Daddy got this idea in mind that he could make the shine and sell it all over the county, not just to white folk. He’d known Wilma’s father, El, from somewhere, I don’t know. Anyway, the two of them stuck their heads together and put the still up there near Jettown, down some narrow trail that I’m not sure I could find again if I tried. My older brothers and Wilma’s would run the shine out, but me and her were set to making sure no one come down the path. No one ever did. All she and I would do was play games and laugh together till the boys or our daddies told us we could go.”

“Cora!” Shelagh laughed as they mounted. “Weren’t you scared? Little girls guarding a trail?”

“We didn’t have enough sense in our heads to be scared!” Cora laughed. “I’m sure gonna miss Wilma.” She looked at Shelagh. “Will you go and see about this baby with me?”

Shelagh reined Mrs. B and trotted her ahead. She smiled at her friend. “Lead the way.”

--

The green water of the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River flowed behind Beech Fork Nursing Center and east toward the county line. As they rode toward Jettown they passed a few houses that Shelagh had visited, but soon broke through a small wooded area to reach a swath of water that Shelagh had not yet seen. Across the river was a small collection of houses.

Cora reined her horse. “There it is.” She nodded toward a clump of trees growing out of the hillside. “The ford is just there, but it’s a mite deep.”
“The ford at Asher Branch is the worst I’ve yet to experience,” Shelagh said, patting Mrs. B. “The water was up to the horse’s neck!”

“Good way to get a bath!” Cora laughed, smacking her leg. “You’ll see I wore my riding pants cause I hoped we’d come out this way! This ‘un’s not so bad as Asher but yer feet and legs will surely get damp.”

“Not with these,” Shelagh said, pointing to the high riding boots. She grinned at Cora before following her horse into the water. Well trained, Mrs. B stepped into the river, easily walking even as the water began to rise.

Halfway across, Shelagh looked down the river at the flowing water, struck again at how her life had changed so fully in the past few months. The view from the middle of the water was lovely, trees and rocky cliffs impressive under the afternoon sun. Cool water struck at her trouser legs, bringing her mind back to the task at hand, but her feet remained dry inside her snug boots. The horses eased onto the riverbank at the other side. “Are your feet wet?” Shelagh grinned at Cora, who shook her head with a laugh and led the way up the path to Jettown.

Wilma’s house stood on a muddy hill just above the river. Around it were houses that appeared to be empty, though a child looked out of the window of one, ducking back inside quickly as Shelagh and Mrs. B passed.

Outside of the clapboard house, Cora knocked before pushing open the door. “Wil, it’s just me, and I brung a nurse like I told ya I would.”

“Well, come on, then!” a voice called from inside the door.

Shelagh followed Cora into the darkened room to see an elderly woman sitting in a rocking chair. She looked at Cora to find her nodding encouragingly, so Shelagh smiled at Wilma. “Hello, Mrs. Williams,” she said, placing her midwifery bag on the table near the fireplace. “My name is Shelagh Mannion, nurse and midwife. And friend of Cora’s.”

“You’ve a lovely voice there,” Wilma said. “I bet anything yer a songbird.”

“She’s a golden voice, Wil,” Cora said. “Done heard her up to that church this very morning.”

“Church.” Wilma sighed. “I reckon that’ll be one good thing up in Ohio. I sure enough miss it.”

“Reverend Douglas moved on, then?” Cora settled into a straight backed chair.

“The reverend, our neighbors, my family--Lord knows there’s only a handful of us left here, Cora. Come hot summer I expect some folks be out here picking over the bones, living where they dared not step afore.”

“I purely hate to see you lose this place, Wilma. I knowed how much it meant to yer Daddy.”

Wilma’s lips ticked up in a bittersweet smile. “It did. And I’m gon’ miss it. The sound of the river and of a summer night.” She sighed. “But there’s a summer in Ohio, too. And Daddy would be prouder of the least uns--they’s what he did all of it fer.”

“Well, how’s Felice? She seemed good enough when I was here last, but I brung you the nurse.”

“She’s tolerable and fat,” Wilma said. “Eats everything we got and then some. I told her that baby don’t need all that she chews but she gon’ chew it anyway.”

“Lord, let her enjoy it, Wilma. Soon that baby’ll be chewing on her.”

Wilma and Cora laughed together and Shelagh shook her head, smiling at the old friends. When they calmed, Shelagh looked to Wilma. “Is it Felice that you would like for me to have a look at?”

“Yes, ma’am,” she said, rocking back in her chair. “It’s my eyes. I can’t see no longer. Looking at you now all I kin see is some dark and light. The doc said my eyesight was near gone afore he left to Ohio. Your doctor came and said the same. It’s far gone, he said, too far gone.”

“I’m sorry, Wilma.” Cora sighed. “Dr. Turner didn’t mention that he’d seen ya.”
“It was good of him to come here. Nothin’ to be sorry fer. I don’t have to look at everybody I know growin’ older.”

The women laughed again, though Cora reached out to pat her friend’s hand.

“Did Dr. Turner examine Felice, too?”

Wilma turned toward Shelagh’s voice. “No, she weren’t here when he was. I had a thought on having him deliver her. But I figure if you, Cora, were here and the nurse you said you knew, well, it’d be women in the room with Felice, like it ought to be. Like it woulda been, afore.” She tapped the arm of her chair and fell into silence. After a beat, she jerked her head toward the back of the house. “Y’all go on back there. Felice knows yer comin’.”

Cora touched Wilma’s shoulder as she passed and gestured for Shelagh to follow her. She stopped outside an open doorway and called out “Felice?”

“Come on in, Mrs. Cora,” a young voice called back. “I heard ever word.”

Following a chuckling Cora, Shelagh saw a young woman sitting in a small bed, her round cheeks pressed up in a grin. “Granmomma says yer coming. I told her you’d be here afore this one!” she pointed to her stomach. “I don’t think it wants to be borned, Mrs. Cora!”

“Well, honey, that’s the way of it, sometimes.” She winked. “The least ‘uns over to Hyden have started to believe the nurses are bringin’ the babies in their saddlebags!” Cora gestured Shelagh forward. “This here is Nurse Mannion. She didn’t bring no baby with ‘er, but she’ll look at ya and see what needs done.”

“Hello, Felice,” Shelagh said, stifling a smile and settling her bag onto the bed. “How are feeling today?”

“Tired. I thought this would done be over. I wisht you had brung a baby in yer bag.” She ran a hand over her stomach. “I think I’ve been carryin’ this one since time begun.”

Shelagh smiled. “I’m sure it feels like that! Would you consent to my checking on you and baby?”
Felice nodded, pulling up her shift. “The doc would check on me when he was here, and Granmomma’s friend Pearl, afore Cora started lookin’ in on me.”

“I’m sure your grandmother gives you quite a bit of advice,” Shelagh said, placing a pinard on Felice’s stomach. She smiled at the strong heartbeat.

“She’s can’t see none,” Felice said, moving her hand to her stomach. “But this morning she felt around and said the baby’s head was just…” she trailed off as she touched her abdomen. “Here.”

Shelagh placed her hands in the area to feel for the lie and confirmed Wilma’s finding. “Spot on!” She grinned with Cora and Felice. “Let me ask you a few questions, Felice, and do a few more checks…” After taking a history from Felice Shelagh took her measuring tape and checked fundal height. “I’m reading thirty-seven weeks, which seems to be correct with your dates.” She returned the tape to her bag. “Most babies are born at forty weeks and first babies can often be a wee bit on the late side, I’m afraid. Though baby is head down, you’re still carrying high and haven’t dropped. It could be another few days or as much as three or more weeks.”

Felice groaned. “Three weeks!” She grasped her stomach and sobered. “Maybe it’s the good Lord’s way of lettin’ us stay here longer. ‘Granmomma’s in no hurry for Ohio.”

“Well,” Shelagh smiled gently, “I’m sure that you’ll enjoy these last few days here together! I would also hope that you won’t take off straight away with a newborn!”

With a shake of her head, Felice sat up and righted her shift. “I don’t know which’ll be squallin’ more as we leave. This baby or,” she jerked her head toward the front room, “Granmomma.”

Shelagh and Cora crossed the river and rode away from the Williams’s house as late afternoon approached. It was still warm and breezy and Shelagh turned her face to the sun, enjoying the heat after the damp cool of the house on the river.

“I worry about them,” Cora said, leading her horse around a rut in the path. “Out on that river, most of the men gone.” She sighed. “Course, I’m home to an empty house, too.”
“Oh, Cora,” Shelagh said, her lips twisting with sympathy.

“It’s the way of it, I ‘xpect.” Cora pulled her horse to a stop at the fork in the path. “I remember thinkin’ that life would always go on the way it did back when I was a young woman, when I had Fount and all my friends were young. Now there’s only a few left my age and most can’t sit a horse. And now Wilma...” She frowned. “I don’t know I was ever good enough a friend to her.”

Pulling alongside, she reached for Cora’s hand. “She’s trusting you to deliver her great-grandchild. I would say that tells you just what she thinks of you.”

Cora squeezed Shelagh’s hand. “I reckon I got a few more babies to deliver yet.” She looked down the trail. “You be careful now, hear?”

“Only if you’ll do the same!” Shelagh smiled. “Goodnight, Cora.”

With a wave, Cora headed up into the hills, bound for home.

--

It was a lovely day for a ride. There would be paperwork, sterilization, and preparation for the week ahead at Beech Fork and so Shelagh took her time with Mrs. B, enjoying the just budding trees and wildflowers that had started to grow in what had once been muddy grass. Full white clouds sat in an impossibly blue sky and Shelagh smiled at the glory of God’s work in nature. The river flowed unhurriedly as she passed shanty houses and small cabins, waving here and there to familiar faces and curious children. Just ahead she noticed another rider and slowed Mrs. B’s gait so as not to overtake him. She recognized the Morgan with the distinctive pattern on its rear flank and her heart began to jump.

Riding closer, she pressed her lips together nervously before calling, “Dr. Turner! Greetings.” She brought Mrs. B to step alongside the Morgan.

Dr. Turner turned to her and broke into a smile. “Nurse Mannion!” He looked over his shoulder as if he might spy another rider. “Called out to a patient?”

“After a fashion,” she said, holding a hand to shield her eyes from the sun. “Cora did the calling.”
“Ah,” he said, one side of his mouth quirking. “She’s right good at that. I’ve been dragged halfway to Pineville and back looking after a few of her friends.” He laughed.

“She does seem to know practically everyone!” Shelagh smiled, too, before sobering. “She wanted me to see to Wilma Williams’s granddaughter, Felice. I understand that you’ve seen to Mrs. Williams,” she said, blushing slightly in the fear of being too familiar.

“I have,” he said, his fingers twitching as if he wanted to rub them together. “I’m afraid I wasn’t able to give her any good news.” He lifted his hat and brushed a hand over his head to push back the sweaty fringe from his brow. “I hope the examination of Felice was much better.”

Shelagh dropped her eyes from his dark hair as he righted his hat. “It… It was, much better.” Shelagh swallowed, trying to regain her composure. “The baby is in a good lie and will probably be born within the next three weeks!”

“Right happy news, then.” Dr. Turner shook his head. “Not as happy at Wolf Creek. I’d estimate Mr. Jones might have the same timeframe, perhaps a little longer.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.” Shelagh smiled at Dr. Turner’s nod. They rode in silence as they passed a row of small houses, several small children running about the water’s edge. She glanced sidelong at him, noticing how straight he sat in his saddle, his arms taut even with the horse in such a slow gait. His face was damp from the afternoon heat, his upper lip and jaw already darkened with stubble. He didn’t wear a beard as many men in Leslie County did, Shelagh thought idly, noticing the sharp curve of his jaw. She quickly lowered her eyes, taking in the frayed edges to his shirt sleeves and the worn fabric of his trousers.

“Some days it does seem I deliver more bad news than glad,” he said with a weary sigh. “Never gets any easier.”

“No,” Shelagh agreed. “It doesn’t.” The wind rustled through the trees, tiny green buds just beginning to show. “Timothy--”

“How did--”

Their eyes met as they spoke over one another. Dr. Turner smiled before laughing, and Shelagh ducked her head, a smile breaking over her face even as she tried to fight a blush of
embarrassment. “Please, go on.”

“Forgive me, Nurse Mannion. Mam Turner, my father’s mother, would never excuse me, talking over a lady. You were saying?”

Shelagh smiled again. “It was nothing much, really. I just wanted to inquire after Timothy. His spirits this afternoon were revived once he met up with Jack Smith.”

Dr. Turner flashed a grateful smile. “I hated leavin’ him there, even though Thom and Anna Jane had him. He’s still so young, and….” he trailed off. “I shouldn’t bother you with this, Nurse. But thank you for tellin’ me. I’m glad his good nature returned.”

Shelagh’s heart skipped at the look of loneliness that washed over Dr. Turner’s face. She had seen an identical look on Timothy’s that day at the creek. “Oh, it looked as if they were having a merry time, Doctor.” She paused, wondering if she should go further. “I met your brother and his wife today.” She waved at a woman hanging laundry on a line. “They were very kind.”

“They are,” Dr. Turner said, removing his canteen from the saddle hook and taking a long pull. “Anna Jane invited you to supper, of that I have no doubt. Done fed all of this county and half of Harlan.” He laughed, replacing the canteen.

A dog’s bark took their attention, and they pulled the horses to a stop as a large, black dog ran alongside. Dr. Turner grinned at Shelagh. “Still lookin’ for a dog, Nurse?”

Shelagh’s forehead wrinkled for a moment before she remembered her conversation with the doctor outside of Mrs. Polly’s house. “I must say that I did not expect one to to come to me!”

The dog wagged its tail and ran off into the underbrush. “I think that was Jeb Southworth’s dog,” Dr. Turner said, urging his horse onward. “Believe his name is Tray.”

“Tray?”

“There’s a tune, you might not have ever heard of it, I reckon. ‘Old Dog Tray’. About an old man with nothing left but his best friend, the dog.” He hummed for a moment, before smiling self-consciously. “I would once sing now and again.”
“Did you?” Shelagh smiled, thinking of the things they had in common. “So did I.”

“Not much time for it now,” he mused. “Always work to be done.”

“There is that, Doctor.” They rode in silence for a spell, before Shelagh inquired as to Mrs. Polly’s care.

“She asks after you,” he said with a smile. “I think she feels comforted when you’re there to do her checks.”

“I’ll admit to favoring her. I’ve been praying for a happy outcome.”

“I’m hopeful, too. She and Hiram are the best of us up in these hills.” He paused. “Did you know that your Mrs. Breckinridge has ordered a ‘Hess Bed’ for the hospital? It’s for premature babies. Have you heard of one?”

“I have heard of an incubator,” Shelagh said, forehead creasing again as she thought. “They could be life-changing for premature babies. When is it due to arrive?”

“I don’t know,” Dr. Turner said, his fingers twitching once more. “Every day I check the post or wait to hear from one of your Couriers. I’m in the hope that it’ll arrive for this least one…” he trailed off. “The post is not so regular through the mountains.”

Shelagh nodded. “I shall pray for it’s swift arrival.”

“I’d be obliged,” he said, a smile crossing his face before turning into a full grin. They came to a fork in the path and Dr. Turner tipped his hat. “Nurse Mannion, I’d thank you for making my ride far less…. Lonesome.”

Shelagh’s breath caught. “I’d give you the same compliment, Doctor.” She paused. “Please tell Mrs. Polly that I’ll ride into Hyden this week. Perhaps Wednesday.”
“I will. She’ll look forward to it.” He opened his mouth as if to say more, but nodded instead. “Evening, Nurse.”

Turning Mrs. B down the path to the Clinic, Shelagh couldn’t resist looking over her shoulder to watch as the doctor rode away, his shoulders slightly hunched now as he made his lonely trek into Hyden. Beech Fork was quiet, Lisette arriving just after Shelagh to care for the horses. They laughed and spoke over a warmed over supper, but as she settled into bed Shelagh couldn’t remember what they had spoken about. She resolved to pay better attention to the young girl, but even as she attempted to sleep she found that she was restless and her mind refused to give over to slumber. She put her glasses on and walked around the room, glancing out of the window into the darkness.

She made her way to her bags, intending to take from it a slice of cornbread from the picnic. Her fingers brushed over the edges of Dr. Turner’s magazine, instead. She flushed as she pulled it from the bag. Turning on her coal oil lamp, she settled into the bed with the journal, feeling almost as if she was doing something wrong with the rustle of the pages in the darkened room. Running a finger down the table of contents, she stopped at an article that had been circled. Miners’ Nystagmus, she read, following the loop of the circle with her finger. Feeling foolish, she crossly placed the book on her bedside table, along with her glasses. After extinguishing the light, she willed her heart to slow, resolving to return the magazine to Dr. Turner at Tuesday’s clinic.

Chapter End Notes

Jettown is of my own creation, though I borrowed the name from another area in Kentucky. As I was listening to the oral histories of Hyden and the FNS, I realized that some people would mention a local population of African Americans, that there had once been a school and a small community. I wondered about these people and wished to add in their stories; the idea of Affrilachia (coined by Kentuckian Frank X Walker) and the diaspora of black Appalachians as they moved north in search of opportunity and community.
...the foods you have described are quite fascinating. Soup beans and cornbread seem a very hearty meal-- always welcome for a busy midwife! I enjoy the tales of your delightful friend Cora. One day, perhaps, you will convince her that buttermilk is not for you and instead tempt her with a cup of well-sugared tea! Just now our dear Sister Monica Joan is calling me to Compline, which reminds me--she asks that you send the recipe for Apple Stack Cake just as soon as you are able....

The temperature dipped on Monday and Tuesday and Shelagh took to wearing her cardigan again, the wind cutting through her arms as she rode the trails. Tuesday’s clinic came and went in a hurry, Shelagh barely able to speak to Dr. Turner in the barrage of patients. He was called out to Stinnett before the end of Clinic hours and so his Lancet was safely tucked back into Shelagh’s saddlebag as she set out on Wednesday morning for her rounds. The wind had eased back into warmth, and trees that had only just the weekend before been bare were blooming and green. The trail was busy, miners filing down the path to their job sites and women and children waving them on. She was offered breakfast from at least three separate families, though she promised ‘another time’ with a smile, still warm and full from her breakfast tea and jam toast.

Her first stop was the Sutherland cabin, to check on the growing baby. Lillian was clearly the star of the family, as Shelagh found young Sara carrying her and cooing as the door was opened. “She looks like me,” Sara said shyly, handing the baby to Shelagh. “The rest of ‘em look like Daddy.”

Mrs. Sutherland’s laugh was strained. “You run on. It’s nice enough out and you’ve all done with yer chores.” She sighed as the kids ran out of the door, save little Johnny who sat at the table, spooning mash into his mouth. “I’ll be glad when I kin send ‘em all to school and let teacher deal with ‘em!”

Shelagh laughed, taking the baby to weigh. “Good morning, Miss Lillian!” The baby gave a reflexive smile before throwing up down Shelagh’s uniform.

With an embarrassed shriek, Mrs. Sutherland handed a towel to Shelagh, who accepted it and gently smiled. “Not to worry,” she said. “Hazard of the job!”

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After leaving the Sutherlands, Shelagh headed for the McMillian cabin, which had been empty the week before. If it were still empty she resolved to ask Cora about its occupants. Yet as she approached she could see the front door open, Mr. McMillan stepping out onto the stone step.
“Oh, good morning! Midwife calling,” Shelagh said, smiling as she started to dismount.

“Sorry, Nurse,” Mr. McMillan said, closing the door. “You’re not needed any longer. I meant to send word to your clinic.”


“If she did, we’d a come fer ya. She don’t need nothin’. Thank you for riding by, but I’m afraid you done wasted your time.”

A movement at the window caught Shelagh’s attention. Mrs. McMillan shook her head at Shelagh before ducking back into the darkness of the cabin. “Well,” Shelagh raised her voice slightly, “please have her contact me at the Clinic should she need assistance.”

Mr. McMillan gave a short nod. “We will. Goodbye, Nurse.”

He stayed in the doorframe and so Shelagh turned Mrs. B and headed back down the trail.

--

It was gone two as Shelagh handed Mrs. B off to Eula at the Hyden Hospital stables. She smiled at the girl, inquiring after her morning, before walking the incline to the main building. At the front door a patient was being brought in by stretcher. Skirting toward the side of the building, to the secondary entrance, Shelagh stopped as she found Dr. Turner, sitting on a bench in the shade of the overhang of the roof. Her heart stuttered in her chest. She remembered his words to her just a few days past, thanking her for making his ride to Hyden less lonely. And now here he sat, once again alone, shoulders slumped forward as if a great weight held him down.

For a moment she thought to turn away, to leave him to his own counsel, but her heart constricted to think that he might be, as he had said, lonesome in this moment. She stepped forward and he looked up, face brightening as he noticed her. Her stomach clenched. “Greetings,” she said, coming to stand next to the bench. “I hope that I’m not interrupting you.” Her eyes flitted to the entrance. “I was going to call in with Mrs. Polly, as…. as I mentioned this weekend.”

“Of course,” he said, looking up at her. “She’s been waiting on Wednesday. She’ll be right glad to
see you.”

“It’s mutual.” She smiled. “My rounds aren’t quite as pleasant without her!”

He shifted on the bench, taking up a bottle that had been balanced on the seat next to him. “Forgive me,” he said, holding up the bottle of Coca-Cola for her to see. “My dinner.”

Shelagh raised a brow. “Dinner generally includes food back at home,” she said, and then wished she could take the words back, feeling all too familiar with the doctor.

But he grinned, reaching into his coat pocket to remove a packet. “Here too, Nurse,” he said, opening the bag to let her peer inside.

“Peanuts?”

“They’re good with a Co-cola,” he said, sliding down the bench to make room. He glanced to the door and then back at Shelagh. “I have, well, an extra, if you’d like it.” He paused, picking up an unopened bottle from the ground. “If you’re thirsty.”

Shelagh looked at the small space next to him on the bench. She pressed her lips together before accepting the damp bottle. “Thank you,” she said, sitting gingerly on the bench. She took the opener and popped the cap, wiping her hands together to rid them of the bottle’s condensation. “Coca-Cola is sold in London,” she said, remembering seeing it on the shelf at Selfridges. She dipped her head, suddenly shy. “I’ve never tasted one, though.”

“I hope you like it,” he said, gesturing with his bottle. “Try it.”

Shelagh looked at the bottle and then quickly to Dr. Turner. She smiled at him. She liked the way he spoke. His voice was warm, husky, and the way he stretched his ‘i’s’ was charming. Her thoughts strayed to him often and it made her somewhat uneasy to realize that they were sitting so closely together on such a small bench. Conscious of his eyes on her, she took a sip. “Oh!” The bubbles tickled her nose. “It’s… I quite like it!” She took another sip. “It’s not overly sweet, like I thought it would be.”

He grinned. “Just enough sweet. That’s why you add the salt.” He held up the bag of peanuts, offering it to her.
“Oh.” She took one peanut from the bag, holding it between her index finger and thumb. “Thank you.” She chewed the peanut slowly and took another drink. “They do have a nice flavor together.”

“They do.” He took the bag and upturned it, pouring peanuts into his bottle. He handed the remaining peanuts to Shelagh.

Shelagh furrowed her brow, taking another sip of her drink to keep from asking the doctor about his ‘dinner’.

He noticed her look and laughed. “Sorry, Nurse. Old trick. Learned it down in the mines when I was young. You can’t always take time to eat a real meal down there, but a Co-Cola and packet of peanuts will keep you full till you make it back to the surface.”

“You were a miner?”

“Had to. We all had to run the farm or get down in the mine to support the family. I was better at the mining than the farming.” He took a drink and chewed slowly. “After a time my Daddy let me save some of my earnings toward medical school.” He took another sip. “One thing’s for certain: I don’t miss it.”

Shelagh thought of the conditions she had heard of in the mines and nodded. “I would think not.” She fiddled with the bag before making a decision and pouring the remaining peanuts into her bottle.

Dr. Turner whooped quietly. “That’s it,” he said, holding his bottle out to clink hers. “You’re--”

The door opened and a medical orderly stepped through. “Dr. Turner,” he said, nodding to the doctor. “There you are. Nurse Smith is fit to be tied and set me to finding you!”

“I’ll be right behind you, Mac,” Dr. Turner said, standing from the bench. He swallowed his last drink, chewing quickly as he patted his pockets. “No time for a smoke,” he said, shaking his head at Shelagh. “Enjoy the Co-Cola,” he said, pausing as Mac walked back inside. “I’ll see you on the ward.”
The door closed behind the doctor, and Shelagh sat back against the wall, eyeing her bottle. It was quiet now that Dr. Turner had left and she listened to the rustle of leaves as she took a swallow of the strange concoction he had left her with. She chewed the peanuts thoughtfully, enjoying the flavor, but missing the company. She pushed the thought from her mind as she finished her miner’s lunch and headed inside to greet Mrs. Polly.

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“Nurse Mannion!” Mrs. Polly’s eyes lit up. “I’ve been looking at the door all morning hopin’ you’d walk in!”

Shelagh smiled, settling into the chair at Mrs. Polly’s bedside. “You’re looking well!” She glanced at the stomach that was indeed growing with every visit. “How’s the little one today?”

Mrs. Polly placed her hand on her belly. “He shifts around, but I expect he’s too big to do any jiggin’ now.” Her lower lip wobbled. “I jus’ wished he’d go on and be borned, Nurse. I know he’s alive now, but every night I worry, what if he ain’t come mornin’?”

“Oh, Mrs. Polly!” Shelagh took her patient’s hand. “You must be exhausted from your worries. You don’t have much longer to go--and you couldn’t be in a better place!”

“I’m plumb tired, Nurse.” Mrs. Polly sighed. “I just want him here, even if it means I never sleep again.”

Shelagh squeezed her hand. “Have you had your checks today?”

Mrs. Polly nodded. “My checks, my dinner…. My day revolves around that schedule. Said I might have too much sugar in my body. I told ‘em I’d do anything to sees the baby’s born alive.” She fiddled with her quilt. “Said, too, there might be too much fluid in there. And that’s why I can’t feel him a jiggin’.”

Shelagh furrowed her brow. She took the chart from the end of the bed. “Baby’s heart-rate is good, Mrs. Polly--and though I see the note about the possibility of excess fluid, there are no obvious signs of distress or trouble since your pains have eased. You did have high sugar in your body on a few of my checks. The diet that they’ll have you on here will help lower that excess sugar. Hold onto that--though I know it must be hard when you’re sitting here with little else to
do, day after day!”

“...made baby clothes,” Mrs. Polly said, holding up a small nightdress.

“How lovely!” Shelagh touched the tiny sleeve. “Does making the clothing keep you occupied?”

“Some. I also run Bible verses through my head.” Mrs. Polly worried her bottom lip. “I like the stories about the babies best.”

Shelagh smiled. “So do I.” She tucked the tiny sleeve back against the baby garment. Pressing her lips together, she made a decision. “Have you heard of Saint Raymond Nonnatus, Mrs. Polly?”

Mrs. Polly’s forehead crinkled. “Can’t say I have.”

“When I was... younger, I quite enjoyed his story. He was born after his mother’s death by a cesarean delivery, and has become the Patron Saint of pregnant women, childbirth, and midwives.”

“What’s a ‘patron saint?’” Mrs. Polly folded the baby clothing and set them on the side-table.

Shelagh paused. “A patron saint is a person who lived and was deemed holy enough to have special connection with a certain thing, such as childbirth, in this case. Some faiths believe that a saint can intercede—that is, speak to God, to help those who ask for it.”

Mrs. Polly leaned back against her pillow. “Someone who can speak to God,” she said, in wonder. “But I’ll stick to my prayers. This Saint Raymond don’t know me from Eve herself.”

Shelagh laughed. “God is never too busy to hear our prayers. I suppose I’ve always thought kindly of Saint Raymond Nonnatus due to our shared calling for mothers and children.” Shelagh released a breath, strangely relieved to speak to someone about such a large portion of her past, even if in general terms. “How else are you passing your time?”

“Well, I try and remember some of them old songs my Momma used to sing me.” She pursed her lips. “I wasn’t much of a singer but a baby won’t know the difference.”
“Not at all! Your baby will love the sound of your voice from the moment he or she is born.” Shelagh smiled, replacing the chart. “Did your mother have a lovely voice?”

Mrs. Polly’s face cracked into a smile. “No ma’am.” She laughed before sobering. “But I loved it all the same.” She sighed. “I wisht she were here now.” Folding the small garment, she patted it lightly. “Sometimes I think she’s got a hold of this baby up there in Heaven. Took ‘im right out of a cloud cradle and is holding him tight, and not ready to part with ‘im yet.”

Shelagh’s eyes misted. She reached for Mrs. Polly’s hand. “I’ve no doubt that God and your Mother will send the baby to you when the time is exactly right.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, leaning back against her pillows. “I keep a-tellin’ myself that, too, Nurse. Jus’ keep sayin’ it, so’s we’ll both believe in it.”

Shelagh left the ward and almost smacked into Timothy Turner as he came quickly around a corner.

“Nurse Mannion!” His eyes were wide, face pale. “Have you seen my Dad?” He was holding his arm to his side protectively.

“Timothy? Is anything amiss?” She knelt to his height. “Your Dad was just outside but that was some thirty or more minutes ago. Can I be of help?”

“It’s just--” he held out his arm. His sleeve was torn, his arm scraped and raw, dirt evident in the wound. “I was down in Hyden with Uncle Thom. He said I could come to visit and…” he trailed off.

“Timothy!” Dr. Turner came from the other direction in the hall, Nurse Wright trailing behind him. “What happened?” He reached for Tim’s arm, twisting it to look at the abrasion.

Nurse Wright glanced at the three of them and nodded toward the ward. “I’ll see you inside, Doctor.” She passed through the doors, the noise from the ward rising and then dampening as the
doors shut.

“Timothy?”

“Uncle Thom’s in Hyden and said I could come up on my own so long as I was back to meet him after four.”

Dr. Turner frowned. “He should have come with you! What if I’d been away on a call?”

“You’re always at work!” Timothy’s frown mirrored his father’s. “Besides, I asked at the desk and they said you were here.”

Dr. Turner seemed torn, his eyes flitting from Timothy to the ward.

“I think there’s a definite need for a bandage,” Shelagh said, taking Timothy’s arm and inspecting it again. “We should clean it first, though.”

Dr. Turner’s brow shifted. He looked at Shelagh, seeming to ask a question with his eyes.

She nodded just slightly, and smiled.

“Will you be alright with Nurse Mannion while I finish my rounds? I’ll take a break after, maybe ride down into town with you.”

Timothy’s eyes brightened. “I will!”

Dr. Turner looked back to Shelagh once more. “Thank you, Nurse. You’re very kind.”

He went through the doors. Shelagh looked to the young boy. “Let’s be seeing about this! You look as if you’ve been in the wars!”
“It was a rock, Nurse. I was…” He lowered his voice. “Off the path a little.”

“Perhaps this is why one should stick to the path!” Shelagh led him into the clinical room and gestured to a chair. She took a bowl of water, gauze, and iodine and sat beside Timothy, taking his arm in hand. “This may sting a bit, I’m afraid,” she said, using tweezers to dampen a cotton ball. “Though I’m certain the scrape was far more painful!” She began to dab at the wound. Timothy stiffened. “What were you looking for off-trail?”

“Butterflies.” He swung his feet. “I wondered if there might not be other kinds over here to Thousandsticks. Maybe one I haven’t done seen.”

“I do remember that you like butterflies.” Shelagh finished cleaning the wound, inspecting it for any further debris. “I haven’t seen another since the day that I met you!”

“They’ll be all over, soon! And all sorts of other bugs. The mountain is so loud with ’em. I miss it when it’s quiet in the winter.”

Shelagh finished wrapping Timothy’s arm. “All done! You did so well!” She smiled at him before leaning in somewhat conspiratorially. “Would you like a little something to eat whilst we wait for your father?”

Timothy grinned, hair falling messily over his forehead as he seemed almost to wiggle in excitement. “I would, Nurse!”

He looked so very like his father in the moment that Shelagh’s heart thudded. “Very well,” she said, quickly cleaning up the supplies. She paused at the door and motioned for him to follow her toward the Nurse’s Quarters. “We’ll have tea and biscuits.”

“Oh!” Tim caught up easily. “I love biscuits!

--

Timothy placed his cup in his saucer. “Thank you, Nurse Mannion.” He looked at the last cookie on the plate, but averted his eyes as he wiped his mouth with his napkin.
“Please take the last biscuit, if you’d like,” Shelagh said, hiding a smile.

The boy did so, crunching happily into the baked treat. “Do you have biscuits at home?” he asked, after he swallowed his bite. “I mean--not a cookie biscuit, but a biscuit biscuit?”

Shelagh couldn’t hide her smile. “Well, we have something called a scone that is quite similar, though softer and sweeter.” She picked up her teacup. “My Mam used to make them on Sundays.”

Timothy chewed the rest of his cookie, looking thoughtful. “You know, my Mommy always made biscuits on Sundays, too. She’d cut ‘em all out with a can and then there’d always be a little scrap of dough left. She’d roll it up and call it a ‘bic-biccie’. She said it was for the smallest family member--but I was the only one.” He took a sip of tea. “It was always for me.”

“That sounds like a lovely tradition.” Shelagh’s stomach clenched at the shadow that passed over Timothy’s face. “My Mam died when I was just a young girl.”

“I’m sorry, Nurse Mannion.” Timothy fiddled with his cup. “Did you live with your Dad?”

“I did, but he was very busy and…. Well, I suppose I didn’t often see him except for early in the mornings and late in the evenings.”

“Did he like butterflies?” Timothy finished his tea.

Shelagh was taken aback. Had her father liked butterflies? “I’m sorry to say that I don’t know if he liked butterflies or not. He did like birds. Especially if they were singing in the morning.”

“I think he liked butterflies,” Tim said, completely certain in his statement. “My Mommy did.”

“She must have been very special.” Shelagh smiled gently, taking the teapot and the plate to the sink. “Does your father make bic-biccies?”

Timothy snorted in laughter. “Dad’s a disaster at cooking, Nurse! He can’t boil water nor soak a bean!”
Shelagh remembered the basket of food from the women of Beech Fork that Dr. Turner had at the church picnic. “A disaster might be slightly harsh, Timothy!” She glanced at her watch as Timothy laughed harder. “Oh dear! Your father is probably wondering where we’ve gotten to!”

“It’s not after four is it?” Timothy’s eyes were wide.

“Not yet, but we’ve been here for quite a while!” Shelagh straightened the table. “Dr. Turner may well be stood outside of the doors!”

“Can’t he come in?” Timothy followed Shelagh into the hall toward the hospital.

“Not into the Nurses’ Quarters.”

“Because he’s a man? But I was just there!” Timothy pushed at the door, holding it open for Shelagh.

“Thank you,” she said, passing through. “And you were there as a guest!”

Timothy seemed mollified, but his face changed as Dr. Turner walked down the hall. “Dad!” he held out his bandaged arm. “Nurse Mannion fixed me up!”

“I can see that!” He smiled at Shelagh over Timothy’s head. “But where have you been?”

“I had tea and biscuits with her, Dad.” Timothy’s voice held a superior note as if bragging that he had spent time with Shelagh that his father had not.

Shelagh thought back to the bottle of Coca-Cola and packet of peanuts. She was making a habit of sharing food with the Turners.

Dr. Turner laughed. “Did you?” He dutifully checked the bandage and smiled at Shelagh. “Thank you again, Nurse Mannion.”
“It was hardly trouble, Doctor.” Shelagh smiled at Timothy. “We had a nice chat!”

“Did you know that they have biscuits in Scotland, Dad? They just call them scones!” Tim grinned.

“I do recall scones, son. They’re not quite the same as a pan of biscuits.” He looked at Shelagh and winked. “But they’ll do in a pinch.”

Shelagh’s stomach tingled but she smiled back, feeling as conspiratorial with Dr. Turner now, as she had felt with Timothy back in the Nurses’ Quarters. “I believe you have that muddled, Doctor.”

Timothy rolled his eyes, looking in between his father and the nurse. “Adults think things are funny that really aren’t,” he complained.

Dr. Turner ruffled Timothy’s hair. “Hazard of agin’, son.”

Shelagh smiled at their interaction. Dr. Turner seemed, for a moment, lighter, and happier than she had yet known him. Timothy also seemed more animated, happy in his father’s presence. “Well, then,” she said, smiling gently, “I’m due back at Beech Fork. It was very nice to see you again, Timothy.”

“Nurse, wait,” Dr. Turner said, holding up a hand to forestall her. “Anna Jane reminded me that she had invited you to supper. Would you be free to come out a week from Friday?” The fingers of his right hand twitched as he looked at her.

“Oh!” Shelagh was taken aback, though Mrs. Turner had invited her. “I hadn’t--yes, I could be there.” She paused awkwardly. “Shall I bring anything?”

“Only if you want to. It’s nothin’ fancy, but you’ll be well fed. It’ll be nice to have company. It’s generally only any Turner that happens to be helping out or passing through.”

“You won’t even have to hoe the corn first,” Tim said, his irrepressible grin flashing.
“Timothy!” Dr. Turner laughed. “I’ll let Anna Jane know, if you think you can make it.”

Shelagh’s heart thudded at the thought of seeing Dr. Turner outside of a professional setting. “Yes, please do. And tell her that I thank her again for the invitation.”

Dr. Turner grinned, his smile turning into a small rush of laughter. “I will, Nurse.”

Timothy smiled up at her. “Great! I can’t wait to see you out home. I’ll show you my butterfly collection!”

“Will you now? That’ll be fine, Timothy. I’m looking forward to it!” She smiled at them both and waved, walking away from the sound of Timothy’s chatter. Her steps seemed overly loud in the hall and she exhaled as she stepped outside.

It wasn’t until she reached the path to Beech Fork that she remembered Dr. Turner’s copy of *The Lancet*, tucked safely still in her saddlebag.

--

Tuesday Clinic was winding down. The last patient was behind the screen with Nurse Parrish, and so Shelagh set to cleaning the instrument trays, readying them for sterilization. She paused for a moment to glance out at the approaching weather. It had been hot all day, apparently not uncommon for late April, at least according to the patients who had fanned themselves as they waited for their appointments. “Jes you wait, Missy,” a patient’s mother had said, waving her makeshift fan at Shelagh, “come July you’ll be wishing you were fer back ‘cross that ocean. The mugginess will do you in right quick. Hot as the devil’s livin’ room, I tell ya.” For now, the heat looked to have a break coming, as dark clouds rolled in. Shelagh watched the grass wave and the tree limbs arc against the coming blackness in the sky and shivered.

“Someone walked over your grave, Nurse Mannion?” Dr. Turner placed a tray of soiled instruments with the rest.

Shelagh turned from the window, mind still on the approaching storm. She had feared that she might feel awkward around Dr. Turner after his reminder of Anna Jane’s supper invitation. But Clinic had clicked along as normal, without a further reminder of Friday’s upcoming meal. “I’m sorry?”
Dr. Turner smiled. “You shivered just now. My old Granny always said that meant someone walked over your grave.”

“Oh!” Shelagh laughed. “My Gran used to say that, too.”

“Then it must be true?”

“Perhaps.” She began cleaning out the spirit lamps. She was still unsure of what to do with his medical journal. She felt too shy to hand it to him in the middle of Clinic. He cleaned his hands as she contemplated it, asking instead, “Are you off on your rounds?”

“Yes,” he sighed. “I’m hoping to finish in time to go up to Tim’s school. They’re having a spellin’ bee.”

Shelagh smiled. “I’m sure he’ll do just fine. And that you’ll make it on time, even with the approaching rain.”

“Not if I don’t get a move on,” he said, removing his coat.

Shelagh watched, noticing a missing button in the row that lined his white coat. She opened her mouth to mention it, but thought better of it. “I hope you have a nice evening, Dr. Turner.”

“Thank you,” he said, hanging the coat. He paused at the window, running his fingers through his hair. It did it no good, as if flopped back into his face. He ran a hand over his roughened jaw, and sighed. He turned back to her. “Goodnight, Nurse Mannion.” He started to leave but doubled back. “We’ll see you on Friday?” He waited for her nod. “Anna Jane serves at six.” With that, he smiled briefly and exited.

“Goodnight,” she responded faintly, watching him go. His reminder had set her cheeks flush, but as she watched him go she frowned. He seemed so worn and tired. He was up before the sun, she knew, riding out to patients, making it in to Hyden and to Clinics, spending precious spare time at his brother’s cabin, looking in on his son. She remembered his delight with Timothy in the hospital corridor and hoped that he would make it, reasonably dry, to the spelling bee.

“Did Dr. Turner leave?” Nurse Parrish breezed in, plopping into a chair. She placed her instruments on the table and continued to talk without waiting for an answer. “Patient’s gone. I’m
“I'm knackered.” She hid a yawn in her elbow. “I’m off to Possum Bend tomorrow, for a two-week stint. I do so hate being out there, especially now that they’ve cut back on our numbers and we run them alone.”

“It is lonely sometimes,” Shelagh agreed, nodding toward the instruments. “Do you want me to pre-wash? I’ll do so if you’ll boil the water.”

Nurse Parrish pushed the instruments forward. “Thanks, love.” She groaned. “I knew it would be a hard job of it, coming over here. I just never expected it to be so…. Wild. And vast. At least we have the couriers who drop in to check on us at the outposts. Without them, and the patients, I think I might go mad.”

“Indeed.” Shelagh scrubbed the instruments, thinking of the darkening evening sky. “Lisette has been a welcome addition here, but she’s out on a run this evening.” She continued to scrub. “It is beautiful in Kentucky, isn’t it? Even if somewhat ‘wild’? I didn’t expect to find the mountains so lovely. Or so very in need. Putting things to rights with the women and their care--it’s worth a lonely evening in the outpost.”

Shrugging, Nurse Parrish stood and accepted the first tray of instruments to place in the pot. “I’m more for the adventure, myself. I had hoped to find more eligible bachelors.” Turning from the stove, she threw a smirk at Shelagh. “What I’ve found are plenty of bachelors--just not so many that I deem eligible!” She leaned against the counter as the instruments began to boil. The room rumbled with thunder.

“The storm is fierce!” Shelagh looked through the window. “I do hope Dr. Turner made it to his son’s school.”

“Dr. Turner,” Nurse Parrish mused. “He might be handsome if he worried a bit more about his appearance. Have you noticed the button’s come off his clinical coat? It hardly inspires confidence in our patients to have him looking so unkempt.”

Shelagh thought of the missing button, and set her mouth. “I’m sure that we should speak more respectfully of Dr. Turner.” She turned back to scrubbing. “Would you pass the scalpel please?”

“I think it’s far more disrespectful to pretend that we don’t notice the button’s absence.” Nurse Parrish gave her the instrument, eyeing her curiously.
“Well, Dr. Turner has no one to sew it on for him,” Cora said, entering the room without a knock. “And everyone’s noticed. I’ve a mind to sew it back on myself, Nurse Parrish.”

“I doubt he’d notice.” Nurse Parrish sat back against the counter, turning her eyes to the newcomer. “I thought that you had already left for yours, Ms. Cora.”

“I sat out there with Big Bettie so long, she’s snorin’. I thought I’d look in on you two, as I sure don’t want to walk out in this mess.”

“As well you shouldn’t,” Shelagh said, finishing the pre-wash and cleansing her hands. “Perhaps I’ll turn on a radio program for those waiting out the rain. It may taper off soon.” She looked to Nurse Parrish. “Would you like some tea?”

Nurse Parrish waved them off as she checked the boiling water. “None for me, thanks. As soon as I finish with these I’ll be leaving, rain or no.”

“Don’t trouble yourself over tea,” Cora said, following Shelagh out of the prep station. “I’m not what you’d call thirsty. We can just sit and talk while we wait for the rain to move on.”

“That would be fine. Let me check our waiting area and see how many are still here.” She watched as Cora settled herself into a chair in the small sitting area near the intake desk.

A few mothers and small children sat in the front of the Clinic, along with the snoring Big Bettie. Shelagh lit lamps and flipped on the radio, welcoming them to stay until the storm passed. Satisfied that all was in order, Shelagh went back to the main room to sit with Cora.

Cora was knitting, and looked up as thunder boomed overhead and the radio crackled. “This storm reminds me of the night Patrick and I delivered a baby right after he come back from the war.”

“He served in the Great War?” Shelagh thought back to the war, and how the lines of returning and injured men had made her want to go into nursing, to make a difference in the lives of those who needed it most.

“He, his brothers, and many of the other boys around here.” Cora’s knitting needles flashed as she worked in the dim lamp light. “He was gone maybe a year and a half. Only he and Thomas returned. The other two died over yon, one to the enemy and one of the flu.”
Shelagh frowned, thinking of the atrocities she had heard of associated with the Great War. “He served in a medical capacity?”

“Yes, honey. When I think of what he must have seen.” Cora sighed. “When he come back, he was a skinny thing. Nothin’ to him but bone, hair, and dark circles under his eyes.” She paused to check her progress. “I took him with me down by the river there to deliver a first timer’s baby.”

“Did it… go well?” Shelagh sat straight in the chair, almost leaning forward as the rain pelted the roof and Cora wove her story and yarn.

“The waters were up. You can’t hardly get out here from Hyden when the river’s up so fer. But he made it, dripping wet, shivering. The girl laid there cryin’. She didn’t want to give birth with the water up. Thought it was bad luck.”

Shelagh waited, a song from the radio catching her ear briefly before static overtook it.

“The baby would’ve come easier if the mother coulda relaxed. But she was frettin’, Patrick was frettin’, and the water was coming up the bank and thunder booming.” She placed her knitting down. “Done too dark for this.”

Lightning made the room bright for a moment, dazzling Shelagh’s eyes. “I believe you’re enjoying keeping me in suspense, Cora.”

Cora laughed. “Maybe, honey. I was busy that night, trying to calm the both of them and not lose my own mind. But then, just after midnight, the baby was born just as the storm give up. A boy. Patrick held him for maybe just a mite too long, smoothing a hand over his head.” Cora sighed. “I think all of us were cryin’ in that cabin that night. After that, Patrick went off up to Lexington for a few months, come back home, and has been doctorin’ us all ever since.”

“What was in Lexington?”

“Well,” Cora stood from her chair and stretched. “I never asked.”

The rain slowed against the roof. The front door opened as children ran out, and the radio silenced
mid-static song as it was switched off. Shelagh and Cora walked into the waiting room to find it empty. “Another clinic finished.”

Cora grinned. “I expect I ought to make my way afore the rain returns.” She patted Shelagh on the arm. “Goodnight.”

Shelagh wandered through the Clinic, cleaning away toys and pamphlets. She swept the room, exchanging a few words with Nurse Parrish as she left. After the room was put back to rights, Shelagh’s eyes strayed to the white coat, hanging neatly on its peg. Dr. Turner had several, one at each Clinic he serviced so that he would not have to carry it with him. She thought of the missing button, but frowned, walking into the kitchen to prepare a meal. Nothing seemed satisfying, however, and she wandered back into the main room, taking her sewing kit from the mantle. Inside were several buttons, one white.

Placing the kit on the table, Shelagh took the doctor’s coat from the hook. Sitting down, she began to sew.
Kentucky Waltz

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

...7oz muscovado sugar

2 eggs

12 oz plain flour, sifted

4 fl oz buttermilk...

I do hope you enjoy the cake, Sister!....

Lisette panted as Eula wiped her hands on her uniform trousers. Shelagh huffed a laugh at the two of them, gasping for air as she placed her own heavy burden on the floor of the Clinic. “Oh my,” she said, straightening her spine to relieve it’s ache. “It’s wonderful to have fresh supplies, but the unpacking is daunting!”

Lisette groaned. “It was the Hess Bed that nearly did me in.” She draped herself dramatically over the waiting bench. “It was heavier than I expected and we had to treat it with kid gloves. Couldn’t risk any small parts breaking in transport.” She picked up a pamphlet on baby care and fanned herself. “I wanted to ford the river before dark, so there was no time to rest.” She looked mournfully at the boxes. “Do we have to open all of them tonight?”

Eula grinned mischievously. “Not I,” she said, nodding toward the door. “My eye is on the far side of the mountain.”

“Fine, fine,” Lisette affected a hurt tone. “Ride on to Red Bird without me.”

The girls giggled, and Shelagh smiled, taking a bar to pry open a box. “Lisette, why don’t you have a wee rest. I’ll begin the unpacking.”

Lisette smiled, waving at Eula as she left. “Bye, Eu,” she said, before turning back to Shelagh. “I’ll help,” she said, jumping up from the bench. “The work will be no more than a moment, if halved.” She pried open a box.
“Was the Hess bed being set up as you left Hyden?” Shelagh sorted supplies into piles, counting them to add to the inventory.

“Dr. Turner was looking at it as I left. Mrs. Breckinridge was trained to assemble one by Dr. Hess himself. She was riding in as I was leaving.”

Shelagh remembered Dr. Turner’s worry for the Hess bed’s arrival. “I’m thrilled that we have the bed! It’ll make such a difference for those born too soon.”

“I just hope that all of the pieces arrived intact!” Lisette marked the inventory sheet with a pencil. “It’s something amazing that the bed can help to save a baby’s life. I hope Mrs. Breckinridge will allow for a demonstration of it’s capabilities.” Completing her checklist, she picked up some booklets, and handed them to Shelagh. “While at Thousandsticks Post I picked up the newest Montgomery Ward and Sears catalogs,” she said, eyes sparkling. “The looks are divine! I’m going to place an order, and thought you might wish to, as well.”

“Oh!” Shelagh set the top back on her empty box and took the catalog. “I’ve not been one to--are these ready made?” She flipped through, looking at the drawings of happy women in fancy frocks. “They are lovely, but I’d not have an occasion to wear one,” Shelagh mused, almost to herself.

“What about to the Hyden Hospital Fair?” Lisette finished scratching on the clipboard with the pencil. “I’ve heard that Mrs. Breckenridge has relented and said that the nurses and couriers need only be in uniform during their shifts!”

“Has she?” Shelagh paged through the catalog again. The fair would be in early May, plenty of time for a dress to be delivered. Her mind drifted to Dr. Turner seeing her not in her bulky uniform but in a stylish dress…. Shelagh cleared her throat and set the catalog aside. “Perhaps I’ll look again once you’ve made your order.”

“I’ll send it away tomorrow, if you’re interested.” Lisette jumped up and began lifting empty boxes. “When I left Chicago I was excited to wear trousers instead of dresses. My Mother lamented over me--I just haven’t been quite the daughter she imagined.” She laughed as she pushed the screen door open with her back. “What would she think now--me, wishing for a dress!”

Shelagh laughed with Lisette, standing from the floor to stack crates. The wind rattled through the partially open screen door and fluttered the pages of the catalog. Picking it up, it opened to the pages Shelagh had been fascinated with before, specifically a red and white polka dot patterned dress, belted, with a flared, godet skirt. It was nothing like the dull house-dresses that she had worn upon leaving the convent, the color unlike anything she had owned before. The price was not
unreasonable. Shelagh pressed her lips together before taking up Lisette’s discarded pencil. She found the order form and scribbled in her order, closing the catalog to go and locate the money to give to Lisette in payment.

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Thursday afternoon was sunny as Shelagh rode away from a new cabin, housing an expectant pair of sisters. Their husbands were often away in the mines and so the women lived together, sharing chores and childcare. Shelagh smiled and laughed with the youngest boy of the family, a two year old with dark eyes and a quick smile. She was in a fine mood as she and Mrs. B set back out on the trail, the lack of rain and pleasant temperature bolstering her humor. Yet with each baby she cared for, every vaccination given, and throughout her long rides, in the back of her mind she thought of the impending supper at the Turners’.

She hadn’t mentioned the meal to Cora, somewhat afraid of the knowing look that might brighten the older woman’s eyes. Cora loved Dr. Turner, each story and anecdote filled with her respect and admiration for him. Shelagh felt shy to admit to the meal, concerned that Cora might make more of the meeting than it warranted. Still, she almost wished that Cora would be at the Turner cabin as sort of a buffer, someone else besides Dr. Turner and Timothy that Shelagh knew. Supping with the family seemed almost too intimate for a colleague, but she knew that Mrs. Turner was only being friendly with her initial invitation, and Dr. Turner kind, as he reiterated the request. She was concerned that there would be little to speak of outside of nursing and her and Dr. Turner’s shared work, and didn’t wish to appear to alienate anyone with medical conversation.

Her worry for the supper was compounded by her excitement. She was interested to see Dr. Turner with his family, to talk with Timothy again and to see his butterfly collection. Mr. and Mrs. Turner had been friendly at church and at the church picnics; smiling and waving Sunday last as she exited the picnic early to deliver a laboring mother. She had shared many a meal with the locals whilst on the trail: coffee and grits in the morning, fried potatoes and soup beans at noon, a packet of biscuits and tea with a new mother. Supping with a family of a colleague was different, however, even if she would be in uniform as she sat to eat. One never knew when they might be called to duty, and so she would wear her uniform to the Turners’, bringing along a simple pudding in appreciation of the invitation.

An approaching rider shook her from her jumbled thoughts. “Mr. McMillian,” she said, as he overtook her. “Greetings.”

“Nurse.” He tipped his hat without looking at her, kicking his horse as they continued on the path toward his cabin.

Shelagh followed behind, hoping to catch a glimpse of his wife, but by the time she passed the
lonely cabin, the door was closed, and window covering drawn. Frowning, Shelagh led Mrs. B away, setting a pace back to Beech Fork.

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The Turner cabin was set back from the mountain path, recognizable for its large porch and budding azaleas. Shelagh dismounted as the front door slammed open, Timothy hopping from the porch, a delighted grin on his face.

“You’re here!” He came to Mrs. B’s side, reaching to pet her neck. “I’ll settle her for you, Nurse Mannion.” Mrs. B seemed to be agreeable, nudging at Timothy and nickering.

“Thank you, Timothy!” Shelagh removed a container from the saddle and looked toward the cabin. “Is your father here?”

Timothy nodded, leading Mrs. B toward the stable. Two old dogs came out from under the porch and stretched as Timothy passed. He stopped to pet them and looked back to Shelagh. “Just rode in afore you. Most of my cousins are here, too.” His grin turned mischievous. “I’m glad you’re paying us a visit. Aunt Anna Jane made fried chicken. We mostly only have soup beans on a Friday!”

Timothy’s antics calmed the nerves in her stomach. “Tell me, is that the only reason you’re happy I’m visiting?”

The boy shook his head in the negative. “It’ll also keep Dad from telling boring tales!”

Amused, Shelagh laughed before controlling her face. Timothy’s grin was irrepressible as he walked away with Mrs. B and the dogs. Timothy had left the door partially opened and from the porch she could hear voices, children laughing and adults talking. She knocked at the door, but wasn’t heard. Turning from the door, she looked to the stable and frowned, wondering if she should wait for Timothy, or walk inside without being invited. She wasted time by fussing with the tie of her uniform, hoping the workday garment wouldn’t stick out too sorely in the Turner home. Before she could work up her nerve to push at the door, it opened fully and Dr. Turner stepped out, nearly bumping into her and upsetting her pudding.

“Ti-- oh!” Dr. Turner moved back, holding up a hand as if to steady himself. “Nurse Mannion. I apologize. I was wondering where Tim had got to. I hadn’t realized you were already here.”
“Oh!” Shelagh held tightly onto the box to keep from dropping it. “Greetings!” Her mind blanked for a moment before she looked toward the stables again, feeling unbalanced. “He took Mrs. B to settle. I’ve only just arrived.” She looked back at the doctor, who had stepped back inside and held the door open for her. His shirt-sleeves were folded back and she fought to keep from looking too closely at the tanned skin of his forearm. Flushed, she stepped through the door, welcoming the din of chatter that enveloped them, even as the Turner children turned their eyes toward her.

She had seen them at church and the picnics, though she could only place a few names with faces. The oldest daughter was Gladys, mother of two young children of her own. It was Gladys who smiled at her now, wiping her hands on a cloth. “Nurse Mannion!”

“Oh, Mrs. Lowe,” Shelagh said, shifting the box in her arms.

Gladys laughed, dimpling. “Lord, call me Gladys, please! Momma’s just slidin’ the biscuits in the oven and will be out.” A baby started to whine and Gladys bustled over to take him from her husband, bouncing and cooing to him.

The younger children were whispering and nudging one another. Dr. Turner spoke up. “Would you like me to take that?” He nodded to the box she held.

“It’s a little treat for pudding,” she said, looking toward the kitchen. “Perhaps I should take it to Mrs. Turner.”

“I’ll do it fer you!” A dark haired girl jumped up, grinning as irrepressibly as Timothy had.

“Thank you, Margie,” Shelagh said, remembering Timothy calling his cousin’s name after Sunday School service.

The little girl beamed, before leaning in. “If you don’t know a name, ask me. I’ll tell you, sure.”

Before Shelagh could respond, Margie was off, speeding into the kitchen. The front door opened and Timothy entered. “Mrs. B’s taken care of, and I washed up,” he announced, looking at his father. “You don’t have to ask.”
Dr. Turner raised his eyebrows at Shelagh before looking at Timothy. “A little less sass, please.” Then he grinned, ruffling the boy’s hair. “I was goin’ to ask.”

“You always do!” Timothy’s grin echoed his father’s.

Anna Jane came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. “Oh, Nurse Mannion,” she said, striding forward to take her hand. “Thank you for coming to supp. Patrick, don’t leave the lady standing in the door!” She drew them into the room, shooing Timothy away. “Now, even with our James out visiting his sweetheart, there’s still a plumb bunch of us in this house. You already know Gladys and Little Alfred,” she said, gesturing toward Gladys and her husband. “Leona’s here with her sons.” A young woman with a little boy on her lap gave a friendly nod. Anna Jane continued, “...Margie brought me your offerin’ and we thank you fer it. So that leaves Robert--” a little boy slightly younger than Timothy smiled, “and baby Walter.” The youngest Turner child was too busy trying to grab his sister’s hair to look at Shelagh.

“Hello,” Shelagh said, feeling shy as she stood in front of the room.

“Won’t you come into the kitchen? We’re almost ready to serve. I just wanted to ask after your dessert.” Anna Jane walked toward the kitchen.

Shelagh followed, feeling less exposed in the kitchen. The scent of fried chicken and baking biscuits was delicious, and Shelagh’s mouth watered at the scent of warm food. “The dessert isn’t much, I’m afraid,” Shelagh said, dipping her head slightly. She looked at the table, already set with vegetables and gravy.

“I took a peek and it looks right good to me,” Anna Jane said, opening the oven to peer in at her biscuits.

“I made them for Timothy,” Shelagh said, smiling fondly. “He’d asked me if we had anything like your biscuits where I’m from. They’re scones and jam. Not a Kentucky biscuit, but really quite good!”

Anna Jane closed the oven and smiled at Shelagh. “He’ll love that. He’s as inquisitive as his father. He’ll want two scones--one to eat and one to cut into and inspect!”

The women laughed, and Shelagh watched as Anna Jane removed a pan of biscuits and began placing them into a bowl. Gladys and Leona entered the kitchen, Gladys’s young son still on her
They began to take up cups and fill them with water, coffee, or milk. Feeling timid, Shelagh asked, “Can I be of help?”

“Not at all. Everythin’ is ready!” Anna Jane placed the large bowl of biscuits on the table. “Did ya tell them to warsh their hands?”

“Yes, Momma,” Leona said, replacing the coffee kettle. “Daddy was just coming in the door when I made him go on back out.”

Anna Jane laughed, catching Shelagh’s eyes. “Once Thomas and Patrick sit, we’ll say the prayer. Sit on where you want to. Patrick mostly sits down this way,” she said, gesturing toward the far end of the table.

Shelagh’s stomach clenched at a look that she thought she saw in Anna Jane’s eyes, but the moment passed as the younger children came to the kitchen, clambering into their seats, at a smaller table, placing their hands into their laps. Shelagh settled herself near the end of the larger table. Timothy grinned at her from his spot at the small table, his eyes bright under his unruly fringe. She smiled back at him and at Margie, who also grinned and gave a tiny wave. Dr. Turner ended up across the table, baby Walter in his arms. The baby reached for his uncle’s hand, and Dr. Turner turned his palm up, letting Walter slap his tiny fingers against him. Walter laughed in satisfaction. Shelagh’s stomach dropped as Dr. Turner looked at her, one side of his mouth hitching up, as if the baby’s smile was something only the two of them together could see. She blinked and flashed a quick smile, turning her eyes to the table as Thomas took his seat.

The family joined hands. Shelagh took Anna Jane and Little Alfred’s hands as Thomas prayed.

“Heavenly Father, we thank ya for this meal in which we partake, and for those that gather ‘round this table. You bless us with your bounty and our lives that will be everlastin’. We ask you to be with those in need and to lift up the ones in need of liftin’. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray.”

The family, and Shelagh, responded, “Amen.”

Platters were passed and Shelagh enjoyed the din of conversation and clanking silverware that filled the room. She added a piece of fried chicken to her plate and contemplated the gravy before taking a cue from Dr. Turner and pouring it over a biscuit. Anna Jane offered to take Walter from Dr. Turner’s care, but he told her to eat, that he could handle the baby, and he did, deftly feeding small bites to him as he managed his own meal.
“Chicken’s good, Annie,” Thomas said, taking another piece from the platter. “I don’t reckon there’ll be any left, but if there is, Little Alfred and I sure wouldn’t mind taking it out for our dinner tomorrow. Would we, Alf?”

Little Alfred grinned at his father-in-law. “Sure wouldn’t. It is right good, Ma Turner. No one can fry it up like you.”

Anna Jane caught her daughter, Gladys’s, eye. “Think they’re aimin’ for me to fry up more.” Mother and daughter giggled.

“It is delicious, Mrs. Turner,” Shelagh said, taking another biscuit. “It was lovely of you to invite me.”

“It was lovely of you to come,” Anna Jane replied. “And please. Call me Anna Jane.”

Something in Anna Jane’s smile made Shelagh feel that they could become good friends. “I will,” she answered shyly, “if you’ll call me Shelagh.”

“Thank you, Shelagh.” Her smile turned mischievous. “You hear them tryin’ to get me to fry more chicken?”

Shelagh smiled, looking down at her plate.

Thomas laughed, shaking his fork at his wife. “Don’t side the company against me.” He sobered and took a gulp of coffee. “Alfred and I will be working the bottom land tomorrow. Gotta finish getting the corn laid.”

“You’re welcome to my patch of dirt,” Patrick said, tearing a piece of biscuit for Walter. “Would give you more yield.”

Thomas’s nod to his brother was short. “I thank ya, but not this year. With Leona’s Billy down in the mines, I only got myself, James, Alf here, and Big Alfred to keep up with it.”
Patrick’s fingers rubbed together, before he gripped them around his mug.

“Well, why don’t you tell us about yourself, Shelagh,” Anna Jane said, her voice brightening the tension between the brothers.

Placing her fork beside her plate, Shelagh looked at the expectant eyes at the table. Even Timothy was leaning from the children’s table, more interested in the grown-up conversation than in his cousin Robert stealing his chicken leg. “I believe that you already know what there is to know!”

“We do know that yer a right fine nurse,” Gladys said, looking to her uncle. “Uncle Patrick says yer the best he’s worked with.”

Startled, Shelagh looked across the table. Dr. Turner was turned toward Walter, letting the baby suck gravy from a wooden spoon. “I’m certain that’s not the case,” she demurred, mind racing. “It has always been a…. Well, I suppose you would call it a dream of mine. To become a nurse,” she clarified, watching baby Walter but studiously keeping her eyes from the doctor. “As a girl I was overly interested in nursing! It drove my father to his wit’s end! I insisted on nursing him, my dolls, rabbits, my school-friends…”

Gladys and Leona laughed. Anna Jane cut into the chicken on her plate. She nodded at Thomas. “Thom always said that Patrick had his nose buried in a medical book. I reckon you did, too?”

Shelagh pressed her lips together. “When I could find one! I left Aberdeen when I was eighteen and went to London to train. I do remember the first time I opened my nursing texts. I read them cover to cover.”

Dr. Turner chuckled. “I was caught more ‘an once in the hayloft, reading a medical journal when I ought to have been hoeing corn or mending a fence-line.”

Shelagh noticed Timothy watching his father and wondered what he knew about Dr. Turner’s early life. She remembered Cora’s recollections of a young Dr. Turner delivering babies and learning medicine as he also sought to be a support to his family. “It’s easy to be caught-up,” she mused, pausing to sip from her coffee. “Though I haven’t had the time to read that I once had!”

“Y’all always busy from what I hear,” Gladys agreed. “All this caring for folk and now there’s going to be that fair up to the hospital.”
The children began to buzz with excitement over the prospect of the fair. “I hope there’ll be ice cream!” Margie said, practically dancing in her chair.

“The Fair will be a wonderful day with sweets, games, and things to learn.” Shelagh smiled at Timothy. “I understand you’ve put your name down for the three-legged race.”

“I have! With Dad!” Timothy grinned. “And since it’s at the hospital I know he’ll be there!”

Dr. Turner looked at his son. “Tim!” He seemed at a loss for words until he said, “I’m looking forward to the Fair, son. And our race.”

Timothy’s smile at his father was beaming, and Shelagh ached at the sight of it. “It’ll be wonderful to relax and have fun together. Everyone works so very hard.”

Thomas looked at Dr. Turner before turning to Shelagh. “I suppose one must be dedicated to provide the type of care y’all nurses do. I seen you riding out toward the river afore dawn one mornin’.”

“It’s not always easy, but it is always worth it.” Shelagh took up a bit of biscuit and gravy.

“Always?” Leona took one of her little boys into her lap, letting him eat from her plate. “Seems a birthin’ would be joyous, and helping someone feel well again, but… there’s such sadness, too, isn’t there?” She shook her head. “I’m not sure I’d be able to stand it.”

“Well, Leona,” Anna Jane said, passing a platter of chicken to Shelagh to give to Little Alfred, “that’s when one relies on their faith to get ‘em through.”

“There are times, down with a patient that has no chance, that I have wished for a little faith of my own,” Dr. Turner said quietly, taking a soggy biscuit from his nephew.

Shelagh’s heart constricted. She looked at Dr. Turner. “In those moments, I wish that it made a difference.”

Dr. Turner’s eyes met hers across the table. For a heartbeat it was as if the clanking of silverware
and voices of children subsided, and there was only the look of gratitude and interest in his eyes. Dipping her head, she sought to escape his probing gaze when Walter banged his spoon on the table.

Anna Jane laughed, taking her youngest from his uncle’s arms. “Let’s talk of other things,” she said, smiling at the children at their small table. “Like stack cake? Or Nurse Mannion’s jam scones?”

“She’s?” Timothy looked at Shelagh with a huge grin. “You brought scones?”

“I thought that a growing boy and his cousins might like to give them a try!” Shelagh hoped that her voice was steadier than she felt. She was again off-balance but now in a strange new territory, conscious of the spark of notice in Dr. Turner’s gaze.

Gladys and Leona helped their mother with the desserts, while Thom and Patrick exited the house for an after supper smoke. Shelagh was relieved to have the doctor out of the room, to give her time to regain equilibrium. She again offered to assist but Anna Jane would hear none of it, and so she looked for Timothy, only to hear a timid voice behind her.

“She’s Mannion?”

She turned to find Timothy holding a folded sheet of paper. He seemed furtive, standing close to her. “Yes, Timothy?”

He pushed the paper into her hands. “This’s for you.”

“For me?” Shelagh started to open the paper, but Timothy’s wide eyed stare at his cousins made her stop. “Perhaps I’ll open this later?”

He nodded, a smile coming back to his face. “I’m glad you come to supp.”

Before she could reply he’d regained his seat next to Robert. She placed the paper into her jacket pocket, wondering at what it could be. Dr. Turner and Mr. Turner came back to the table, the scent of smoke clinging to them. Anna Jane and her daughters handed out slices of the stack cake and Shelagh’s scones. Timothy exclaimed over his, and Anna Jane shared a knowing smile with Shelagh as he immediately cut it open with his case knife.
The cake was crumbly and just sweet enough. Shelagh was about to comment on it when a knock came at the front door. Mr. Turner frowned, striding from his seat to open it.

Shelagh heard Eula before she saw her, and from the corner of her eye she saw Dr. Turner standing. She was startled to realize that she was already standing, too. “Eula?”

Eula nodded. “I’ve been sent from Hyden to find the pair of you. It’s Mrs. Polly. She’s in labor.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to weshallc for corrections to the recipe! <3 I was unsure as to what Shelagh would actually call scones, but as she’d already spoken to Timothy about them in another chapter, she had to bring them to sup!
My Mother's Hands

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

….my sisters and I have added your patients to our daily prayers. It seems perhaps the triumphs and heartaches of midwifery are the same no matter where one travels. Every birth is a new and sundry experience for both midwife and mother, and there is always work to be done. Through it all, I know of only two constants. He will be with you and the joy of midwifery shall never dim...

The ride into Hyden was a blur. Dr. Turner rode ahead. She followed his Morgan into a dry creek bed, the late evening closing in around them. The evening seemed still and quiet, the sound of the horses the only break in the pall. Supper at the Turners seemed far away now. Shelagh’s mind focused only on her patient and in the need to get to her as quickly as possible. Mrs. Polly would be scared, worried over the baby that was already so very loved. She prayed for the baby to be safely delivered and for Mrs. Polly’s strength in the hours to come. As they came upon Thousandsticks she began to pray for her own courage and ability to see Mrs. Polly through, whatever the outcome. She remembered the Hess bed and thought that perhaps the Lord had already answered an unknown prayer. They would need faith to get them through this night. As she watched him crest the hill toward the hospital she thought that perhaps Dr. Turner’s hope that the bed would arrive in time for Baby Polly had been his own kind of faith.

Eula took the horses as they arrived at the hospital stables. The walk toward the doors seemed the longest piece of the journey, yet the silence was not strained but expectant, as they prepared for the night before them. Dr. Turner nodded at Shelagh as they arrived at the side entrance of the ward. His gaze was set, determined, but for just a moment his unguarded eyes of earlier in the evening flashed in her memory. She pushed the thought away, hurriedly entering the hospital, changing into a delivery gown and cleaning her hands.

Nurse Wright met her at the Nursing Station, forestalling her entrance into the delivery room. “Dr. Gratz is over at Possum Bend with another laboring mother. He won’t be back until morning. Mrs. Polly’s been asking for you. Her waters haven’t gone yet but she has had a bloody show. Contractions are four minutes apart. They were far apart most of the day. We thought perhaps it would be like the last. Now they’ve become regular. It looks like it’ll be tonight, or sometime early in the morning.”

Shelagh nodded. “How is she?”

“As you’d expect. I think she’ll fare better with you. I’ll keep an eye on the ward whilst you and Doctor deliver.”
Nurse Wright stepped away. Shelagh entered into the delivery room, fixing a soft smile onto her face.

Mrs. Polly was contorted in a contraction, the muscles in her neck tight as she gritted through the pain. She turned her head toward the opening door, her eyes widening, a few tears rolling down her cheeks. “Nurse Mannion,” she gasped, reaching out a hand. “Yer here.”

“I wouldn’t be anyplace else!” She smiled and grasped Mrs. Polly’s hand. “I’ve heard that baby is misbehaving a wee bit, ready a bit early to meet his Mummy.” She squeezed Mrs. Polly’s hand before moving around the bed, fussing with the blanket. She dipped a rag into water and patted Mrs. Polly’s face, gently wiping the tears away. Mrs. Polly’s body relaxed from the intensity of the contraction, and Shelagh gave her the wet cloth, moving to slip on a pair of gloves. “Now that the contraction has eased I’m going to check down below to see how things are progressing, and then we’ll make a plan.”

“A… a plan?” Wringing the cloth above her neck, Mrs. Polly rubbed the water into her skin. “What do ya mean?”

“Well, we’ve both of us a long evening ahead, though you’ll be doing all the hard work.” Shelagh smiled at her patient, helping her to open her legs and fit her feet into the bed’s stirrups. “I thought that if we could make a plan, it would make the pair of us a bit calmer.”

“I could do with some calm, sure.” Mrs. Polly let her head rest against her pillow. “Are ya gonna look down there now?”

“Yes,” Shelagh said, “if you’re ready.” Mrs. Polly nodded, wincing slightly as Shelagh gently probed with her fingers, determining dilation.

Easing away, Shelagh removed her gloves and placed them into the bin. She then felt Mrs. Polly’s abdomen, determining position. “Baby is in a hurry, but there’s still plenty of time. Once your waters go things will progress more quickly.”

Mrs. Polly’s eyes closed, tears once again escaping. “I jus’ want him to live. An’ it’s too early.”

Shelagh caught Mrs. Polly’s hand. “We’ve every reason to hope. Did Dr. Turner tell you that the special baby bed came? It will be ready for your baby, should he need it.”
“He…” Mrs. Polly gulped. “He said it come, and that it could keep the baby warm and give him extra air. Cause sometimes least ‘uns need help to take a breath.”

“That’s right! It’s a wonderful small bed and it will be ready for your little one. Keep that in your heart, alongside your prayers.”

“Will you pray with me? Before we make our plans?” Mrs. Polly sniffled a laugh. “Though He might be plumb tired of me!”

“Oh!” Shelagh smiled. “He knows your heart. Of course I will pray with you.” Keeping her hand, they both bowed their heads and silently prayed, Shelagh asking again for fortitude for the hours ahead. Once Mrs. Polly raised her head, Shelagh let go of her hand and stood, tiding the already tidy room. “Now, for our plan. I would suggest that we begin with making certain to work together. I know that a delivery can be overwhelming. Let me know what you need from me and I will do the same for you.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, tensing as another contraction began. She rode it out as Shelagh held the cold cloth to her forehead. Once it eased, she smiled up at Shelagh. “We’ll face what comes together.”

Shelagh nodded. “We will.” It felt almost as a covenant between them, solemn and binding, made as the wind blew through the trees on the cool mountaintop. “When do you want Mr. Polly to be informed? He may visit you on the ward, of course, but do you want him to visit tonight, once you’re tidied up?”

Tearing up again, Mrs. Polly held her head back against the pillow. “I asked that courier to send fer ‘im.” Her voice wobbled. “When our las’ one died, he stood outside the cabin and bawled. He thinks I don’t know it, but I did. I don’t want ta do that to him again.” She took a deep breath. “Oncet the baby’s borned, I’ll know.”

“Very well.” Shelagh looked into her patient’s eyes. “We’ll keep him informed.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, wincing from the pain.

“We do have medication we can give to help with your pain, should you want, though we often like to wait until you’re a bit further along in your labor before administering it.” Taking a breath, Shelagh continued. “This might be hard to speak about, but I feel that we must. In the case that giving birth on your own becomes impossible, we may have to resort to surgery. Many
complications can arise in that case. We may have to surgically remove the baby if things go very badly. I want to be as honest with you as possible. And I don’t want you to be afraid. I’ll be with you every step of the way.”

Mrs. Polly nodded, sniffling once again. “I know you will. Yer my angel, remember?”

Shelagh’s eyes became glassy. “Look at us!” she fussed, standing and straightening the bedclothes.

Laughing, Mrs. Polly began to pant as another contraction began. “We’re a pair, alright. Can’t keep a tear in our eye!”

As the contraction deepened, a soft knock came at the door. Shelagh cast an eye over Mrs. Polly before answering, finding Dr. Turner on the other side. She looked back to her patient. “She’s contracting regularly, but only three centimeters dilated. Baby appears to be in position, but there is quite a bit of fluid.”

Dr. Turner nodded. “I’ve her husband here. He’s desperate to see her, if only for a moment.”

Shelagh looked back to find that the contraction had tapered off. “I’ll ask.” She closed the door. “Mrs. Polly? Dr. Turner has your husband here! Would you like for him to come in for a moment now, before things progress?”

Face brightening, Mrs. Polly looked at the door. “He’s here? Already? Must have flown!” She clenched her hand on her stomach. “I do want to see him.”

Smiling gently, Shelagh opened the door and nodded to Dr. Turner. Mr. Polly was wearing a white gown over his clothing, clutching his hat in his hands. He nodded at Shelagh as he came through. He stopped beside the bed, looking down at his wife. “I’ll be just outside should you need me,” Shelagh said, stepping away as Mrs. Polly softly spoke her husband’s name and he began to bend toward the bed.

In the hall, Shelagh ran the back of her hand against her eyes, trying to stave off the tears that threatened.

“I knew Hiram’s Daddy,” Dr. Turner said, looking toward the room. “He was a good man, like his
“Yes,” Shelagh agreed. “I only hope…” She trailed off before straightening her shoulders. “Forgive me.”

“You can’t help but get close to ‘em,” Dr. Turner mused, leaning against the wall. “You’re with them during the best and worst moments of their lives.”

Shelagh raised her face, startled to catch his eye. Their gazes clung for a moment until Shelagh drew a breath and looked away. “I… I understand the Hess bed is operational,” she managed, looking for safe territory in the strange new landscape that had been opened to her this night.

Dr. Turner blinked, almost shaking himself from some reverie. “Yes. It’s unlike anything I’ve seen, though I had heard of Dr. Hess’s attempts at incubators back before the War. The addition of oxygen to the bed should save lives, Nurse Mannion.”

“Tonight?” The word slipped softly from Shelagh’s lips before she could stop it.

Dr. Turner’s fingers twitched. “It gives us somethin’ to hang our hopes on.”

The door opened and Mr. Polly’s panicked face peeked through. “She’s paining! Can’t you help ease her?”

Shelagh and Dr. Turner entered the room. “We’ve discussed pain relief, Mr. Polly. We’ll do everything we can to help her through.”

Dr. Turner looked at the father-to-be. “Why don’t we get you settled in the waitin’ room? I’ve some Co-Colas or cigarettes, should you want one.”

Mr. Polly nodded, looking to his wife. “I’ll come. When yer ready for me. I’ll stay all night.”

Mrs. Polly smiled through the pain. “Don’t drink too many of them Co-Colas, now.”
Dr. Turner smiled as he left the room with the jittery young man.

Looking at Shelagh, Mrs. Polly shook her head. “I think they’re both off for a drink and a smoke. Leavin’ us to the work!”

Shelagh laughed.

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The evening wore on as the contractions came closer together. Mrs. Polly’s waters went just before midnight, the color clear but the abundance confirming the supposition that she suffered from hydramnios. Shelagh knew that the baby’s gestational age could be off by many weeks due to the imposition of the fluid, but said another quiet prayer that his lungs would be developed enough to breathe. As she cleaned the fluid from Mrs. Polly’s thighs, the younger woman apologized, cheeks red from exertion and embarrassment.

“You’ve nothing to apologize for!” Shelagh removed her gloves. “Believe me, there’s more fluids and all manner to come!”

But Mrs. Polly wasn’t listening to the reassurances. She had turned her head and was humming. Shelagh tried to make a song from the off-tune melody, and after a few moments thought perhaps that she recognized it. “Is that a song that your mother would sing?” Shelagh picked up the hum.

“Yes,” she said, “only I can’t remember all the words. Somethin’ about ‘behold what love, love divine, the Father showed to thee’…”

Shelagh took up the chorus.

Such love cannot be fathomed,

’Tis like the boundless sea;

His broken heart so wounded,

Is bleeding now for thee.
Mrs. Polly joined at the last and as they finished singing, she looked to Shelagh. “I think my Momma’s let him out of his cloud cradle. He’ll be here soon.”

Checking her progress, Shelagh met her tear-streaked face with a smile. “I’ll fetch doctor.” Opening the door, she found Dr. Turner stood there, as if he had been ready to enter but had stopped himself. His eyes flashed to her and away quickly, as if he did not dare to look too long.

He shook his head and came through the door, dressed in his gown and mask. “Nurse?”

Putting his gaze out of her mind, she let him know that Mrs. Polly was into transition. “It’s time.”

Settling Mrs. Polly’s feet back into the stirrups, Shelagh glanced at the doctor, who appeared to be gathering himself. The chances of fetal distress were great with this delivery, cord prolapse being a chief concern. But Shelagh kept a smile on her face, patting Mrs. Polly’s face with the wet flannel and explaining how they would like for her to push when the next contraction began. Mrs. Polly nodded and gritted her teeth in determination, pushing through the pain as Shelagh counted her off.

“You’re doing so well!” Shelagh patted Mrs. Polly’s forehead with the damp cloth.

“Am I, Nurse?” Mrs. Polly’s cheeks were wet with sweat and tears. “I jus’ want him here so bad.” She trailed off with the last word as the next contraction rolled over her and she grunted into a push.

“You are.” Shelagh smiled. “Perhaps try to breathe in through your nose and out from your mouth, however.” Shelagh demonstrated. “It may help conserve your strength.”

Mrs. Polly did so, and with the next contraction grabbed the backs of her thighs to lean into it, panting through the pain. “It’s too early,” she whimpered, falling back into the bed. “I don’t…” she seemed to hold in a groan as the next contraction came. As it continued she cried out, “I don’t want it to be like my first ‘un, Nurse!” Damp strands of hair fell into her face as the strain passed. She began to stammer out an apology for her cries.

“There’s no shame here,” Shelagh said, dabbing at Mrs. Polly’s flushed face with the flannel. “Just remember to breathe through it.” Shelagh began to breathe in and out, encouraging the laboring woman to imitate her.
“That’s it,” Dr. Turner praised, glancing up at Mrs. Polly. “Another push and I should see the head.”

Encouraged, Mrs. Polly held fast to Shelagh’s hand as she pushed once more.

“Head’s born,” Dr. Turner said, wiping baby’s eyes and mouth with a rag. “Mrs. Polly,” he said, not looking up from the baby. “If you feel the urge to push I’m going to ask that you try your best not to do so, for just a moment. I’m just helping the baby into position.”

Mrs. Polly nodded weakly, but Shelagh glanced at the doctor, noting a bead of sweat sliding down his forehead. “Doctor?” Giving Mrs. Polly the flannel, Shelagh moved to the end of the bed.

“A double loop,” Dr. Turner whispered, indicating the baby’s neck, where the cord was wrapped. “Tight, but….” He looked into Shelagh’s eyes. “On the next contraction I’m going to see if I can remove it from the neck. I don’t like to cut the cord too early.”

Shelagh nodded, understanding the implication that he did not wish to cut off the baby’s support from the very cord that encircled him. Pressing her lips together, she sent upward another silent prayer, moving to once more clasp Mrs. Polly’s hand as the next contraction began.

“Push now, Mrs. Polly,” Dr. Turner said, nodding at the laboring woman. “But not too hard, ease right into it, if you can.”

Mrs. Polly grunted, pushing while taking slow and deep breaths.

“That’s it,” Dr. Turner praised, working quickly to free the baby. He looked to Shelagh briefly with a small nod, relief in the action, before looking back to Mrs. Polly. “On the next contraction do exactly the same. Once the shoulders pass, he’ll be born. You’re almost there.”

Shelagh squeezed her patient’s hand, sending a silent thank you to the Lord. “One more brave push and your baby will be here!”

But Mrs. Polly did not seem to hear them. She looked toward the ceiling, her lips moving as if in silent conversation. As the next contraction began, she leaned into it, her breath controlled and
“You’re doing so well,” Shelagh murmured, holding tightly to Mrs. Polly’s hand. “Keep doing--”

“And he’s here!” Dr. Turner looked up with a grin, before looking down at the baby in front of him. “It’s a little boy, Mrs. Polly!”

“Is he a-livin’?” Mrs. Polly sobbed, falling back into the bed. “He ain’t cryin’!”

Dr. Turner cut the cord, handing the baby to Shelagh, who took him to the examination table, gently placing him down. “He’s so young, Mrs. Polly. He needs a little encouragement to breathe.” She looked down at the baby. “Come on, little one,” she whispered, taking in his red hair and flat infant expression. She cleared his throat with the mucus extractor and wrapped him into a warm towel. Behind her, Dr. Turner coached Mrs. Polly to bear down slightly to deliver the afterbirth.

Shelagh flicked the baby’s feet, but did not receive a reaction. Picking him up, she listened for respiration, heart plummeting as she did not detect his breath.

“Nurse?” Dr. Turner turned toward her, looking at the baby.

“I’ll have to try Eve’s Rocking,” Shelagh said in a rush, looking to the doctor. “Have you--”

“Yes, yes,” he said, nodding his head in resolute trust. “Try it, Nurse.”

Shelagh immediately moved into the motion, lowering the baby, and raising him again, seesawing him to encourage him to take that first breath. She placed her mouth over his, breathing in to encourage his lungs to expand.

“Is ‘e dead?” Mrs. Polly cried, trying to ease herself from the bed. “I need my baby, Nurse Mannion!”

Shelagh, now, was not listening, focused only on the tiny life in her arms. She lowered the baby again and raised him, breathing in, looking into the tiny face for any sign of life. The moment
slowed until there was only Shelagh and the baby. She rocked and breathed, willing him to live. Lowering him once more, she heard a tiny squeak, quieter than the mewl of a newborn kitten. Daring to hope, she looked into blinking blue eyes and smiled. “Praise the Lord,” she whispered. “Hello, little one.”

As she looked up, she found Nurse Wright in the room, attending to Mrs. Polly. Dr. Turner was at her side. He looked to the baby and back at Shelagh. “You did well, Nurse.” Accepting the baby, he placed him back on the examination table, listening to his heart and evaluating him. “Respiration is quick and shallow. There are compression marks on his neck from the cord, but I don’t feel any internal damage. But he is cyanosed. Given these things and his premature status, little soldier’ll be the inaugural occupant of our Hess Bed.” He inclined his head toward Nurse Wright. “She’s explaining things to Mrs. Polly.” He re-wrapped the baby and handed him to Shelagh. One side of his mouth ticked up in relief. “Let’s let Momma quickly see ‘im and we’ll take him to be settled.”

Shelagh walked the baby to his mother, allowing her to take a peek.

“Oh,” Mrs. Polly brought her hand to her mouth. “He’s the best thing I ever seed.” She kissed a finger and touched that finger to his tiny cheek. “Momma’ll be right along. Keep breathin’. I’ll be a-right there.”

Shelagh’s eyes met Mrs. Polly’s briefly and welled with tears as Mrs. Polly’s face crumpled.

“Take care of ‘im fer me,” she whispered. “Now yer his angel.”

“I will,” Shelagh promised, this vow an extension of her earlier promise to be with Mrs. Polly every step of the way. Following Dr. Turner, she entered the room with the Hess bed, situated near the hospital bed that Mrs. Polly would soon occupy. The bed was warmed and the oxygen tank at the ready. Placing the tiny baby inside the bassinet, Shelagh closed the viewing door, holding her breath as Dr. Turner began the oxygen therapy.

He came to stand beside her, looking in through the door at the baby, watching his tiny fingers flex and his chest move with each breath of life.

“When babies are born with respiratory troubles it many times gets worse before it gets better,” Dr. Turner said, his voice raspy with the late hour. “I’ll explain that to Mrs. Polly if--”
“I will,” Shelagh said, touching the Hess bed just next to the glass viewing window as the baby twitched. “Do you know how long he might be confined?”

“I’m hopeful he’ll be out before seventy-two hours are up.” Dr. Turner’s shoulders sagged slightly. “We waited so long for this bed. Sometimes I still feel like I’m a-waitin’.” His accent thickened as he looked at baby Polly. “Forgive me, Nurse.” His fingers twitched. “I’m just as pleased he’s breathin’.”

Shelagh wished that she could tell him to go home to his son, to Timothy, but knew that she could not. Instead, she said, “So am I.”

Together, they listened to the hum of the machine and watched the tiny life begin to thrive.

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Mrs. Polly was brought into the room, anxiously looking at the Hess bed. “Is he still breathin’?”

Shelagh stood alone at the bed, monitoring the baby’s movements. She smiled. “He is! His breath is still somewhat shallow, but steady. Would you like to come over to see him?”

Mrs. Polly stood from the chair she’d been pushed in, standing between Nurse Wright and Shelagh. “He’s under glass?” She looked at the viewing window.

“He’s being given air through the bed itself,” Shelagh explained, pointing to the oxygen tank. “We can raise and lower the amount he receives as he needs it.” She gestured to the sides of the bed. “There’s warm water in the walls of this bed to keep him cozy and his temperature steady.”

“Will you look at that.” Mrs. Polly leaned in. “Oh!” She raised her hand to her mouth. “Look at ‘im!” Her eyes overflowed with tears. “The whole time I was a-carryin’, I wisht I could look inside and see ‘im.” She wiped the tears with the back of her hand. “And now there he is!” Her smile was wobbly. “He looks like his Daddy made over.”

Shelagh grinned as Nurse Wright laughed. “Do you have a name picked out for him?”
“We’re gon’ call him Hiram.” She looked over to Shelagh. “I was thinking of Hiram Ray. Ray after that saint you told me about. I reckon the Lord knows what he’s doing, sending me a midwife who knows all about her callin’.” She reached for Shelagh’s hand. “Is that alright, Nurse?”

Shelagh’s smile was brilliant as she squeezed Mrs. Polly’s hand and looked into the incubator. “Hello, Hiram Ray.”

Mrs. Polly was settled into her bed after being appraised on the schedule for Hiram Ray and what would happen on their first night. Dr. Turner checked on the baby regularly as Shelagh and Nurse Wright worked to help Mrs. Polly express colostrum in anticipation of the baby’s first feeding. The night wore on as Mrs. Polly and her son dozed. Mr. Polly was allowed into the room to view his tiny son. He held his hat and cried, hastily wiping the tears away as Mrs. Polly awakened. She beckoned him to her side, and he held her hand, softly whispering his love to her.

As morning neared the baby’s breath became more regular, and Shelagh watched as Dr. Turner’s posture eased. He turned to Mrs. Polly. “Dr. Gratz will be in soon to take over the day shift. He’s been told about Hiram Ray and will answer any questions you may have as the day wears on.” He smiled at the young couple. “But y’all know I’m only just down the mountain if you need me. I’ll be here before you know it.”

“Thank you, Dr. Turner.” Hiram shook his hand before turning to Shelagh. “And you, Nurse Mannion. We can’t never repay ya.”

“It wouldn’t be necessary in any case,” Dr. Turner said, drawing Hiram into conversation.

Shelagh looked to Mrs. Polly. “I’m going back to Beech Fork, Mrs. Polly. I’ll come back tomorrow to check on you both, but should you have need of me before then--”

“I’ll send for ya if we need, Nurse. You need to rest afore the next momma’ll be needin’ ya!” She laughed before sobering. The look in her eyes didn’t need to be spoken aloud.

Shelagh smiled in understanding and reciprocation in their bond of sisterhood. “Congratulations,” she whispered, before exiting the room. She should feel tired, she knew, and perhaps stay in the Nurses Quarters for some sleep before riding back to the outpost. And yet, she was full of adrenaline, alert and wide awake. Leaving the hospital through the side door, she started toward the stables when she noticed a lone figure standing on the far side of the tree, smoke curling from
the cigarette he held. Supper at the Turners seemed so long ago, and yet, her cheeks warmed as she remembered the notice in his eyes, not many hours before.

“Nurse Mannion,” he said, his lined cheeks raising as he smiled. “I was on the way home, but stopping for a smoke seemed more important.”

Heart pounding, she stepped toward him until they stood side by side, looking at the rising sun. She glanced at him from the corner of her eye but didn’t speak.

He took another draw of the cigarette and exhaled. “We’re like an officer and a sergeant, the morning after the Somme.” He grinned at her, shaking his hand in mock severity. “And that’s not to say that I see myself as the officer.”

Shelagh couldn’t stop herself from smiling, capturing a lock of hair as it blew into her face with the rustle of air through the trees.

Dr. Turner’s voice softened. “I feel as if I should offer you one,” he said, indicating his cigarette. He laughed. “Or I could get a Co-Cola, instead.”

Shelagh startled, and laughed. “Just a wee puff,” she said, accepting the cigarette from his hand. She inhaled, enjoying the vice, before exhaling and holding the cigarette. “I’d never had a Coca-Cola but I did sometimes sneak cigarettes from my father’s desk.” She smiled ruefully at the look of surprise on Dr. Turner’s face. “I was about fourteen.”

He smiled and his face softened, the look of interest once again in his eyes. He pushed his hair back as the wind blew, breaking their gaze. Shelagh’s heart stuttered. “Thank you,” she murmured, handing him back the cigarette.

“You’ve earned it,” he said, watching as she looked toward the stable. “It’s a long ride to Beech Fork with the wind picking up.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “But I’ll take my leave. Good day, Dr. Turner.”

She didn’t wait for his reply, walking away, feeling raw and exposed. When she and Mrs. B passed the tree, Dr. Turner was gone.
Back at Beech Fork, she entered her bedroom to rest before commencing morning rounds. She eased out of her jacket, frowning as she felt a piece of paper in the pocket. Pulling it out, she remembered Timothy giving it to her at supper. Sitting on the bed, she unfolded it, heart jumping at the picture of she and Timothy. He smiled in the drawing and so did she, eyes wide and blue behind her crudely drawn glasses. Their hands were clasped but on her free hand rested a single, red butterfly.

Eyes welling once more, Shelagh refolded the paper and slid it under her pillow, sinking against it, thinking of Timothy and his father as she eased into the welcome abyss of sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Eve's Rocking was first described in 1932, just barely making the cut-off for this fic!
The weather has warmed; early mornings now rival the hottest days I knew in Poplar. The mothers tell me that far worse heat is coming. I shall soon rotate my wardrobe and wear my summer uniform. It is little changed from the winter version--linen instead of wool, sleeveless jacket over long sleeves, the same shade of blue. The biggest difference is the addition of a panama hat instead of a cap. It should efficiently block the sun, even if I feel it is a bit conspicuous! Several young couriers deem our outfits as fashionable. I would say that they are appropriate in marking each nurse as one of a group and are made for long days in the saddle, messy work in patient homes, and traversing the land...

The afternoon sun worked its way across the clinic floor as Shelagh saw to her last patient. A few stragglers were left behind in the waiting room, listening to Ma Perkins on the radio. The women were hooked, and even Shelagh would listen in now and again to hear what was happening with Ma. Looking to her patient, Shelagh ducked her head with a smile. “Oh, Mrs. Webber, forgive me,” she said, taking up her pinard. “My mind was wandering for just a moment!”

“Mine does it all the time,” Mrs. Webber, said, settling back against the examination bed. “’Tween this ’un,” she gestured to her stomach, “and the other seven, if’n my mind didn’t wander it might up and leave me!” She laughed before turning toward the waiting room. “I don’t care for that Ma Perkins. What I like is them advertisements. Lord, what I wouldn’t give to have half them products they hawk on there. Makes cleanin’ and life sound like a breeze.”

“They are are quite nice,” Shelagh agreed. “Sometimes if I can get a signal at night I’ll listen and it’s like having someone here with me.” She placed the pinard on her patient’s stomach and listened.

The baby was none too pleased and moved away from the instrument. Mrs. Webber laughed. “I got someone here with me.” She fondly ran her hand over the curve of her stomach. “Did ya hear ary a thing?”

“Baby sounds wonderful,” Shelagh said, taking Mrs. Webber’s arm to help her to sit up.

Outside of the curtain the radio drama was ending and children came inside to gather around their mothers. “Nurse Mannion, Nurse Mannion,” a little boy shouted as she and Mrs. Webber came out from the examination, “did you hear tell of the fair up to yer hospital?”
Shelagh laughed. “I did, Charley!” She looked at the other children. “Are the lot of you coming?”

Cheers rose from the children and even the mothers were smiling. “Don’t get much together ‘cept fer church,” Mrs. Webber said. “It’ll be nice to have something for the least ‘uns to look forward to.”

“I hope they have lemonade,” a little girl said, smiling shyly at Shelagh.

“I think there’s a possibility, Thelma!” Shelagh grinned, knowing that Mrs. Breckinridge would stop at nothing to bring sweets and treats for the children of Leslie County. She did love to dote on them.

The door opened and Cora stepped in, looking to Shelagh. “Shelagh,” she said, taking in the crowd around her, “could you ride out with me a spell?”

“Of course,” Shelagh said, mind racing as to whether Cora was taking her to another patient or if Felice had gone into labor. “I was just going to help Lisette to clear up.”

“I’ll do the cleaning,” Lisette said, peeking her head around the kitchen door, where she had been sterilizing equipment.

“Miss Lisette!” Charley grinned. “Will you be up to the fair?”

“I’ll be drinking all the lemonade!” Lisette winked at the children, who began to shout among themselves just how much lemonade they would drink.

Cora shook her head at the children. “Buttermilk is a-better for yer bones!”

“Aw, Mrs. Tucker,” Charley said, shaking his head. “Don’t you like nothin’ else?”

Cora laughed. “I’ll see you directly,” she said to Shelagh, shuffling from the door.
Shelagh turned off the radio and gathered her cloak and bag. Leaving the clinic in Lisette’s capable hands, she saddled Mrs. B and met Cora on the path that led away from the outpost. “Is it Felice?” She kept her voice low, though no one was around.

Cora nodded. “I’m thinkin’ it might be time.” Nudging her horse forward into a walk, Cora continued, “A little boy from out there come up my place, said she was painin’ and she’d be glad of us to come.”

“Thank goodness he was able to find you! I’ve been worried that she would start to labor and have to endure it alone.”

“So’ve I,” Cora said, shaking her head. “It hain’t right, them practically alone out there. Felice’s husband is down the mine and most of the rest gone north. Still, they’re making do.”

Cora urged her horse to trot and Shelagh fell in behind for the ride toward the Jettown.

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Wilma met them at the front door. “I tol’ her it was false, but she was done convinced, Cora. You know how stubborn that girl is.”

Cora entered into the house after Wilma. “You sure? The pains stopped?”

“Oh, yes.” Wilma settled into her chair. “I tol’ Felice that they was never regular pains to start with. That baby too snug to come out as yet. Hit’s head down where it ought but hit’s not ready.”

Cora settled next to Wilma. “You want Shelagh to go on and look at her, Wil? Since we’re here?”

“Might as well. She’s been wantin’ the doctor to be here, as if ol’ Granmomma hain’t enough.” Wilma shook her head. “But I remember my first. I wanted everythin’ jus’ so. And with my sight failin’...”

“I’d be happy to look over her again, Mrs. Williams.” Shelagh looked toward the back of the
“Shall I go on through?”

“Go on,” Wilma fluttered her hand toward the hall. “She’ll be pleased ta see you.”

Shelagh looked to Cora but Cora was already pouring cups of buttermilk for her and Wilma and looking for a pan of cornbread to crumble in it. Shaking her head at the two old friends, Shelagh knocked at Felice’s door.

Felice called for her to enter. “Nurse Mannion,” she said, cheeks wet with tears. “I done thought it’d be today. But it’s never gon’ come out!”

“Oh, Felice!” Shelagh found a flannel and brought it to the girl. “I’m certain that you’re tired and anxious, but I promise you, the baby will come!” She sat beside the bed. “Would you like for me to examine you again?”

Felice nodded. “Can’t ya also tell me some ways to encourage hit out?”

“Well,” Shelagh said, placing her hands on Felice’s stomach. “I have heard that spicy foods might bring on labor. Or exercise, such as walking.” She took her pinard from her bag. “Castor oil, though I don’t personally recommend that treatment!” She listened to baby’s heart and measured fundal height. “39 weeks,” she said, smiling in sympathy when Felice groaned. “Right on target. Your grandmother was correct--baby is in the perfect position for birth. It really could be any time! When was your last pain?”

“Maybe an hour ago or more.” Felice rubbed a hand over her stomach. “I was jus’ hoping this was it. Jimmy be back out of the mine soon and I wanted to show him our baby.”

“I know it must be so tough to wait! Soon, though, your little one will be here and will bring so much joy to your lives!”

A horse whinnied from outside as another rider approached. “That’ll be Dr. Turner,” Felice said, pushing up from the bed. “He’s been seein’ to Granmomma. Maybe he got some of that castor oil.” She grinned at Shelagh. “I’ll walk an’ drink the oil. Even up my odds.”

Shelagh busied herself with folding the flannel and repacking her bag. She heard Dr. Turner come into the house and greet Mrs. Williams, Cora, and Felice. Her stomach clenched at the sound of
his voice, but she took her time to fluff Felice’s pillow before walking into the living room.

Dr. Turner was knelt in front of Mrs. Williams, looking into her eye with the aid of a small lamp. “That’s very good, Mrs. Williams,” he murmured, moving the light and peering closely. Placing it on the table, he stood, smiling down at his patient. “I see no evidence of infection, though I’m afraid the deterioration remains the same.”

Wilma nodded, rocking in her chair. “I done resigned to it, Doctor.” She nodded toward Felice. “That one want lookin’ after, not me.”

Turning toward Felice, Dr. Turner stopped when he saw Shelagh in the doorway. “Nurse,” he greeted with a smile, before turning to Felice. “I know you’ve been looked after well with Nurse Mannion.”

“Yes, sir, I have,” Felice said, looking to Shelagh. “I was wonderin’ if you might have some of that castor oil fer me? Nurse Mannion says it might help to bring on the baby.”

Wilma made a rude noise. “The nurse also said she wouldn’t recommend it! You be in the outhouse all night!”

Dr. Turner appeared to try to stop his lips from twitching. “I believe I do have some oil in my saddle bag,” he said to Felice. “I’ll bring it in to you and explain the side-effects.”

“I’ll come out with you if it’s all the same.” Felice stood with some difficulty. “I got to walk this baby out.”

Wilma inclined her head toward Cora as the door closed behind Dr. Turner and her granddaughter. “She’ll go overdue and I won’t never hear the end of it.”

“Maybe it’ll learn her some patience. Lord knows she’ll need aplenty of it oncet that baby’s here.”

“She’s like her Momma for the world. No patience and a smart mouth.” Cora’s lips curved into a smile. “And I hope her child’s jus’ the same.” She took a spoonful of her mashed cornbread and milk, but held it suspended over her glass. “I reckon I worry about us up to Ohio. How we’re gon’ live, how she’s gon’ care for that least ‘un without all we know here. I ain’t never been so fer.”
“At least yer kin will be there,” Cora soothed, drinking the last bit of buttermilk and crumbs in her glass. “That’ll make all the difference.”

Wilma was quiet for a moment before nodding. “Listen to me. I’m gon’ home to my people, but you, Nurse Mannion,” she turned her head toward where Shelagh stood. “Here you are with strangers in a strange land.”

Shelagh settled into the seat Felice had occupied. “Oh! It becomes less strange as the days pass,” she said, looking out of the window at the river that wound the bend below the house. “I’ve been given so much--friends, lovely patients, confidence…” Pressing her lips together, Shelagh looked to Cora. “I must have looked terrified that morning we met,” she said, smiling. “The trip over the mountain was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do!”

Cora grinned before leaning in toward Wilma. “She did look a mite scared but what impressed me was that there she was, a tiny little thing, ready to take on the hills and anyone who dared ‘er.”

“You got to have some fire in ya to come this fer,” Wilma agreed. “And when you go back home, imagine the stories you’ll tell. Poor folk, rivers, wild animals, guns, mountains--them city people will be enthralled!”

Cora slapped her leg and laughed, Wilma chuckling with her. Shelagh imagined herself telling Sister Julienne about her Kentucky adventures and knew that her former mentor would understand what she had found in the mountains so far from home: a need for care.

“What’re yer plans when you go back to London?” Wilma let her spoon rest in her glass. “Will ya keep with the midwifin’?”

“I…” Shelagh paused. “That was my plan. I knew that my two-year contract at FNS would make me an attractive candidate for placements when I returned, but…”

“But it’s a long time off,” Cora cut in, taking the glasses to the sideboard and scraping the remnants into the scrap bowl.

“When they first started talking ‘bout Ohio I thought it was a long time off, too.” Wilma leaned back in her chair. “Now I got to go, and Lord, I hain’t ready.”
The door opened and Felice came through, holding her bottle of oil. “Granmomma,” she said, “hand me that spoon, please.” She looked to Cora and Shelagh and grinned, dark eyes shining. “Y’all be seein’ me again, real soon.”

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Soon after the pronouncement, Shelagh, Cora, and Dr. Turner took their leave, saddling up and heading toward the path. Only two horses could walk alongside the other, and so Dr. Turner took up the rear. “I sure hope Felice don’t down too much that oil,” Cora said. “Though I reckon the baby might shoot on out with enough of it!”

“Cora!” Shelagh tried to stop herself from laughing. Behind her she heard Dr. Turner’s laugh and her cheeks flushed at the masculine sound of it. “I only hope that we’ll be able to make it to her bedside before that should happen.”

Cora laughed. “It wouldn’t be the first to come out with little coaxin’.”

A path into the hills opened toward their right, and Cora slowed her horse. “I think I’m gon’ head up here and talk to Big Bettie afore gon’ home.”

Dr Turner stopped his Morgan next to Shelagh and Mrs. B. “Cora, do you need me to send Tim and Jack up to help you with aught?”

“You can send ‘em to keep an ol’ lady company,” she said with a grin and wave as she started up the narrow path.

“I think she knows every trail and path in this county,” Dr. Turner said, looking to Shelagh. “Do you need to rush back to Beech Fork?”

He encouraged his horse into a walk and Shelagh urged Mrs. B to match their stride. “Lisette was cleaning after Clinic. I’ll assist her when I return.”

“I’m sorry I was called out before the end of Clinic,” he said, smiling ruefully at her. “Seems to be the way of it. Were there any troubles?”
“No,” Shelagh said, ducking her head slightly. “Although Ma Perkins' children seemed once more in a fix…”

Dr. Turner’s forehead scrunched. “Ma… Oh!” He laughed again. “Every Clinic I attend has women around the radio. I’ll admit that I prefer Ma Perkins or The O’Neills to some of those charlatans that play in between.”

Shelagh remembered goat glands and their supposed restorative powers for men and blanched. “Quite. I enjoy the ladies listening to their favorite shows and music. I like being surrounded by the chatter.”

“I’d imagine it’s a change for you, coming from London and into the hollers of Kentucky,” he said with a chuckle. “When I went to medical school I couldn’t get over how loud Louisville was. Buggies, newsies, people hawking their wares, the students--I’d thought my brothers loud, but nothing at all prepared me for living in town.”

Shelagh thought of the cloistered and silent life she had led in London. “It has been quite a change,” she murmured. They rode in silence for a few moments, Shelagh taking in the land surrounding them. Spring was still evident, flowers blooming and trees now lush with leaves. Here and there trees bloomed white, pink, or red, breaking the endless green. “I always find this stretch of bottom land lovely.” Shelagh gestured to the flowering trees. “Oh, how I admire these as I ride through.”

Dr. Turner stopped his horse, looking out over the land. “Do you really?” He smiled, but something in the smile seemed almost shy.

Shelagh stopped just ahead of him and looked back at him. “Doctor?”

“Forgive me, Nurse. I was looking over the land with fresh eyes,” he said, one side of his mouth hitching upward. “Ah,” he took his hat off and ran a hand through his hair. “This is actually my patch of dirt.” At her look he elaborated, “That I offered to Thomas for planting.” When Shelagh didn’t answer, he continued. “Well, not here for the planting. There’s a good patch for plowing nearer to the river.”

“This is your land?” Shelagh looked out over the trees and high grass. She thought of the building in town that she knew Dr. Turner to be living in and wondered why he wasn’t on his land, though proximity to the hospital seemed the most likely reason. “It’s beautiful.”
Dr. Turner nodded, opening his mouth as if to say something, before closing it again. He looked toward trees and then back at Shelagh. “Would you like to ride out to see some of the blooms? Tim likes to play in them because many of them attract butterflies.”

Before Shelagh knew what she was doing, she was nodding, and following Dr. Turner’s Morgan down into the grass and across a field. “What sort of flowers?” she managed, her heart beating a fast tattoo.

“I’m not sure of all the names,” he said, pointing to a tree. “That’s a redbud, there. I’m sure Cora’s told you about Redbud Winter. That’s when those bloom.” He pointed to the white blooms on another tree. “That’s a serviceberry…. According to Timothy, there’s also honeysuckle, blueberry, coneflower, sweetspire…” He grinned. “And about a hundred other names that I will confess to havin’ forgot!”

Shelagh laughed, imagining Timothy reading to his father from the butterfly book and investigating plants. “What sort of tree is this?” Shelagh stopped in the shade of a tall tree. The leaves were waxy and a deep green.

“That’s a blackgum tree,” he said, stopping next to her. “Down there a piece is the river,” he said, gesturing ahead of them. “And over there--” he turned his horse and indicated a field of purple flowers to the right of them.

Insects dipped and buzzed over the blossoms and Shelagh was enchanted. “Oh, it’s lovely!”

“It is,” he agreed. “I just don’t think I’ve ever taken the time to notice it.” He cleared his throat. “Would you be inclined to stay just a bit longer? Perhaps take a meal with me? I’ve some of Cora’s cornbread, some of Mrs. Jones’s salt pork, and Harold Beecham gave me a container of divinity…”

Warmth still lingered in the air. Beech Fork suddenly seemed far away from the flowered field before her. Shelagh wanted to stay longer but being so near Dr. Turner, alone, made her stomach bunch into a knot. She shouldn’t leave Lissette with all of the work at the Clinic, and a patient may, even now, be knocking at the outpost door. Yet she looked at Dr. Turner’s profile as he surveyed his land with seemingly a new appreciation. He turned to her and his smile crinkled his eyes. “Yes,” she answered, dismounting.

Dr. Turner left his horse, reaching into the bags for the wrapped food. He stood awkwardly for a
moment, but Shelagh pulled a small cake of soap and a canteen from her bags. She settled herself onto a patch of grass and washed her hands, drying them on a clean handkerchief from her pocket. Looking up at him, she shyly offered the soap.

Once his hands were clean he sat opposite her and offered her the cornbread. She took a slice, breaking off a small piece. “Have you built a cabin here?”

“Thought on it,” Dr. Turner said, making a sandwich with his cornbread and the salt-pork. “Marianne, my wife, came from the other side of the mountain, out near Hazard. She wanted to live closer to her family. We lived on the other side of Hyden when Timothy was born. After…” he trailed off, taking a bite of his cornbread. “After she passed, I moved into town to be closer to the hospital.”

Shelagh nodded. “I’m certain that makes it easier to get to your patients, being centrally located.”

“Except when they knock on my door at all hours,” he said with a wink.

Shelagh’s breath caught. In the distance a dog bayed. Shelagh turned toward the sound.

“Still in want of a mutt, Nurse?”

“Not enough to be running through the bushes after one!” The doctor laughed and a comfortable silence grew between them as they ate. “It’s so peaceful,” she said, as a gentle wind swayed the branches above them. “I didn’t expect these mountains to be quite so beautiful.”

Dr. Turner swallowed his bit of sandwich. “Beauty is one thing we’re not short of out here.”

Shelagh’s cheeks flushed as Dr. Turner’s eyes met hers for a brief moment before he turned his head, looking out over the land. “I’ve not seen much of your state,” she said, hoping the heat in her cheeks wasn’t evident.

“You’ve probably seen more of it than most in the county!” He grinned. “Have you heard of ‘Chained Rock’, over to Pineville?”
Shelagh vaguely remembered some of the women laughing over something called Chained Rock and was immediately wary. “Only that it’s a rock that’s chained to a mountaintop?”

“That’s right,” he said, still grinning. “Couple years back these two fellows decided to chain up a rock that jutted out from a mountain. Seems the people livin’ below thought that rock might fall and …. Well, demolish the town.”

Shelagh’s lips twitched. “Their answer became a… chain? They chained the rock to the mountain?”

“Well, it’s not called ‘Chained Rock’ for nothin’, Nurse Mannion!”

Unable to stop herself, Shelagh giggled. “Does anyone believe that this chain will stop the rock from falling?”

Dr. Turner tilted his head as he looked at her. His eyes were wide with humor and glittered attractively as he studied her. “Uh… no,” he said, seeming to shake himself for a moment before answering. “I’m, uh, I’m afraid it’s a hoax, though what’s real is that an entire group of people lugged a chain right up the side of that mountain.”

Grinning, Shelagh tried to imagine the chain stretching from the rock to the mountain. “Anything for a good story!”

“Yes,” he said, offering her a piece of divinity candy.

Shelagh reached into the packet, removing one of the sweet confections. As she looked up her eyes once more met Dr. Turner’s and their gazes clung. Heart thumping, Shelagh looked away, standing to wipe the grass and dirt from her trousers. “How is… how are Mrs. Polly and little Hiram Ray?” she asked, seeking a safe subject on which to converse with the doctor. She went to her own bags and removed a few carrots to give as treats to the horses.

Following her lead, Dr. Turner stood and began to repack his bags. “Mrs. Polly is recovering nicely. I think having Hiram Ray in the room with her helps to ease her. Hiram Ray is taking small stints outside of the Hess bed, though his breathing remains shallow. He’s still learning the use of those lungs.”
“I intend to ride to Hyden for a visit. I’ve prayed daily for them and think of them quite often.”

“She does the same for you,” he said, buckling his bag. “I’ve sat up with Hiram Ray and she and I have talked some. She thinks the world and all of you.”

Shelagh smiled softly as Mrs. B finished her treat. “Will you tell her that I will visit as soon as I can?”

“I will,” he promised.

Shelagh offered a carrot to the Morgan, who nickered at her before accepting. “May I?” she asked Dr. Turner, reaching to pet the animal.

“Of course,” Dr. Turner said, smiling affectionately at the horse. “Ole MG loves it. And he thanks for you for the carrot!”

“MG?” Shelagh allowed the horse to get to know her, holding out her palm.

“Morgan Grey.” Dr. Turner indicated the grey pattern on the horse’s flank. “Tim’s the one who started calling him MG and it’s stuck.”

“Goodbye, MG,” Shelagh said, rubbing the side of his neck. The horse leaned into her, as if asking for another treat. Shelagh giggled once more.

Dr. Turner was watching her as she mounted to ride and she felt the butterflies once more fluttering in her stomach. The doctor settled himself onto MG and Shelagh took one last look at the lovely flowers and black gum tree. “Thank you for the meal,” she said, Mrs. B falling into step with the Morgan. “It’s a long road back to Beech Fork.” She looked to the beginning twilight. “And longer still to Hyden!”

“I expect we’re both used to it, Nurse.” Regaining the trail, they rode in silence for a time, until the sound of rushing hoofbeats behind them had Dr. Turner moving his Morgan behind Shelagh’s mount. A horse and rider slowed as it made to pass them. “Mr. Kenton?” Dr. Turner called to the rider, who looked at the doctor with disdain.
Mr. Kenton urged his horse forward. “I don’t have time for you, Turner, nor your lot either,” he said to Shelagh. “I’ve things to attend to at home.”

Shelagh remembered Cora mentioning the bad blood between the Kentons and the Turners.

Dr. Turner said, “Mr. Kenton, I’ve heard tell maybe one of yours is sick. I know you don’t trust me, but Nurse Mannion here--”

Mr. Kenton cut him off. “Said we don’t need help from yer kind. I take care of my own.” He patted his saddle bag. “’Sides I got elixir here that’ll fix her right up.”

Shelagh knew about the false elixirs and medications sold in town and through the radio. “Mr. Kenton, I met with your wife once and--”

“I tol’ you both. We don’t need your kind.” With that, he kicked his horse and rode away.

Looking to Dr. Turner, Shelagh said, “I hope that it’s nothing too serious.”

Dr. Turner rubbed his forefinger and thumb together before urging MG to walk once more. “So do I.”

Chapter End Notes

I have seen Chained Rock with my own two eyes.
https://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/12949
...much excitement for the Hyden Hospital Fair. Each nurse will pair with a courier to alternately staff a special FNS information desk. Our hope is to reach further into the community, to offer care to those who have not yet taken advantage of our services. This information shall be provided in the midst of a fun fair, replete with food, entertainment, and fellowship. The children, of course, are thrilled that there shall be sweets and games; an entire day of amusement! Please keep our venture in your prayers, dear sisters. With each new patient comes hope for lasting change...

Shelagh was washing a plate when Lisette came into the clinic and poked her head around the kitchen door.

“Our dresses are here!” she squealed, eyes dancing. “Yours is on the sideboard. I have to try mine this instant!”

With that, Lisette disappeared into her bedroom, the door closing behind her. Shelagh dried her dish and replaced it in the cabinet, walking through the kitchen and setting the already perfectly ordered counters to rights. She glanced at the sideboard and the innocuous package that sat there. Interest stirred in her belly but stubbornly she turned, seeking out odd jobs and distractions until Lisette sashayed into the hall, striking a pose in her yellow and white dress.

“What do you think? Shall I send my mother a photograph and give her a shock?”

“You look lovely!” Shelagh smiled, replacing the inventory clipboard as she looked at Lisette’s new dress. “There seems to be a sparkle in the fabric. It’s very pretty!”

“I also purchased a blue one,” Lisette said, distracted by the hall mirror. She fussed with her hair, pulling the wealth of it over her shoulder and pouting. “Though I am beginning to think that I have worn enough blue to last a lifetime!”

Shelagh looked down at her own uniform trousers. “Indeed.”

“Aren’t you going to try yours?” Lisette tapped the parcel. “I think the color will be perfect for you.”

“Oh, I will,” Shelagh demurred. “I was finishing up a few things before retiring.” She looked to
the kitchen. “Have you eaten? Mrs. Sutherland brought a basket of chicken and biscuits.”

“Just some trail mix. I’ll look in the basket after I change.” With that, Lisette went back into her bedroom.

Shelagh checked the doors and lamps before picking up her package and going into her room. She closed the door firmly behind her, placing the packet onto the dresser. Kneeling beside the bed, she began her evening prayers, the chorus of tree frogs outside the window a welcome accompaniment. When she stood some time later, she went to the mirror, taking down her hair and combing it. She thought to continue to work on the gift she was making for little Hiram Ray, but her eyes landed back on the dress package and she could no longer contain her curiosity. She slit the package with her letter opener and removed the tissue. The dress was carefully folded, the color bright even in the dim light of the bedroom.

She gently touched the fabric, the softness of it foreign to her fingers, so used to utilitarian workday clothing. She pulled it from the box and shook it out, setting it across her bed. It was too fine for her, she thought, taking in the godets and lacy, embroidered collar. Yet she longed to put it on, to wear something so different, so lovely. Body flushing cold and then hot, she removed her blouse and trousers and stepped into the dress, buttoning the round white buttons that so carefully matched the polka-dot pattern that covered the fabric. The belt was still inside of the package, and she took it out, cinching in her waist before looking into the mirror.

When she had first taken the room, the large, oval mirror had intimidated her. She had thought to remove it, but never had, and now she found that she was glad it was there, so that she could see herself and the dress fully, the slim fit flaring just above her knees. The faint red hue of her cheeks was just a shade lighter than the red fabric that fell softly about her body. Staring at herself, she lightly touched her waist, unused to the feminine curves that the mirror showed her. A few nips and tucks would be required for the dress to fit perfectly, but that would not be a challenge. Wearing it to the fair, however, where the nurses, patients, and he would see would be the bigger test.

Taking one last look, Shelagh removed the dress and readied for bed. She did not fall asleep easily, thinking instead of the upcoming hospital fair, and whether she dared to wear the dress that now hung in her closet, a bright spot in the midst of a sea of uniform blue.

--

“Knock, knock!” Shelagh called, standing at the doorway to Mrs. Polly’s room.
“Well, Lord, get in here!” Mrs. Polly’s smile was wide as stood from the chair next to the Hess bed. “It is so good to see ya!”

Shelagh placed her bag onto a table and took Mrs. Polly’s hand in hers. “You’re looking well!” She glanced into the incubator. “And so is little Hiram Ray!”

“He’s gettin’ less of that air now, Nurse,” Mrs. Polly said, proudly. “Soon he’ll be in a crib jus’ like the rest of ‘em.” Her wide smile stretched even further. “He cries, Nurse. Jus’ a little whine, mind, but it’s the most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard. Ever’ day they let me take him out and cuddle him. He knows me already!”

“Of course he does!” Shelagh smiled in at the sleeping baby once more. “One day he’ll know just how you prayed for him and how brave you were the night he was born.”

Mrs. Polly ducked her head. “I don’t know ‘bout that, Nurse Mannion. But I do know I’ll gladly talk to that baby there about anything he wants to talk about.”

“Oh! What conversations you’ll have!” Shelagh grinned, picking up her bag. She took a softly wrapped package from it and handed it to the new mother. “It’s just a little something for the wee one. I couldn’t resist!”

Mrs. Polly blinked back tears before tearing open the tissue. “Oh!” she brought her hand to her mouth, softly touching the small, blue matinee jacket. “It’ll look right good with his hair,” she murmured. “I can’t wait to put him in it.” She smiled up at Shelagh. “Thank you, Nurse.”

“Oh, it was no trouble,” Shelagh said, smiling shyly. Her smile spread as she held out a small, striped bag. “I also brought--” she handed the bag to Mrs. Polly.

“Popcorn!” Mrs. Polly grinned. “Is this from down yon’?”

“Yes! The fair is still being set-up, but I couldn’t resist bringing that inside for you. Do you think you might walk about the grounds later?”

Perhaps if Hiram comes in.” Mrs. Polly took a handful of the popped kernels. “A little bit o’ heaven,” she sighed, eating another bite. “I purely love popcorn!” A small sound came from the bed, and Mrs Polly placed the popcorn on the table, looking into the glass. “Hello,” she cooed,
before turning to Shelagh. “He’s blinkin’ those pretty eyes at me, Nurse.”

A knock at the door had them turning. “Nurse Mannion, Mrs. Polly,” Nurse. Parrish said, coming into the room. “It’s Hiram Ray’s feeding time.”

“He’s right on time,” Mrs. Polly said, stepping away from the bed. “But, oh, Nurse Parrish, could Nurse Mannion get ‘im out? She ain’t held him since he was borned and I would love to see her with ‘im.”

Nurse Parrish turned and raised an eyebrow at Shelagh. Shelagh nodded at the nurse before smiling at Mrs. Polly. “I’d love to hold him.”

Removing the glass, Nurse Parrish stood at the ready as Shelagh extricated the tiny baby from the machine. His eyes were very blue and slitted as he looked up at Shelagh, a pout making its way across his mouth as he realized that she was not his mother. Shelagh grinned, holding him close, listening to his respiration. “He sounds wonderful,” she said to Nurse Parrish, who nodded.

“He’s coming on a treat,” Nurse Parrish said fondly, looking to Mrs. Polly. “And quite the eater!”

Rubbing a hand over the downy soft hair, Shelagh breathed in his baby scent, before handing him to his mother. “Thank you,” she whispered. “He’s lovely!”

A ruckus rose outside of the hospital. Shelagh looked out of the window, seeing crowds of people entering into the field behind the hospital where the fair was being staged. “My shift at the fair starts in just a few moments,” she said, as Nurse Parrish prepared to help with the feeding. “I’ll leave you to it.”

Mrs. Polly’s eyes shone with contentment as she held her baby, but she waved as Shelagh exited. “Have fun down to that fair!”

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Giggles met Shelagh at the door to the Nurses’ Quarters. She walked in to find several nurses and couriers admiring one another’s dresses, lacing up boots, and buttoning jackets.
Lisette roped her arm through Shelagh’s. “I’m beginning to doubt myself for not bringing the blue dress!”

“The dress you’ve chosen is lovely! How could it not be, with the bright sunny sky?”

Lisette grinned. “But, for now,” she said, looking down at her uniform, “I suppose we’ll have to make do with our trousers.”

“Oh, it’s only for a little while!” Shelagh looked in the mirror to straighten her tie. “Our shift is only an hour long!”

“At least we’re first!” Lisette gestured at the scene outside of the window. “There are so many things to see! I’m not certain there’s ever been anything as big as this in Hyden.”

Nurse Wright laughed from where she pinned her hair at the mirror. “Aside from the church picnics, I think not!”

Anticipation buzzed outside of the window. Lisette began to debate the merits of her blue dress with Eula, but Shelagh stood apart from the group, watching as they laughed and made jokes. She was smiling at the tableau when Nurse Wright turned to her.

“Is the red dress yours? I saw it hanging in the wardrobe. It’s gorgeous!”

Shelagh’s cheeks pinked. “It is, though I’m not certain that I’ll change into it.”

“Why not, love?” Nurse Wright shrugged her shoulders. “Though I really don’t mind staying in my uniform. The trousers make life easier!”

“Indeed,” Shelagh said, taking note of her watch. “Oh, excuse me,” she said, turning toward the young couriers. “Lisette?” She nodded toward the door. “Ready?”

Lisette came forward, leaving the other nurses and couriers, as Shelagh opened the door. Outside the sky was a stunning blue. Crowds murmured and moved about the hospital property, food and game booths already drawing patrons. The FNS information booth was set up at the entrance to
the fair, near the small stage that Mrs. Breckinridge would speak from during the noon hour. The
carnival atmosphere brought a smile to Shelagh’s face, and she gasped as she saw a juggler tossing
and catching small balls. Children followed in his wake, begging to see him add another ball to the
three he already juggled.

Settling in at the booth, Shelagh looked over the handouts they had for interested parties and the
clipboard and pencil that was at the ready to take down information on potential patients. Dappled
leaf shadows covered the table as Shelagh signed her name to the register and organized the table.
Lisette settled beside her, writing in her own name and taking a look at the papers and clipboard.
Shelagh glanced out over the field, noticing several familiar faces; patients and church members
mingling among the growing crowd. A few curious women came up to inquire about services, and
Shelagh explained what FNS could offer, while directing them on locating their nearest outpost
clinic.

Lisette took names and directions to various cabins to distribute to outpost nurses. She sighed in
relief when the line dwindled. “Before working here I never would have thought that a set of
directions could include the directive, ‘…down the holler a piece’,” she said, placing the pencil
back onto the table. “And I never would have known that I would have been able to follow those
directions so clearly!”

Shelagh smiled in agreement. “I must confess to having been so confused over just what a ‘holler’
was!” She looked at Lisette and they broke into laughter.

“Well, this looks like a fine time!”

Shelagh looked up to find Anna Jane and several of the Turners walking toward the table. “Oh,
hello!”

“Good morning,” Anna Jane answered, hitching Walter to her hip with one hand as she shaded her
eyes with the other to look out over the crowd. “I’ve never seen a thing like it,” she said. “Even
when I was a girl, I don’t remember much in the way of a fuss like this!”

“It is grand!” Shelagh smiled up at Anna Jane. “This is Lisette,” she said, nodding toward the
young courier. “I’m not sure if you’ve met.”

Anna Jane greeted Lisette before grinning at Shelagh. “Most my least ‘uns have already runned
off.” She pointed toward Timothy, Margie, and Robert, playing a game of darts.
“They look to be enjoying the fair!” Shelagh smiled at Timothy’s whoop of delight. Baby Walter strained to look over his mother’s shoulder. “I think you have another that would like to be in the thick of things!”

Anna Jane laughed. “He wants to grow too quickly for his old Momma’s liking!” She tickled under his chin and he smacked his hands together and giggled. Looking down at the handouts, she shook her head. “This one was my surprise,” she said, leaning her head on Walter. “I won’t be needing any further services.”

Shelagh began to reply but Gladys piped up, reaching to take a brochure. “It’s looking like I’ll be in need of services soon…”

“Gladys Lee!” Anna Jane hugged her eldest to her with her free hand. “Are you carryin’?”

Gladys nodded, cheeks pink.

“Congratulations!” Shelagh smiled up at the trio, thinking how alike they were, with their dark hair and joyful grins.

“I’ll add you to the clinic list!” Lisette took the pencil and began to take down Gladys’s information.

“Another grandchild,” Anna Jane said. “The Lord is good.”

“He is,” Shelagh agreed, eyes brightening as Cora appeared, walking across the field.

“Cora’s as strong as ever,” Anna Jane said, placing Walter into the grass. The baby poked at a dandelion. “She’s really taken to you.”

“She’s been a dear friend.” Shelagh waved at Cora. “I’m not certain what I would have done without her!”

“Without who?” Cora placed a tin bowl on the table and turned to greet Anna Jane. “Yer least ‘un’s gettin’ away,” she said, nodding toward Walter, crawling toward the crowd.
Anna Jane laughed. “Come on, Glad,” she said to her daughter, “let’s round up the others for something to eat.”

Gladys and Anna Jane waved goodbye, giggling together as they walked away. Lisette looked at the bowl Cora had placed on the table. “What is this?”

“I done brung it over here for y’all to taste,” Cora said, dipping a wooden spoon into the stew. “It’ll fatten ya.”

Shelagh giggled. “If buttermilk won’t work…?”

“Go on, girls, try it.” Cora handed the spoon to Shelagh. “They also had cornbread and biscuits to dip in it, but I only had so many hands.”

Lisette stood from her seat and stretched. “Sit here for a spell, Mrs. Tucker. I’ll see if I can find some cornbread and lemonade.” With a bright grin, she dashed into the crowds.

“She was aiming to get away!” Cora chuckled, settling into the empty chair. “Don’t mind if I sit,” she said, looking to Shelagh and down to the untouched stew. “You gon’ try it?”

Eyeing the bowl, Shelagh stalled. “What is it, Cora?”

“Called burgoo. Not quite sure what all’s in this ‘un. Possum, squirrel, deer… you put in whatever you got on hand.”

“Oh.” Shelagh pressed her lips together. Not wishing to be rude, she stirred the spoon around in the bowl.

Cora nodded in satisfaction. “It’s a right good mix,” she said, pulling out her pipe. “You can tell if it’s any count or not if yer spoon’ll stand up in it.”

“Really?” Shelagh released the spoon and it stayed still in the thick mixture. She looked to Cora
from the corner of her eye. “I’m not certain something so thick is entirely healthy!”

“Look at me!” Cora puffed on her pipe. “Healthier ‘an a horse!”

Amused, but trepidatious, Shelagh took a bite of the burgoo. “Oh!” She swallowed with some difficulty. “It’s certainly…. Unique.” Shelagh fiddled with the spoon. “They must have worked so very hard to make such a large quantity!”

Cora cackled. “Lord, pass me the bowl.” She took the spoon with one hand and held her pipe with the other. “Don’t like the buttermilk, the burgoo… Least ya like the cornbread or I wouldn’t know what to feed ya!”

“Nurse Mannion!”

Shelagh looked up to find Timothy Turner grinning at her. Glancing behind him, she saw Dr. Turner making his way across the field. Her stomach flipped. “Hello, Timothy!”

He handed her a plate of cornbread. “We saw Lisette over to the cakewalk. She was meanin’ to bring this back to ya, but Dad and I said we would, instead.” Tim’s cheeks were red from joy and exertion. “Said she’d be back in just a little while!” He blew out an excited breath. “Dad and I were just playin’ at horseshoes, and I won!”

“Thank you,” Shelagh said, accepting the plate. “And congratulations! That’s quite tremendous!” Shelagh placed the plate in the center of the table. “You must be very proud!” Dr. Turner stepped to the booth, catching up with his son. “Greetings, Doctor,” she said, mouth suddenly dry at his nearness.

“Nurse Mannion,” he said, eyes flitting to hers and then away to look to Cora. “Mrs. Cora! Did you know that Timothy is going to fiddle for us today?”

Cora blew out a bit of smoke. “Are you gon’ fiddle with them, Timothy?” She slapped her leg. “I’d be just as proud to watch!”

Tim ducked his head slightly before breaking into another smile. “You’ll come, too, won’t ya, Nurse Mannion?” Barely waiting for Shelagh to nod, he continued, “Dad and I were on the way to get my fiddle when we run into Lisette.” He turned to his father. “Come on, Dad!”
Patrick gave them a long-suffering smile and moved to catch up to his son. “I’m pleased they’re spending the day together,” she murmured, turning in her chair to watch them walk up the slope toward the hospital.

“Timothy loves his Daddy,” Cora said, taking a pinch of cornbread. “It’s purely a pleasure to see ‘em together. One the spitting image of the other.”

“Quite,” Shelagh said, before changing the subject, asking Cora her plans for the fair, and answering a few questions from patients as the back half of her shift began to pass. Lisette came back to the table with lemonade, but sat in the grass, allowing Cora to keep her seat.

The day had warmed and Lisette fanned herself with a brochure. “Now I want to change into my dress because it’ll be far cooler than these trousers, vest, and tie,” she said, tugging at the tie to loosen it.

“Go ahead and go in,” Shelagh offered, gathering papers and clipping them into the clipboard. “Our shift is nearly finished. I can manage.”

“If you’re certain…” Lisette’s eyes were on the Nurses’ Quarters as she spoke.

Shelagh hid a smile. “Very certain. Have fun!”

Lisette grinned and was off like a shot. Cora laughed. “I remember when I could race up these hills, too.”

“Surely it wasn’t so long ago, Cora!”

Cora scoffed. “Now you get on up there an’ change,” she said, nodding her head toward Shelagh’s relief nurses. “I’ll save you a spot near the front so’s we can see Timothy play.”

The dress flashed in Shelagh’s mind, but for a moment, she paused, thinking to continue to wear her comfortable uniform. Turning toward the hospital, she saw Dr. Turner and Timothy returning with his fiddle. Timothy was grinning, talking and laughing. Dr. Turner turned his face toward his son, a laugh breaking from the smile that seemed etched upon his face. Her heart fluttered. After
saying a quick hello to the nurses, she headed toward the Nurses’ Quarters.

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Nurse Wright breezed into the main room, just as Shelagh was running a brush through her hair. “Don’t you look lovely!” She admired the dress. “I brought a skirt suit to change into, but nothing as fine as this!”

“Oh!” Shelagh looked into the mirror, adjusting her glasses. “Thank you. I bought it from the Sears catalogue. I couldn’t resist—it was so pretty.”

“It is! I suppose I’ll change,” Nurse Wright said, disappearing down the hall. “I’ll see you out there!”

Swallowing hard, Shelagh ran the brush through her hair once more, heart in her throat. She heard Mrs. Breckinridge begin to address the crowd, after which Timothy and the other fiddlers would play. Placing a hand over her stomach, she took a deep breath, before going back into the sunshine.

Mrs. Breckinridge was speaking to the assembled crowd, thanking them for their warmth and the continued trust that they placed into the nurse-midwives. She called the crowd together into a prayer just as Shelagh squeezed in next to Cora. Cora’s eyes opened at the touch of Shelagh’s hand and she startled, barely finishing her prayer before pushing Shelagh back so that she could look at her fully.

“Would you look at you!” Cora made her turn around. “I swanny if you ain’t the prettiest little thing in the county!”

“Cora!” Shelagh blushed. “It’s nothing, really. Just a dress!”

“Hmmm,” Cora puffed on her pipe. “Look, there. Dr. Turner’s ready to watch his boy.”

“Is he?” Shelagh did not turn to look, casting her eyes toward the stage instead. She felt Cora looking at her, but did not return what she knew to be a knowing look. “Have you heard Timothy play?”
Cora cleared her throat. “I have. He’s right good.”

A group of young fiddlers filed onto the stage. Timothy was grinning widely, looking out into the crowd. He nodded when he saw his father, and Shelagh could not stop herself from turning in the direction of the doctor then, her smile growing in response to the proud, fatherly smile on his face. Anna Jane, Thomas, and the younger Turners stood behind him, but Dr. Turner’s complete attention was on his son.

The lead fiddler stepped forward. “This ‘un’s called ‘Blackberry Blossom’,” he announced, before stepping back with the others. Taking up their bows, the group began, and Shelagh laughed as whoops of delight rose from the crowd, people beginning to tap their feet and keep time with hands slapping against legs. A few took up a jig and danced about. Cora took Shelagh’s arm and squeezed, pride over Timothy glowing in her eyes.

Timothy played well, the grin seemingly permanent on his face as he kept time and moved his bow. Shelagh tried to keep her eyes from straying once more to Dr. Turner, but could not. When she looked at him he stood tall and straight amongst the dancing, clapping crowd, the grin on his face and the love in his eyes making him even more handsome. He was so very proud of Timothy and on stage the young boy revelled in it, putting his best into the fiddle work, the joy in the crowd infectious.

As the tune ended the crowd broke into uproarious applause, and Shelagh snuck another peek at the doctor to see that he had his hands above his head, clapping, as the other Turners formed a cheering section just for Timothy. Timothy himself stepped forward to introduce their next song. “This one’s called Meg Gray,” he said, smiling bashfully, before hurrying back into place. The tune was lively, though somewhat quieter than the one that came before, but the crowd was just as raucous, cheering the boys on, and stamping their feet. Shelagh’s eyes once more wandered toward Dr. Turner, but she startled to see Nurse Parrish standing there next to him, speaking urgently. She looked toward the stage to see that Timothy had noticed, his face darkening as his father gave him an apologetic look and hurried after the nurse.

“Theyir race is next,” she murmured, the sound lost in the fiddling. When the song finished the boys took a bow to enthusiastic applause, leaving the stage. Shelagh broke away, intent on reaching Timothy. She found him behind the stage, placing his fiddle in a worn case. From the corner of her eye she saw Anna Jane approach, but upon seeing her, the older woman turned and went back around the stage. “Timothy?”

The boy looked up, his eyes red. “Nurse Mannion?”
“You did so well!” She smiled gently, longing to hug his slumped shoulders, so like his father’s, as if the weight of the world rested on him. “I had no idea you could play like that!”

“It’s nothin’,” he said, looking at his feet.

“It was very much something!” Shelagh pressed her lips together, unsure of what to say and if she might be crossing a line. But she remembered Timothy’s gift to her, the butterfly picture, and forged ahead. “I saw your Dad get called away.”

“He always does.”

“I know,” Shelagh said gently, kneeling in front of the boy. “You should have seen him in the crowd. I saw him watching you. He was so very proud!”

“But he’s going to miss our race! Like he always does! And Robert’s gon’ race with Uncle Thom, and Aunt Anna Jane won’t want to race, and Margie’s got a friend to race with her, and Jack’s not here…” Timothy’s shoulders heaved.

“What if…” Shelagh took a deep breath. “What if I raced with you?”

“You, Nurse Mannion?” Timothy looked up at her, hope written across his face. He wiped his cheek with the back of his hand. “You’d do that?” Not waiting on an answer, he looked dubiously at her dress. “Why’d you change? Can you run in that?”

(Of course I’ll race with you, Timothy.” Shelagh started to walk away and he ran to catch up, falling into step with her. Giving him a sidelong look, she smiled. “As to running in my dress? I most certainly can!”

--

Shelagh’s bravado started to wain as she and Timothy tied their legs together at the starting line. Around them were many other duos, tied together, some trying to work out a system of movement, and others joking, pushing one another and toppling over in laughter.
Timothy grinned up at her. “This might work even better than Dad! You’re not so tall!”

Standing so close to Timothy, Shelagh was surprised at just how close to her own height he was. “I think that if we stay together and move as one, we might win!”

The boy’s face was set and determined. He placed his arm around Shelagh’s back and she curved hers around his shoulder, as they took their mark, awaiting the starting pistol. When the shot came, she sprung forward, Timothy moving with her in perfect motion. The grass was very green and the crowd loud as they ran, awkwardly bouncing together. She vaguely made out Cora’s whoop from the din of the crowd, but the wind in her face and Timothy’s warm weight kept her from looking. The finish line seemed very far away until she heard another voice calling over the crowd, “Come on, Nurse Mannion! Come on, Timothy!” Dr. Turner’s voice seemed to give both she and Timothy an extra burst of energy and they surged forward, falling over the finish line.

Shelagh’s dress flared up as she landed, her knees and palms in the grass, her glasses falling from her face. Her hand stung from the graze of a rock, but she looked up, noticing that she and Timothy had crossed the line first. “Oh!” She looked at Timothy. “We won!”

He grinned. “We did!” Spotting his cousins in the crowd, he made to move forward.

Dr. Turner knelt in front of them. “Timothy, you can’t go anywhere yet! Hold still--” He made to reach for the rope binding their legs, but pulled back at the last moment, reaching instead for the pair of glasses in the grass.

Shelagh quickly untied the knot and Timothy ran off, yelling to his cousins about his win. Dr. Turner handed her the glasses and she took them, suddenly overwhelmed at his nearness. “Thank you, Doctor,” she murmured.

“You’ve hurt your hand,” he said, gesturing to her palm.

“Oh!” Shelagh looked at her hand, surprised to see blood. “Well, I’m sure there’s no need to amputate.” She looked at him, at the concern in his eyes, at the fall of fringe over his forehead, and the set of his mouth. “If you’ll excuse me.” She walked away, her body feeling strange and weightless as she moved toward the safety of the hospital, unsure and beset by feelings foreign to her.

Inside, she detoured from the Nurses’ Quarters and went instead into the clinical room, opening the
tap and placing her injured hand underneath the cold stream of water. She fought to control her breath and her thoughts, focusing on cleaning the wound. The door opened behind her and she stiffened, startling as Dr. Turner asked, “Would you like me to have a look at that?”

A calm settled over her at his soft words. “Yes,” she answered, holding out her hand.

Stepping forward, closer than they had ever stood before, he took her hand in his, thumb gently probing the superficial wound. Shelagh’s breath caught as he touched the sensitive skin. A tingle ran up the length of her arm and she trembled, not daring to take her eyes from his hand and the tender path his thumb made against her broken skin.

The moment stretched between them, silent, but for her breath, shuddering as he continued his gentle onslaught. Her eyes flickered toward his chest as he began to raise her hand, and she knew in that moment what he would do before he did it, knew that she would feel the warmth of his lips against her palm. Her body flooded with heat and she whispered an encouragement as his mouth made contact.

The gentle brush of his mouth drew a helpless, whispery, breath from her, and he pulled back slowly, keeping her hand in his. His eyes seemed to drink her in, to look at her dress, her hair, and finally her lips. “Yes,” she whispered again, knowing what he wanted, even as he did not say a word. She wanted it, too. Boldly stepping forward, she tilted her head as he leaned in, softly touching his lips to hers. She flushed, her body warm in the circle of his arms. Inexperienced, she followed his lead, her fingers hesitantly touching the lapel at his chest as he coaxed her into the kiss. His hand slowly found its way to her cheek, his thumb rubbing through the flare of hair at her ear. She pressed closer, lost in the sensation of his mouth moving against hers.

He shifted, his right hand releasing hers to rest on her lower back. Shelagh jolted as the warmth of his hand seemed to burn through the fabric of her dress. The intimate caress stirred a heat inside of her, shocking her into remembering herself. Realizing that they were stood in the clinical room, she pulled away from the kiss. “Oh,” she whispered, flushing cold as she unclenched his jacket and stepped back from his embrace.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “I shouldn’t have--”

“I’m only here for two years,” she murmured, unable to meet his eyes. “I don’t know if I….” she trailed off, unable to articulate herself.

“I would never press an advantage,” he rasped, his fingers twitching as he clasped them together, “forgive me if--”
“I’m not drawing away because of you,” she whispered. “There are so many things you don’t know.” She closed the tap, unable to look at him.

“Tell me?”

Pressing her lips together as tears unexpectedly threatened, Shelagh tried to make sense of her jumbled thoughts.

The door opened once more. “Dr. Turner?” It was Nurse Parrish again. “Forgive me,” she said, looking to Shelagh and then the doctor. “The patient is settled, but I think you should have another look.”

Dr. Turner nodded. “I’ll be right there, Nurse.” When the door closed behind Nurse Parrish, he looked to Shelagh, slowly lowering his hands. He hesitated before saying, “Duty calls.”

“I understand,” she said, and then said no more, watching as he walked out of the door. She stood in the same spot for a long time, stunned and flustered. She closed her eyes and whispered, “What now, Lord?”
...our esteemed Mrs. B worked diligently on your cake, following your recipe most precisely. Per your instruction, the confection was wrapped and left to souse for three days. If perhaps a small morsel was relished before the three days transpired, I can only say that I’m certain I had not a thing to do with it....

Shelagh rolled over in the bed after a restless night’s sleep. Her palm dully ached but she kept her hand closed into a loose fist, afraid that she might see the imprint of the kiss that had been placed there. Shifting under the blanket, she bade the images from the clinical room to fade. They would not, too fixed upon her mind, and instead played against the blackness of her eyelids throughout the night. Her body was flush with the feelings Dr. Turner had invoked in her--the tingle in her stomach from his low voice, the thrill of his soft kiss, and the sheer heat that pulsed within her as he placed his hand at the small of her back and pulled her close.

Cheeks burning, Shelagh felt also chastened by the tableau by the sink. Dr. Turner was a colleague. They had been inside of the hospital where anyone might see their indiscretion. She was barely three months into her two year contract; they knew one another so little. He did not know of her past, of her losses, nor of her life as a Sister. “Tell me,” he had implored, but it seemed impossible to do so; to expose her heart when she would eventually place an ocean between them. She felt swept up by Dr. Turner. He had been unexpected. Interesting, kind, handsome, beset by heartache and trying to care for a young son--she had inserted herself into his life, all the time knowing that nothing between them could come to fruition.

Her prayers were stilted as she knelt before her bed the evening before. They offered no guidance as to God’s path for her life. She had once said to Cora that she was unsure if her being in Kentucky was of God’s will or her own. Of that, she was still unsure. The life she wished to lead was one in which she was where God placed her--to work among His people to affect change. In Poplar she had felt restless, called to work outside of the district and midwifery roster, certain that the Lord wished for her a life outside of the convent walls. “God wants a different path for me,” she had said to Sister Julienne, “a path that will lead me away from Nonnatus.” She was far away from Nonnatus this morning. The darkness outside of her window hid the mountains she had come to know. Sunrise was still more than an hour away. Upon it’s rise she would see to the morning patients, and attend the church picnic in the afternoon. She was making a life for herself as an FNS nurse, but that did not mean she was making a home. Home was still across the sea, where she would return to continue God’s path of service.

Her hand ached. Shelagh unfurled her fingers and traced the outline of her wound, remembering the soft press of lips, so light against her skin.

A horse’s nicker came from outside of the Clinic, and then an urgent knock at the door.
“Thank you,” Shelagh whispered heavenward, pulling back her blanket.

There was work to be done.

--

It was almost dawn as Shelagh followed Cora up the muddy embankment to Wilma and Felice’s home. The river rippled quietly at the shore, the only sound in the brief silence before the sun rose. The morning was warm and damp but cooler near the water, a breeze pushing cold air over Shelagh’s face as she tapped at Wilma’s door. “Midwives calling!”

Wilma threw open the door. “Maybe this girl will listen to the pair of you cause she sure won’t listen to granmomma. No, ma’am, she won’t.”

“Giving you fits, Wil?” Cora hung her cloak beside the door. “How fer is she?”

“That baby won’t be here ‘til early afternoon.” Wilma settled into her chair. “We’ve time for breakfast.”

Cora looked to Shelagh. “Gon’ now, and check ‘er. I’ll see to Wil.”

Shelagh tapped at the door frame. Felice was clutching the side of the mattress, panting through a contraction. “Come….” she trailed off in a groan.

Entering the room fully, Shelagh timed the contraction, wiping Felice’s sweaty forehead as it eased. “There now!” She gave the rag to Felice. “How are things coming along?”

Felice grinned. “Tol’ you I’d be seeing you soon.” She made a face. “I jus’ let nature do ‘er job. That oil was something unholy!”

Laughing, Shelagh pulled her pinard from her bag. “Your grandmother thinks we should have a baby sometime early this afternoon!” She pulled Felice’s shift up to expose her stomach. “I’m just
“Going to have a little listen…” She placed her ear to the instrument and then smiled. “That all sounds as it should!”

“I’m just as glad.” Felice looked to the window. “Jimmy’s home. He’s gone on over to the neighbor’s. Didn’t want him to hear me a-squallin’.” She rolled her eyes. “It’s likely he wouldn’t do much about it, anyway. He’s quiet, my Jimmy. Granmomma say I have to get a quiet man as I’m so loud!” She fiddled with a necklace about her neck. “But he’s good. He’ll make a good Daddy.”

“That’s lovely,” Shelagh said, eyes misting briefly as she thought of another good father. She pushed the thought of him from her mind. “I’m pleased he was able to come home in time!”

“Me too.” Felice rubbed her belly. “He’s happy. I’m happy. Even Granmomma happy enough, but sometimes it’s like this baby is the end of things instead of the start of somethin’ new.” Felice’s eyes grew damp. “Granmomma don’t want to move, and well, I believe I was her last excuse to stay here.”

“Oh, Felice.” Shelagh sat on the edge of the bed. “Your grandmother might be upset about the move, but I know that she is happy about her great-grandchild. Once she holds baby in her arms, you’ll see.” She squeezed Felice’s hand. “I can tell that she loves you both so very much!”

“I know she do.” Felice sighed, leaning against her pillow. “I reckon I ain’t really ready for no change neither. Don’t seem like I’m becoming a momma today!”

“Soon baby will be here and will bring you and your family such joy! Every little one is a blessing from God. How this child will change your life.” She grinned, squeezing Felice’s hand once again. Felice smiled, returning the press. Standing from the bed, Shelagh pulled newsprint from her bag. “There now! I’ll get this bed ready and do your checks--and then we’ll wait on baby!”

--

As the morning passed, Felice’s contractions grew stronger. She strained with them, her young face tight with pain. Shelagh rubbed her back, helping her to breathe through the pains as they grew longer and harder. Resting her hands on the bedrail, Felice panted. “I didn’t know,” she murmured. “I didn’t know hit’d be this bad.”

“You’re doing so well!” Shelagh rubbed Felice’s back, helping her to stand. “Baby has been so
snug and warm. It takes a bit of coaxing to bring them into the world.”

“I been coaxin’, Lord knows I been,” Felice grunted. “Granmomma say I’d have a baby as stubborn as me and to watch out.” She wiped at her face. “This one is already stubborn, Nurse Mannion.”

“Oh, Felice!” Shelagh took her hand and helped her to walk around the bed. “There’s not long now. I promise.” She helped the girl back into the bed. “It may be that baby is just like his father!”

“That’d be nice.” Felice smiled. “But he stubborn, too, Nurse, just the other--Oh!” She reached down between her legs. “Was that--I think it was my water!”

Wilma whooped from the front of the house. “Jus’ now noon,” she said, coming into the bedroom, followed by Cora. “I was just as sure hit’d be here by early afternoon. But you never know with a first ‘un or a stubborn Momma!”

Felice groaned.

--

The next hour passed quickly, Shelagh taking advantage of the extra pairs of hands to have Cora ready a blanket and bath for baby, and Wilma to dab her granddaughter’s head with the cool rag. Checking between Felice’s legs, Shelagh looked up with a smile. “It’s time to push, Felice.”

Felice looked up to her grandmother. “Granmomma?” Her voice caught on the word, trembling.

“This is it, baby,” Wilma said, taking Felice’s hand between both of hers. “Jus’ a few pushes and that least ‘un be here with us.” She leaned down to kiss Felice’s sweaty brow. “You’ll do jus’ fine.”

Shelagh and Cora helped Felice into position, Cora stepping back with the blanket. Looking at Felice, Shelagh smiled. “When you feel the next pain, I want you to push with it. One big, brave push to get us started!”
Felice gasped as the contraction began, pushing into it, before relaxing back into the bed. “Oh,” she whispered. “I feel the need to do it again…”

“Wait for the contraction,” Shelagh cautioned. “You don’t want to wear yourself out.”

“Listen to Nurse Mannion, baby,” Wilma said, rubbing Felice’s shoulder. “Baby’ll come, baby’s comin’.”

On the next push, Shelagh grinned. “I can see the head, Felice. On the next contraction the head should be born!”

“Can you see hair?” Felice asked, grabbing her thighs.

“Oh yes,” Shelagh said, “I believe this baby will have quite a bit of hair!”

Giving a glad cry, Felice pushed again, falling back against her grandmother.

Cora laughed. “Felice, law, hit’s a headful of curls and a pout on that mouth already!”

“Ease into this one, Leecy,” Wilma said, leaning down toward her granddaughter. “Shoulder’s the wors’ but after that, she’ll be here…”

Nodding, Felice sniffled, tears running down her cheeks. “You hain’t called me Leecy since I was a girl….” She breathed in slowly and pushed.

“That’s it, Felice, you’re doing so well…. Oh!” Shelagh pulled baby free and laughed as it’s indignant cry rang through the room. “Felice, you have a daughter!”

“A girl! Oh, Wil, you have a great-granddaughter!” Cora waited with the blanket as Shelagh clamped the cord and wiped baby’s face. “She’s jus’ as beautiful!”

Cora wrapped the baby tenderly, leaning to hand her to Felice. Felice held out her arms, grinning widely as the baby was laid against her chest. “Oh,” she said, “Granmomma! She look like Jimmy,
but gots your hair!” Taking her time, Felice traced the baby’s face with a gentle finger. “Granmomma?”

“Wil’, let me get ya a seat,” Cora said, pulling a straight-back chair from near the window.

“A great-granddaughter,” Wilma said, settling into the chair. A tear slipped down her lined cheek. “You did good, Leecy.”

Felice laughed, but gasped as another pain started.

“That’s the afterbirth,” Shelagh said, nodding toward Wilma. “Why don’t you let your grandmother hold baby while we finish up?”

Wilma took the baby carefully, holding her in both arms, smiling down at her. She gently placed her fingers against the baby’s chin, cheeks, and nose, getting a feel for her face through touch. “Hello, little girl,” she said, pressing her lips to the baby’s forehead as Felice delivered the placenta.

Taking the afterbirth to the table, Shelagh examined it as Wilma, Cora, and Felice fussed over the baby. It was Cora who said, “What are you gon’ name ‘er, Felice?”

“Well,” Felice said, touching her grandmother’s arm, “I wasn’t fer sure. But then I thought of a good ‘un. Leslie, for Leslie County.” She cleared her throat, holding back tears. “That way, even when we up to Ohio, Granmomma, she always know where she from.”

Shelagh and Cora looked to Wilma, whose head was bowed over the baby. She didn’t say anything for a moment, just hummed a bit and brought the baby up toward her heart. “My Daddy loved this bit of land,” she said, rubbing the baby’s back. “For him the land meant we’d be together.” She cooed as the baby began to fuss. “His Momma and Daddy were taken away from him, sold down the river, when he was jus’ a boy. It meant everything to him that we all had a place to stay; a place to return to.” Kissing the baby’s cheek, she said, “I can’t promise you much, Leslie, but I promise you this. We stay together.”

Felice touched her baby’s foot, and then her grandmother’s hand. “Even in Ohio?”

Wilma’s mouth stretched into a grin. “Even in Ohio.”
The afternoon was warm and damp. Shelagh sighed and smiled at Cora as they remounted. “We’ve missed church!”

“Fer a good reason,” Cora said, grinning. “But I think we could still make the picnic. We’ll miss the sermon but get the gossip.”

“Cora!” Shelagh tried to look stern, but laughed. “I’m sure that’s not the case!”

“Lord, you know them women same as I do.” Cora eyes twinkled. “Course they might be a little more used to gosspin’ in front o’ me!”

The laughed together as they led the horses to the trail, Shelagh stretching her neck to work out the kinks. “I think I will ride over with you,” she said, thinking of the empty chapel and how she might sit in it to pray. “Though I don’t have much more than trail mix with me!”

Cora dismissed the remark. “There’s plenty there that’ll feed you. You kin jus’ bring some of them scones of yours next time.”

“Scones?” Shelagh’s stomach clenched.

“Hm,” Cora hummed under her breath. “I was talkin’ to Timothy yesterday and he made mention of them.” She glanced at Shelagh. “Them Turners are right nice folk.”

“They are,” Shelagh said, looking straight ahead to the path.

“And welcomin’?”

Shelagh did not miss the tone. “Cora, it’s not…” she trailed off, thinking of soft lips and the hint of an embrace. “Dr. Turner has been more than kind.”
A smile spread over Cora’s face. “I’ll say nothin’ further,” she said, her eyebrows raised.

Shelagh nodded, suddenly annoyed with Cora’s cheerful attitude. The older woman didn’t notice or was trying to smooth things over, talking about Felice’s baby and the family’s impending move. As she talked, Shelagh’s ire began to wane. Cora was only looking to tease a friend. She looked at Cora, thinking of her lonely cabin, her husband gone now for many years. They’d never had children, Cora had confided, though not for lack of trying. Shelagh had blushed at the forthright confession, but realized over time that with Cora, truth would never be sugar-coated.

“...poor Jimmy looked ready to fall over,” Cora said, slapping her leg. “But jus’ as in love with that baby oncet we left.”

Shelagh laughed to remember Jimmy’s ashen face. “He was a swift hand,” she said, thinking of the content father, rocking his baby girl just outside of Wilma’s front door. They rode up the lane to the church, waving and calling hellos to the assembled congregation. After sheltering the horses they exited into the crowd, stopping to sit with a large group of Beech Fork residents.

“Come and sit!” Mercy Sutherland gestured to her blanket. “The kids done runned off and Lillian’s asleep over there with Lauriette’s boy.”


Molly Ellis looked as tired as she usually did, red curls pulled back from her face to show the dark shadows under her eyes. “Might be you could mix something’ up, Nurse.”

“Is it colic?” Shelagh studied the baby. “I would be happy to give him a quick examination.”

Smiling, Mrs. Ellis nodded. “After you eat, Nurse Mannion. I don’t mean to rush ya.”

“Well,” Shelagh looked to Cora. “I was out on rounds this morning and didn’t have time to bring anything.”

“Lord, don’t worry on that.” Mrs. Sutherland pointed to a wagon. “There’s food aplenty. Some of us were going to pack up the leftovers to give out. Dr. Turner done left without his portion.”
“Oh,” Shelagh looked toward the wagon. “Was he called out to a patient?”

Cora stood. “I’ll get us something. Jus’ sit tight.”

Mrs. Johnson nodded in response to Shelagh’s question. “He’d been jumpy-like all day, though. Ever’ time a ride come up the trail he looked like he was gon’ jump up an’ meet ‘em at the pass.”

“It was as if he was looking for someone,” Mrs. Sutherland agreed. “But then he’s a-called out so often, I reckon he waits for hit.”

Shelagh briefly wondered if the doctor had been waiting on her. The thought was as disquieting as it was thrilling.

“Well, and there’s so many down with sickness,” Mrs. Ellis said, rocking her baby. “I hear that several them Webbers are laid up. And didn’t you say Virginie Lay’s youngest boy were sickly?” She looked to Mrs. Johnson, who nodded.

“She had a fever, sore throat–pure shame with it bein’ so nice out.”

“It is,” Mrs. Sutherland shaded her eyes as she looked to Cora at the wagon. “Cora done said that the Kentons have one of their girls out to Hyden Hospital. Mrs. Kenton’s never said a kind word one to me, but I purely hate it for her. She’s lost so many.”

Shelagh’s forehead creased as the women started recounting other cases of illness they were aware of in and around Beech Fork. She remembered Mr. Kenton, passing she and Dr. Turner a mere few days before, speaking of his sick child and the tonic he hoped would cure her. “Those are quite a few cases of illness,” she said, accepting a plate from Cora as she returned from the wagon. She thanked Cora before continuing, “I’ll look in and extend my rounds to see if I can offer support. It could very well be a widespread summer flu.”

“Right here in May,” Mrs. Johnson said, head turning as she heard a small cry. She took her little boy into her arms. “This one eats like there’s a prize at the end,” she said, unfastening her dress. She made a face as he latched on. “And them teeth!”
“He’ll never live ‘em down!” The women laughed.

Shelagh listened as they began to gossip, as Cora had predicted. She smiled at Cora jumping right in, stirring the gravy on the plate that Cora had given her. She was hungry after the morning’s birth and ate, even if some of the choices Cora had made were not exactly what Shelagh would have picked for herself. Finishing, she looked to the chapel, thinking that spending some time alone, in prayer, might bring her a measure of peace. Her heart and mind were still jumbled after her brief and tantalizing interlude with Dr. Turner.

The women waved and nodded as she stood, saying that she wished to pray, promising Mrs. Ellis that she would look at the baby when she returned. Her eyes were dazzled as she opened the church door, the interior dark after the brightness of the afternoon sun. Here and there light was provided in shafts that broke through the beams, and small motes of dust scattered through the air, warmer and more still than the air outside. A tall, wooden cross dominated the wall behind the pulpit, and Shelagh sat on the first pew, trying to sort her thoughts into a manageable prayer. After Dr. Turner had kissed her she had been confused, immediately questioning the Lord, asking ‘what now’, as she sought a plan to ease the fear of the unknown. Explaining her past to the doctor seemed daunting. Further complicating her thoughts was her two-year contract, which at one time had seemed so long. It now seemed infinitesimally short when given the idea that a relationship could be nurtured enough to grow between she and the widowed doctor.

Finding little respite in her own thoughts, Shelagh prayed for a clear path ahead, for strength in service, and healing for those sick and infirmed. When she finished, heart a little lighter, she went back out into the sunshine and rejoined in fellowship the women of Beech Fork.

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Rain pelted the roof of the clinic as Shelagh and Lisette set up for the morning patients. The room was dark as thunder rumbled lowly across the mountain. Shelagh lit lamps and placed dry towels at the door for those patients who would brave the storm. The radio played only static, but Lisette spun the dial, searching for any sort of music to entertain the patients who would all be stuck inside on such a dreary morning.

After dialing through the crackling and snippets of sound twice, she looked up with a frown. “No luck,” she said, switching the set off. “Perhaps the storm will ease soon.”

Shelagh opened the screen door and looked out into the dark morning. “The cool air is almost a relief after yesterday’s heat.” She looked at the black clouds moving overhead and the sheets of rain that steadily fell. “The water will be up,” she said, pulling the door closed as the wind kicked up. Drying her damp arm with her apron, she moved to set up the privacy screens. “We may not have many patients at all.”
Lisette agreed. “I don’t think any will chance crossing the Middlefork,” she said, readying instrument trays. “Though there are several who might come in from just nearby. Those who don’t have to cross the water.”

As they continued to ready the clinic the rain began to ease into a relentless drizzle, the dark clouds showing little sign of moving beyond the valley. Shelagh worked methodically, placing screens and checking instruments, sweeping already swept floors, and taking an informal inventory of supplies. Her heart beat a fast tattoo in her chest, as she wondered if perhaps the doctor would not be able to make it to Clinic. She was unsure which would be worse; seeing him or not. The thought of him standing with her in the clinic made her tremble and she was glad for Lisette’s chatter and assistance in keeping her wandering mind occupied.

The clock on the mantle ticked close to eight and almost on cue a trickle of well-wrapped women and children entered into the waiting area. Shelagh breathed a sigh of relief as they settled in, thankful for the patients that would surround she and Dr. Turner’s first meeting since the weekend. Her fingers reflexively reached for the bandage covering the small abrasion on her palm and the sting she felt when pressing it took her mind from the other sensations she had felt when in the doctor’s arms. Straightening her shoulders, she smiled at the waiting women. “Good morning!”

The women returned her welcome, one hanging her wraps on the drying rack, laughing and saying, “Might’n all end up rained in with ya, Nurse Mannion!”

“Oh!” Shelagh laughed. “The more the merrier!” she said, stiffening as the door opened and Dr. Turner entered, removing his soaked hat from his head. His hair was damp across his forehead but he smiled, looking at the women before turning his gaze toward Shelagh. “Ladies.”

Shelagh’s breath caught. “Dr. Turner,” she managed, before taking the clipboard from the intake desk. “Opal Wilder?” An older woman smiled, standing from her seat. Turning toward a cubical Shelagh saw the doctor shrugging into his white coat. The room suddenly seemed far too small as she watched his shoulders move under the fabric. Expelling her breath, she turned to Mrs. Wilder. “Ready?”

After Mrs. Wilder left, Shelagh called to her next patient. Barely into her teens, the girl seemed terrified, looking at her mother before standing, walking slowly toward Shelagh. The girl’s anxiety eased Shelagh’s own. Dealing with nervous, distracted, or unsure patients was nothing new to her. She felt wholly capable of calming any medical fears a patient might have. Inside the nursing cubicle Shelagh felt collected, able to put aside her jumbled thoughts to focus. Outside of the cubicle, however, Dr. Turner was a distraction, sitting as he was with patients, writing prescriptions.
and laughing with the younger children. Shelagh dared not let her eyes stray toward him but she was aware of him all the same; she could imagine the tilt of his head and the twinkle in his dark eyes.

Blinking hard to erase her unprofessional thoughts, she smiled at the young girl. “Miss Roberts?”

“It’s Arletta, ma’am,” the girl whispered.

“Arletta, then,” Shelagh said, gesturing the girl into the cubical. “Would you like your mother to come in with us?”

“Oh, no ma’am. She wouldn’t any how. Said I got myself into this mess. She ain’t fer wrong.” Arletta hung her head.

Shelagh looked at the clipboard, noting the girl’s age. “Arletta, are you here to confirm that you’re expecting?”

Arletta’s hair fell over her eyes as she nodded. “Yes’m. I done got married a few days ago, my Daddy seen to that, but…” she trailed off, eyes glistening.

“Oh, don’t cry,” Shelagh said, handing her a handkerchief. “There!” she said a few moments later, as the tears eased. “I know it must be so overwhelming! I’ll offer support to you along the way. If you have questions, anything at all, I will try to answer!” Treading carefully, she asked, “Is your new husband also a support?”

The girl choked on a sob, immediately silencing herself so that the waiting women would not hear her. “I jus’,” she sighed. “I don’t know, Nurse.”

“He hasn’t shown any support?” Shelagh took the handkerchief and placed it in her apron pocket.

“It’s not that,” the girl whispered. “I jus’, Nurse, I jus’ don’t know nothin’ at all.”

--
Arletta’s mother wasn’t in the waiting area as Shelagh and Arletta exited the cubicle. The girl’s face fell and Shelagh could not stop herself from squeezing her shoulder in support. “She came with you today,” she whispered, so as not to alert the other women to gossip. “That matters greatly.”

Nodding, Arletta gathered her wraps from the rack.

“Your Momma’s jus’ outside, honey,” a woman called, nodding her head to the door. “The rain stopped and said she needed a breath of air.”

Exiting the clinic, Arletta held the door for another mother who ran in, handing her baby to Shelagh. “Hold ‘im, please Nurse,” the mother pleaded. “I need yer privy.”

The women laughed, but Shelagh smiled and hitched the baby on her hip, taking a clean handkerchief to wipe his nose. She hummed as she carried him to the kitchen, seeking a clean set of instruments for her next patient, though her mind was still on Arletta. Just inside of the kitchen stood Doctor Turner with a biscuit in hand. He smiled at the baby before breaking the cookie in half. She tried to control her breath as she accepted the biscuit, their eyes meeting and locking. She looked up at him feeling helpless, almost as if they were once more alone and that he might step forward to kiss her. The baby kicked his legs, calling out for the cookie. “Oh!” Shelagh’s mind went blank. “Perhaps only a wee bit,” she said, giving the baby the treat. She felt foolish now as the doctor looked at her.

“You’re a natural,” he said, watching her as she bounced the baby against her hip. She ducked her head. “It’s merely a biscuit,” she murmured.

“It’s not,” he said, gesturing toward the clinic floor. “I saw you with Arletta Roberts, too. You were…” he paused. “Quite tremendous with her.” As if weighing his words, he glanced nervously at her and then back to the cookie he held. “And you’ve shown such… friendship and care toward Timothy.”

Shelagh’s heart skipped at Timothy’s name and her cheeks burned with the compliments. Raising her head, she sought to dispute his claims, but as the baby gnawed his biscuit her eyes met the doctor’s, holding for a beat longer than appropriate.

“Nurse Mannion, I--”
“Thank ye, Nurse!” The baby’s mother stepped into the kitchen, taking her baby from Shelagh’s arms. “We’re a-ready for our needle whenever you are!” She looked at the baby fondly. “The cookie oughta keep him quiet!”

Mother and baby left the room and Shelagh heard her settling in with the other women. She looked to the doctor, cheeks flushing once more. “I’m only here for the...” she looked at the instrument tray.

“Of course,” he said, “let me…”

His hand reached for the tray at the same time hers did, and his long fingers brushed against the back of her hand. Heat clenched in Shelagh’s stomach, but she snatched her hand back as laughter floated in from the waiting area.

Lisette leaned around the doorway. “Dr. Turner?”

“Yes?”

“Mrs. Cotton has asked to speak with you…”

Shelagh tuned them out, taking the opportunity to pick up the tray and leave the kitchen to see to her next patient.

--

The rain returned after a brief respite. Clinic was winding down, only a few ladies left in the waiting area. Dr. Turner left his cubicle, smiling at a retreating patient. Shelagh surreptitiously watched as he glanced out of the window at the pouring rain. She finished writing an appointment reminder on a card and handed it to the woman standing in front of her. “Have a lovely evening, Mrs. Gaines,” she said, glancing away from the doctor and up to her patient.

“Thank ye, Nurse.” Mrs. Gaines tucked the card into the front of her blouse and turned to leave. “Oh!” She looked back to Shelagh. “Plumb forgot! My neighbors; we’re over on Asher Branch? The Reids. Their youngest least ‘un down with a fever. I tol’ ‘em I’d ask you to come out
tomorrow.”

Shelagh nodded, jotting down the information for her morning rounds. “Thank you, Mrs. Gaines. I’ll add them to the morning list.”

Mrs. Gaines nodded her thanks and left. Shelagh remembered the women at the picnic speaking of fevers and possible summer flu spreading through the community. She extended her afternoon rounds the day before to visit a few families, finding fevers, sore throats, headaches, and anxious mothers. Her eyes returned to the window. “Dr. Turner?”

He looked toward her, a hint of surprise in his eyes. “Yes, Nurse?”

Ignoring the fluttering in her stomach at having his full attention, she mentioned the cases of illness and the talk that she had heard. “I’ve just received word of another fever on Asher Branch,” she finished, gesturing to her notes. “I thought you should know.”

Dr. Turner’s brow creased. He stepped forward, lowering his voice as if not to be overheard by the patients still inside the clinic. “We have had a possible case of polio in a child,” he confided. “At the fair,” he said, pausing slightly, “I was called in to the Kenton’s daughter. We’re waiting on results but all signs point to polio.”

“Oh, the poor dear,” Shelagh said, clutching the back of her chair. “Is it paralytic?”

“Thankfully not as of yet. We’re keeping a watchful eye. These cases of fever worry me. We’ll need to be extra vigilant. Home visits, clinic, we can’t risk ignoring what may seem a simple case of summer flu.”

“I agree,” Shelagh said, looking toward the patients to see if they had noticed anything amiss. They seemed engaged in their own conversations and so she continued. “I’ll have Lisette ride into Hyden so other Outposts may be alerted. I’ll suspend midwifery services tomorrow and instead see to those ailing.”

Dr. Turner nodded. “If you’ll share the family names with me I’ll go and see some myself. We need to head this off—we don’t have the resources to cope with an epidemic.”

His eyes met hers again. She saw his concern for the patients but also his trust in her as a nurse.
She exhaled as he turned away, reaching for his medical bag. “If you have need of me…” he said, glancing at his watch.

She felt the unspoken words in his pause. Handing him a list of patients, she tried to muster a hopeful smile. He seemed as if he wished to say something more, but he merely nodded, placing his damp hat on his head.

As she watched him walk away, she could see that his mind already seemed far away from Beech Fork Clinic. He inclined his head to the congregated women and walked out into the rain. Shelagh exhaled and began to right the intake desk, shuffling and stacking papers, the women’s chatter barely registering in the background until she heard the doctor’s name spoken.

“…never been the same,” an older woman said, clicking her tongue. “A shame. Since Mrs. Turner’s been gone he’s been nothin’ but a sheepdog without a sheep.”

“They were happier than any couple I ever seed,” another woman opined. “I hated her dyin’ like that, as much for the doctor as for the boy.”

The women stood and put on their wraps, calling goodbyes as they left. In the kitchen, Lisette was running water to boil. Shelagh sat alone at the intake desk. Dr. Turner’s past had been laid bare to her, complicating her emotions further. Thinking of Timothy’s longing for his mother, she wondered at the depth of the doctor’s loneliness. Taking a deep breath, she attempted to ease the pounding of her heart. Placing aside her feelings, she focused on patient notes and the list of fevered patients that she would visit come morning.
Pain In My Heart

Chapter Notes

This chapter was a very personal one to me. Some of the subject matter is tough, with a mention of violence leading to a miscarriage and, separately, mentions of illness. I did not take any of this lightly.

...in hopes of stemming an epidemic. As such, this letter is long overdue. I fear I may be unable to finish during this sitting....

The rain continued overnight, letting up here and there before downpouring once more. Shelagh awakened to the rumble of thunder. Listless and still tired, she tried to find a comfortable spot in her bed. She had spent the evening making a plan to spread information to parents and effect quarantine, if necessary. Her mind refused to rest; the fear of a widespread polio outbreak leading her to pray fervently for the children of the county. The prayer allowed her a moment’s peace. Yet as she fell into a doze it was almost as if she heard Dr. Turner’s voice and she jolted awake, the fleeting memory of the dream disappearing with a flash of lighting outside of the window. Irritable, she wrapped her dressing gown about herself and walked into the kitchen to make a cup of tea.

As she waited in the soft glow of the coal-oil lamp for the kettle to heat, she tidied the counter, taking Lisette’s catalogs and placing them inside the girl’s empty bedroom. Lisette had ridden out the evening before with Eula and a group of other couriers to pick up the mail at the train depot in Hazard, just over the mountain. A needed supply of medication and hospital equipment was scheduled for an early weekend arrival. Alone with her thoughts, Shelagh jumped when the kettle whistled, holding a hand to her heart and shaking her head at her silliness. Her head felt heavy as she settled at the kitchen table with the tea and a bit of breakfast, but the warm drink, so reminiscent of early mornings in the convent, fortified her, even as a pinch of a headache remained between her eyes.

The storm began to abate, though the rain continued, misting against the windows as Shelagh rinsed her breakfast dishes. A memory came to her then, of Dr. Turner standing just out of the rain in the Polly barn, smiling at her as rain dripped from the brim of his hat. She closed her eyes against the vivid memory, remembering too, the words of the women at Clinic, on his grief over his wife. She remembered Timothy’s story of bic-biccies and her stomach hurt for the sadness endured by the little boy and his father. Her own father had never gotten over her mother’s death. He would often remark, “She may be gone, but I am married still.”

In the bedroom, the alarm began to trill, startling Shelagh from her thoughts. She realized that her hand was at her lips and snatched it away, walking the dark hallway to silence the clock and dress
for the day.

--

“Hit only jus’ started, Nurse,” the anxious mother said, wringing her hand in the hem of her apron. “He was jus’ as fine yesterday, but this morning he was as hot as the oven door.” She lowered her voice and leaned in toward Shelagh. “Some are saying it’s the tuberculosis.”

“Loren isn’t suffering tuberculosis, Mrs. Woods.” Looking back to the small boy, she asked him to turn his neck.

He tried, but whimpered slightly. “Hurts,” he murmured.

Shelagh took a cool flannel and placed it on the little boy’s head. “You’ve done so well,” she said, patting his hand. “And have been so brave!”

“What is it, Nurse?” Mrs. Woods looked to her son and back at Shelagh.

Weighing her words carefully, Shelagh gestured for Mrs. Woods to step away from the boy’s beside. “I believe Loren is suffering from polio. Many of his symptoms may seem like a normal flu, but he’s suffering from a stiff neck and that concerns me.”

“Polio!” Mrs. Woods gave an anxious look towards her son. “Well, what can we do fer him?”

“We’ll need to admit Loren to Hyden Hospital for tests to confirm polio,” Shelagh said, as gently as she could. “We’ll also need to monitor you and the other children for symptoms. Have any of your other children shown signs of fever or illness?”

Mrs. Woods shook her head. “They all come through the measles a year or more ago, but they’ve been healthy ever-since.”

“I’ll take their temperatures,” Shelagh said, removing the rag from Loren’s head to rewet it. “I’ve asked orderlies from Hyden to follow my rounds today. Should you agree, they’ll carry Loren to hospital by horseback or litter, so that he can begin treatment straight away.”
Mrs. Woods was nodding before Shelagh could finish speaking. “Anythin’, nurse. I hain’t a lost a one of mine yet and I don’t plan to today!” She knelt beside the bed and kissed her son. “It’s gon’ be alright, Loren.” Her voice was steady but as she looked back to Shelagh, tears shone on her cheeks. “It’s not a rainin’ now. Take ‘im afore it does.”

--

Asher Branch was a small tributary, but its waters were outside of its banks as Shelagh approached the cabin mentioned to her by her patient. The ford was one of the deepest in the county, and now too dangerous to cross. The patient’s home wasn’t near enough to flood out, but the grass was patchy and earth muddy around the door. Her eyes widened slightly as Dr. Turner emerged from the home, shaking hands with a man who stood in the doorway. The man caught sight of her and waved. Shelagh wiggled her fingers back, feeling foolish as Dr. Turner looked at her from the step. She rode forward as the cabin door was closed. “I wasn’t certain that you would be able to visit this family,” Shelagh said, glancing at the doctor. Her thoughts and doubts from earlier flooded her mind. Taking a breath, she asked, “Was it polio?”

“I’ve enacted a quarantine,” he said, rubbing a hand at his eye. “Fifth one today.” He moved to walk toward his horse. “Later, I’ll ride out to Thom’s. Haven’t been all week.”

Shelagh walked Mrs. B toward the tree where the doctor’s horse was loosely tied. “Do you think—”

“No,” he said, anticipating her question. “I would have heard something by now if any of them were down sick.” He pushed up and into the saddle. “Though I’ll admit to wanting to see him for myself.”

“Yes,” Shelagh agreed. “A father would.”

“Indeed.” He sighed. “How many have you seen?”

“Four,” she answered, bringing Mrs. B into a trot to match his speed. “The orderlies have taken two of them on to Hyden, and will send another team to assist me for the afternoon.”

“Our resources are being stretched thin.” His shoulders were hunched. “With the Kenton child, your two, and one child not on the FNS roster, that’s four hospitalized. The infant sleeping porch
has been converted into a triage for them, but many more and we’ll have to look into sending them to Hazard.”

Shelagh thought of how far the children would be from their families. From their homes. “I shall pray that doesn’t happen,” she murmured.

“Time for that faith,” he said, a half-smile on his face.

Remembering the conversation from the supper with his family, Shelagh ducked her head. “Quite.”

“Would you like to stop for a bite to eat?” He gestured to a clearing. “It might be too wet to dismount, but...” he slowed his horse.

“Thank you. But I’m not hungry,” she said, looking toward the mountain path. “I should continue so that I can meet the orderlies.”

“Of course,” he said, continuing to look at her as she did not make a move to command the horse. He hesitated before plunging ahead. “It’s not the time, I know, but I wanted to talk to you about--”

“You’re right,” she cut in softly, face hot, a pinch of pain behind her eye, “it’s not the time, nor place, Doctor.”

His voice was quiet as he returned, “I only wanted to assure that I didn’t intend to overstep with you.”

It was silent for a beat. “You didn’t,” she said, steadying her voice before continuing, “But I’m in Kentucky for the children, Dr. Turner. That is all. Before I came here I was a Sister, a nun, in the Order of Saint Raymond Nonnatus. I left the Order yet I am still following God’s path for my life; a life of service to those in need.”

His face seemed to soften, the shock she feared absent in his features. “Nurse Mannion,” he said, “I would never ask you to do anything less.”
Behind them came the sound of horses. “That will be the orderlies,” she said, turning Mrs. B.
“We’ve work to do.”

Before he could respond the men were upon them. The doctor greeted them and they discussed the plan to see to the rest of the ailing children throughout the evening and the next few days.

As she rode away, she forced herself not to look back at the doctor, riding in the opposite direction.

--

By Saturday, the sky was iron grey as Shelagh pushed Mrs. B once more up the path in search of polio cases. Two orderlies followed behind, ready to make the ride to Hyden should another need arise. She stopped at gates to speak to families as yet unaffected by fever, explaining symptoms to watch for in children and other adults. An older woman pointed up into a dark hollow, saying that a family with children lived a mile or so back from the path. “Hit might’n be they need some help,” the woman said, smoking her pipe. “I heerd them chil’ren hollaring and complainin’ yesterday as they rode on by.” She took a long puff. “Said they hurt.”

Giving her thanks, Shelagh looked back to the orderlies still following behind. They nodded their assent and they went off the path, picking their way through the leaves and tangled limbs. She ached from being in the saddle and from the strain of sick children. Resources were so far apart in the mountains and she wished for a way to provide help in a more timely manner, though the men riding behind her were of great assistance.

They made their way in slowly, through the brambles and damp greyness until a man stepped into the path of Mrs. B. He held a rifle.

“Oh!” Shelagh looked to the man, her heart in her throat. “Sir, I’m Nurse Shelagh Mannion from the Frontier Nursing Service. I’m only approaching to check on your children. There’s an illness spreading throughout the county.”

“Hain’t none of mine sick,” he said, eyeing her suspiciously. “And I don’t need ya bringin’ no sickness in on ‘em.”

Pressing her lips together, Shelagh ignored the pounding pain behind her eye that had come and gone over the last trying days. “I’ve heard that your children had complaints, Sir. Complains of being in pain from just yesterday.”
“They had a whooping, Nurse. Learnin’ ‘em a lesson.” He gestured with his rifle. “Go on back the way you came. Hain’t no sickness here.”

“Lee?” A woman’s voice came from behind the man.

Shelagh could see two little boys standing on either side of their mother.

“Lee, the nurse hain’t causin’ no harm.”

Lee didn’t look over his shoulder, but once more at Shelagh. “There. You seen ‘em. Now you can go.”

Shelagh’s throat was tight. “We’ll take our leave,” she said, urging Mrs. B to turn. “Yet should you need assistance--”

“We won’t.” The man gestured once more with his weapon. “Go on and get.”

The wet silence was broken by the sound of the orderlies turning their own horses. Shelagh held her breath as they started down the path, letting it out only as they placed some distance between themselves and the irate man. When she exhaled her breath was shaky and hot tears pricked at her eyes. She was glad the men rode before her, as she did not wish them to see her in such a condition. She took a deep breath but began to feel a breathlessness, as if she could not gain enough air, even in the stormy wind that blew around her.

As they left the hollow and pushed on, Shelagh rubbed at her forehead. The sharp pain behind her eye was beginning to bloom.

--

The sky darkened as the afternoon passed. With one last child secured Shelagh waved the medical orderlies on toward the hospital. The trail was empty and her head pounded, but as she passed a familiar clump of trees she caught sight of a woman standing in front of her lonely cabin, blonde hair blowing loose in the breeze. “Mrs. McMillan?”
The woman looked toward Shelagh, pushing curls from her eyes. “Nurse Mannion,” she said, eyes wide with surprise. “You should be back to yer post! The storm’ll be here afore you know it!”

Shelagh looked to the sky. The black clouds moved quickly, a cold wind following them. She looked back to Mrs. McMillan. “I’ve always time for my patients.”

Mrs. McMillan’s face fell. “Well, I hain’t a patient no more, Nurse.” Her hand fell to her stomach, as if she were going to touch it, but at the last moment she snatched the hand behind her back. “There won’t be no baby this year.”

Shelagh dismounted and sheltered Mrs. B in the small shed beside one of the McMillans mules. Approaching the woman, Shelagh touched her shoulder gently. “Did the baby come away? Are you in any pain?”

A strong breeze came down the mountain, ruffling Mrs. McMillan’s skirt. She gathered her hair in her fist. “Come inside,” she said, stepping over the threshold.

Inside the cabin Shelagh’s skin flushed warm after being in the harsh winds. It was quiet as she waited for Mrs. McMillan’s next move. Pain crossed her temple and she winced, but it went unnoticed by the woman standing at the fireplace.

“Butler hain’t here,” she said finally, turning back to Shelagh. “He’s probably laid up over to Hyden with Mercy Sutherland’s husband, Rog. He and Rog are good buddies, always drinkin’ and runnin’ off.” She sighed. “Mercy done got the good end of it cause Rog wouldn’t raise no hand to her or her children. He jus’ comes home to rut her and then he’s off again with Butler, drinkin’ their lives away.”

“Would you like me to come again another time?”

“Butler wouldn’t let ya. I was amazed he let ya when I was…” her voice broke. “When I was a-carryin’.”

“Mrs. McMillan--”
“He’s just as good when he hain’t drinking, Nurse. Everybody likes him. He can do the work of three men, they say, in the mine or in the field.”

Shelagh swallowed hard. “Mrs. McMillan, did your husband harm you?”

The woman began to cry. “There was blood, nurse, and then…. Then there was nothin’. I buried hit in the yard over yon’,” she said, nodding toward the window. “I used to have dreams about that least ‘un, what she’d look like, and how she’d smile at me.”

“Oh,” Shelagh wanted to reach out, but Mrs. McMillan was closed off, arms tight against her chest. “I’m sorry this has happened to you.”

“So’m I.” Mrs. McMillan sat on her bed. “I expect you want to examine me.”

“I would, just to make certain you’re safe.” Shelagh blew out a breath. “But I’ll only do so should you want me to.”

Settling back on the bed, Mrs. McMillan looked up at Shelagh. “Jus’ do it quick, in case he comes home.”

As Shelagh opened her bag, Mrs. McMillan began to speak behind her. “I didn’t tell him I’d buried hit,” she said. “He tol’ me jus’ to throw it in the privvy.” The woman’s voice broke once more. “And that’s when I knowed that to him, we was no better than shit.”

--

It was nearly dark as Shelagh and Mrs. B took back to the trail. The rain steadily fell, small rivers of water washing down the rock face of the mountain to run alongside the trail. The horse made her way down the mud path slowly and Shelagh winced at the wind in her face, cooling the tears that ran down her cheeks. She shivered underneath her damp uniform, teeth chattering. A headache throbbed behind both eyes, but her heart ached. She felt numb, the heightened emotion of staring at a rifle and learning of Mrs. McMillan’s grief, pounding relentlessly through her mind. When she tried to think of something else, she could only see Dr. Turner’s face and remember her words to him, that she was only in Kentucky for the children, and nothing further. Her mind spun, heartache and fear making her queasy.
Pieces of a prayer came to her mind, but she couldn’t seem to string them together. “Oh, Lord,” she whispered, but the sound was whipped away in the wind and in a splash, as Mrs. B stepped into a puddle and startled. Shelagh wiped at her glasses to look ahead. The path was beginning to wash out. Holding tight to the reins, Shelagh tried to lead the horse onto higher ground. Spooked, Mrs. B whinnied, but eventually walked, picking her way through the brush at the side of the path to skirt the puddle. “We’re almost home,” Shelagh said, trying to soothe the horse. “There’s turtle rock.” The familiar landmark buoyed Shelagh slightly, though she shrank into her clothing, still attempting to warm herself.

As they came down the mountain they passed the small pond, now well out of its banks. Shelagh worried over the river and how fast the current may be, but the sight of the nursing center, standing strong in the midst of the storm, had her urging Mrs. B forward. The thought of warmth and her own bed had never been as appealing. She struggled to shelter and feed the horse, the pain in her head slowing her movements, her fingers clumsy with cold. Dragging herself inside, she collapsed into a chair beside the door, resting her head against the wall.

Outside, thunder began to rumble.

--

The hot water bottle was her first clue. The heat did little to warm her. She huddled under the blankets in her bed, hugging the bottle close. The headache powder she had swallowed had taken some of the edge from the pounding behind her eyes, but not nearly enough. She once again felt the inability to draw in a breath and panicked, trying to fight her way out from under the heavy blankets. The fight exhausted her and her stomach rebelled. Leaning over her bed she barely managed to vomit into a bin. Miserable, she fell back against her pillows and attempted to wiggle her toes. Her foot moved, but the motion made her weary. She fought to keep her eyes open, but could not, sinking quickly into blessed darkness.

--

There was a light and she jerked her head away from it. Her eyes were heavy with grit and she could not open them, even as someone said her name. It was dark again and she smiled, but then the light was back, and her name was more insistent.


He said her name and she liked the sound of it, but she could not answer him.
“Shelagh? Can you move your feet?”

Her body was heavy. “Cold,” she managed. “Polio.”

“Yes,” he said, “you’ve been asleep for a long time.”

Shelagh frowned. It felt as if she had only just closed her eyes.

“The rain is easing, Doctor. I think you should be able to take her soon.”

“Thank you, Lisette.” The doctor’s voice moved further away. “She’s in and out of consciousness.”

“Thought I was tired,” she gasped.

“What’s that?”

Dr. Turner’s voice came from next to the bed once more. Shelagh realized that he was in her bedroom and blushed. “I still have your journal,” she whispered.

“My what?” When he received no answer, he said, “Nurse Mannion?”

Shelagh wanted to answer him, but fell into darkness again.

--

“Nurse Mannion?”

Shelagh opened her eyes. Without her glasses, the doctor was somewhat blurry. She felt as if he
should be upset with her, but could not remember why. “Doctor.”

“Yes,” he said, and the bed dipped as he sat beside her. “The rain has stopped and I think that I need to get you to the hospital.”

“Of course.” She closed her eyes again.

--

“...can you safely move her?”

“I’ve no means of continuing artificial respiration.” The doctor paused. “I’ll…. I’ll ready my mount if you can help her to dress.”

Shelagh turned her head toward the bedroom door as it closed. She was confused as to what patient the doctor would be moving until she felt Lisette’s cool hand on her brow.

“Nurse Mannion?” Lisette’s voice was quiet, lacking its usual enthusiasm. “I’m going to help you to dress. Are you able to hear me?”

“Yes,” Shelagh murmured, trying to lift her leg to assist.

“Don’t wear yourself,” Lisette said, pulling back the blanket. Her voice seemed as if it were going to break.

Shelagh wished to reach out to comfort the girl, but any movement felt bloated and strange. She blinked and a cold wind blew into her face. She turned her head, surprised to find that she was on the clinic porch. “Lisette?”

“I’m here,” Lisette said, her voice once more steady. “Are you cold?”

It was grey and chilly, but Shelagh was numb. She realized she was in the clinic pushchair. She concentrated on moving her feet but felt no movement. A flush colder than the air settled over her,
broken as a horse blew out a breath. Shelagh looked to find Dr. Turner standing before her, ready to leave for Hyden. He had told her the horse’s name, but she found she could not remember it. “Is there a travois?”

“The water is too high,” Dr. Turner said, stepping to the porch. “I’ll take you to Hyden.”

“You don’t need to do that…” Shelagh managed. “My patients.”

“I’ll ride out,” Lisette said. “Concentrate on yourself. They’ll be cared for.”

Overwhelmed, Shelagh tried to catch her breath.

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Jerking awake, Shelagh gasped in a breath.

“Easy,” Dr. Turner said, “breathe as slowly and deeply as you can.”

She stiffened as she came awake, realizing how intimately her head was nestled against the doctor’s neck. She looked down but the ground below moved too quickly with the horse’s gait. Shelagh became disoriented, closing her eyes and fighting back nausea.

“Do you want me to stop?” Pulling the reins, Dr. Turner slowed their pace.

Shelagh opened her eyes and looked at the mud and water along the trail, knowing there was no place to stop. “No,” she said, “I’ll manage.” The horse, MG, Shelagh remembered, walked on command. She shivered, snuggling deeper into her clothing.

“Your fever hasn’t broken.” Dr. Turner cleared his throat. “I rode out with Lisette to…” he trailed off before continuing, “to help her unload supplies. We found you there very early this morning.”

She tried to respond but choked. She gasped for air as the doctor’s arms reflexively tightened around her.
“Don’t,” he said, “don’t try to talk. We’ll soon have you safe in the hospital.”

His voice was soft, similar to the way it had sounded after their kiss. She did not struggle against him, concentrating instead on her breath and his warmth. The thought of her predicament set her chin to wobble, but another thought badgered at her, even over her concerns for her own health. Taking a shallow breath, she spoke. “Timothy?”

The doctor’s chest raised against her check as he drew in a breath. “Tim’s fine, they all are,” he said, and his head lowered slightly as if he might rest it against hers. He pulled back at the last moment. “I rode out. Stood at the fence and told Thom to keep ‘em all there, not to come into town.” He breathed out a small laugh. “Probably reading to ‘em all on butterflies and the like.”

Worry eased, Shelagh relaxed against him, even as MG’s rough gait made her wince. “Thank you,” she managed.

He did not relax his grip, but his voice was soft once more. “Rest.”

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At Hyden, Nurses Wright and Parrish met them at the door, along with several orderlies, helping Shelagh from the horse as Doctor Turner struggled down. “She was feverish and disoriented as we left Beech Fork,” he said, helping to settle Shelagh onto the gurney the orderlies carried.

“Nurse Mannion?” Nurse Wright’s face was shocked, but she quickly masked it, running alongside the gurney and into the hospital.

Shelagh felt strange staring up into the faces of her colleagues and friends, closing her eyes against the new reality she found herself in.

Dr. Turner was still listing symptoms. “....mechanical ventilation will be needed. She’s gasping for breath. She appears to also have lost mobility in both legs…”

She had known the virus was paralytic, but to hear it from the doctor sent a bolt of fear through Shelagh. She knew that there were no mechanical ventilators available at Hyden. A relatively new
treatment, Iron Lungs would only be available at larger hospitals. The nearest would probably be in Hazard, and she was seized in further fear at the idea of having to travel over the mountain for care.

Dr. Gratz entered the room, pulling Dr. Turner aside. Shelagh strained to hear them, making out the word ‘epidemic’ before panicking and losing her breath. Nurse Wright grasped her hand and coached her to breathe. The men left the room.

Once she calmed, Nurse Wright began to bustle about, taking her temperature and changing her wet clothing. “I’m going to wrap your legs in cotton,” she said, taking a length of gauze from a cabinet. “I’ve read that it helps if affected limbs are kept warm.”

Shelagh’s eyes filled with tears as her colleague gently wrapped her leg. Ashamed, she blinked hard. It was difficult to speak without losing her breath. She closed her eyes, but opened them once more when Nurse Wright gave her medication to ease the fever.

“I’m sorry that we cannot do much more,” she said, gently touching Shelagh’s arm. “Bigger hospitals might have the serum that the medical journals discuss, though I have my doubts about its authenticity.” She sighed. “As you know, all we can do is keep you comfortable for now and monitor your breath and limbs. We’ve sent a courier ahead to Hazard to see if they have an available spot for you. If not, you’ll go on into hospital at Lexington.”

Nurse Parrish entered the room, smiling gently down at Shelagh. “Do you need anything?”

Numb and overwhelmed, Shelagh could only shake her head, before she fell into an exhausted sleep.

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“...your faith,” Dr. Turner spoke as Shelagh blinked her eyes open. Nurse Wright sat nearby, filling out paperwork.

To the nurse’s left the door to the room swung as if someone had exited. There was a chair at her bedside, and she pictured Dr. Turner in it and wondered at what he had said before leaving. He had once said, I have wished for a little faith of my own.
Lying still, exhausted and sore, Shelagh closed her eyes and offered up a prayer.
Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone

...has been admitted to Good Samaritan Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, some 125 miles from our humble accommodation. She was taken by train Monday last. Upon arrival, she was immediately ensconced in one of the many Iron Lungs that line their pristine polio wards. What a marvelous machine, capable of giving the breath of life! Our dear Nurse Mannion cannot be in better, nor more caring, hands. Between the plentiful prayers in the mountain hollows and in your blessed convent, I am certain she will soon be restored to us, most hearty and hale… Sincerely Yours, Mrs. Mary Breckinridge

The ward was quiet in the early morning. Not as crowded as the children’s ward, there were still several fellow adult polio patients in the small beds that seemed roomy and large after enclosure in the ventilator. Shelagh’s memories of the machine were patchy, save for the last day of confinement when she awakened fully for what seemed like the first time in weeks. First of July and she had been in Lexington just over a month, having spent much of that time in the dreaded Iron Lung.

Recuperation from polio consisted mainly of rest. There was no cure and no medication that was sure to remove symptoms. The first six weeks of treatment after leaving the Lung consisted of a regimen of absolute rest of body and mind. The nurses, friendly to a fellow colleague, spoke to her as such, and did not sugar-coat her long road to recovery. It was daunting to learn of the long days of complete rest. No books, no letters, and little conversation was to be had. Her limbs were well cushioned so that her body did not need to strain itself and could work at healing.

After the six weeks of rest, basic physiotherapy would be provided daily, heat and massage to keep the affected muscles from atrophying further than they had done already. She would have to build her way up to walking again and that thought was so overwhelming that Shelagh tried not to mull over it, though in the back of her mind she wondered how she would perform her job once she was able to return to active duty.

The bright July sun was beginning to shine behind window blinds that were little match for the golden rays. Soon, Shelagh knew, the morning nurse would come and wake the ward, raising the shade to a sight now familiar to her. Lexington was a world apart from Hyden. It was rural but bountiful. Even the grass seemed thicker and richer than that of Leslie County; the famed ‘bluegrass’, named for its blue hue as morning light hit stalks covered in dew.

Good Samaritan Hospital stood in the middle of Lexington, near two universities and a growing main street. Yet the view from the window was one of a small horse farm, a black plank fence in the foreground and barn in the distance. Daily, Shelagh would watch for the farm’s horses, as they would graze near the fence. She missed Mrs. B as she watched these horses frolic in the summer sun. A mare nursed a foal and the young horse was fast on its spindly legs. The window to the wider world was Shelagh’s lifeline; the picturesque view one that she would draw if she were able
to use pencil and paper.

The ward door opened and Nurse Lucas came through, opening the blinds and greeting the awakening patients. In the bed nearest Shelagh was a young mother, her two year old spared the polio that she herself had contracted. “I’m just as glad,” she whispered one evening to Shelagh. “I’d rather it was me than her.” Though, she added, she worried what her husband was doing home alone with a toddler. Yet there was little time to converse. The ward was to remain silent during this phase of their treatment. Once they moved into a more active phase there would be plenty of time to talk, the nurses said, strict but caring in their immaculate white uniforms.

Nurse Lucas inclined beds and directed orderlies to remove bedpans before stopping in front of Shelagh’s bed. “Nurse Mannion,” she said, inclining her bed and plumping her pillow. “You’ve a letter in the mail.”

Shelagh could see the other patients perk up. She blushed to be the center of attention. “Thank you,” she said, incredulous as she accepted a thin envelope. During their period of absolute rest, the nurses compiled weekly reports on their recovery to send to loved ones. Shelagh knew her reports to be sent along to FNS headquarters, before being forwarded to Nonnatus House.

“You’re still a bit away from leaving the treatment,” Nurse Lucas said, pulling the tray table over Shelagh’s lap. “But this letter is from your employer and marked as ‘urgent’.” She leaned in. “I thought it might be in regards to sending you home,” she said quietly. “When you’ve finished with it I’ll lock it with your personal possessions, if you’d like.”

The nurse bustled away and Shelagh looked at the envelope, feeling conspicuous as she opened it. Her ward mates looked away as if giving her privacy, but she could sense that they were disappointed not to have mail of their own. Unfolding the paper, she noted that it was from Mary Breckinridge herself. Apologizing for not yet visiting the hospital, Mrs. Breckinridge sent her deepest regards and regrets. Given the circumstances, the letter went on; the two year contract could be terminated, should Shelagh wish, so that she may return home after her convalescence, with the Frontier Nursing Service’s blessings and best wishes.

Folding the letter, Shelagh sat it on the tray. Outside of the ward window, the farm horses were standing at the fence, the foal lying in the thick grass at its mother’s feet. Home, she thought, and began to pray.

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The quiet days passed slowly. Shelagh remembered the Great Silence of the convent evenings but
those hours had been filled with joy and peace, whereas this silence held a painful expectation of wellness and wishes for the future. Never a very relaxed sort of person, Shelah found that lying completely at rest did not agree with her very well. Once she emerged from the fog of fever she wished to be up, to work toward her wellness and to regain a semblance of her life. Yet as she prayed she began to suspect that maybe the Lord was speaking to her through the enforced stillness. It seemed that He was allowing her the chance to work through her thoughts, to see more clearly the road that He had laid out for her. She had once said to Cora that she was uncertain if the Lord had led her to Kentucky or if she had asserted her own will over His. She teasing at these thoughts as she lie immobile, ruminating on God’s will and the idea of home. Mrs. Breckenridge’s letter battered at the edges of her mind at every waking moment. The promise of two years had once seemed daunting, but now the idea of them being taken away seemed, if possible, more overwhelming. Under the tutelage of the Frontier Nursing Service she had a purpose and a community for which to care. Giving that up and sailing back to London would put her in the position of starting over yet again, once more finding her feet in an uncertain world.

A pattern emerged as the weeks passed. She began to look forward to the nursing checks and the changing of the hot packs. Wearying of lying down, she began to wish for the days that she had sat in saddle, closing her eyes to remember the minute details of the mountain path. Turtle rock, the small pond, the trail, would look so different in the hot summer sunshine. The Polly cabin was only a short way from turtle rock, and Shelagh thought of little Hiram Ray, wondering if Mrs. Polly had been able to bring him home yet. She remembered Mrs. Polly’s complaints of bed rest, of how her days had revolved around her dinner and her checks. Dozing, Shelagh’s mind blurred, remembering the song she and Mrs. Polly had sung together the night the baby was born. Behold what love, love divine… Upon awakening she wondered if she had been singing in her sleep, yet the ward was silent still, only the breath of her ward mates to keep her company.

Rain pelted the ward window, thunder gently rumbling outside. Shelagh hid a sigh, moving her back and adjusting her arms. The paralysis was confined to her legs, the nurses certain that the extent of the damage had been reached. Her legs were well wrapped and cushioned. Fatigue was the enemy of post-polio treatment. The doctors and nurses felt that any muscle strain was too much for the recovering body and yet the strain of being immobile was wearing at Shelagh. Her mind drifted once more to the mountain trail and the path along the river. She thought of Mrs. Williams, Felice, and Leslie; wondering if they had yet settled into Ohio. Dear Cora must miss her friend fiercely, and Shelagh hoped that the other FNS nurses had taken her under their wing. She was lonely and so isolated in her small cabin. The Turners would care for her, she knew, and smiled to think of Anna Jane sitting at Cora’s table, eating cornbread and drinking buttermilk. Timothy might go along to help in Cora’s garden. Shelagh, if she were there, would sit at the table and speak with the women and laugh at Timothy’s jokes. He would grin at her and they would both giggle, turning to smile when they heard a familiar voice behind them. Dr. Turner would enter and say to them, “What’s all this?”

Shelagh breathed in sharply at the imagined tableau. The room was dark from the overcast sky, the rain still falling.
“Are you alright?”

A quiet voice spoke up and Shelagh startled, the voice in her head at odds with the soft, female voice that spoke. She turned her head to the young mother who recovered in the bed to her right. “Yes,” she whispered back. “I was…” she trailed off, unsure of what to say, embarrassed of her daydream.

“I do it, too,” the woman said, voice soft under the sound of the storm outside. “I’ll almost think I’m home with my baby girl and then… My mind playin’ tricks.”

“You must miss her terribly,” Shelagh said, heart aching at the strain in the young woman’s voice.

“I do.” The woman sighed. “I’m scared she won’t know me no more when I get out of here.”

“A child always knows their mother,” Shelagh said, certain in her statement. “She won’t forget.”

“Thank you… Nurse Mannion? Is that your name? I hear them call you that.”

“My name is Shelagh,” she answered. “I am a nurse, however. I think they’re being very kind in calling me by my professional title.”

“Shelagh,” the woman said. “I like it. Mine’s Betty,” she said, lowering her voice further when another patient grumbled.

“Hello, Betty.”

“Are you missin’ your home?” Betty shifted in her bed, the mattress creaking.

“I do,” Shelagh answered. “I’d never seen summer in Hyden and had been looking forward to it!”

Betty clucked her tongue, as if embarrassed. “I meant, well, you have such a pretty accent an’
Shelagh drew in a breath. “Oh!” She laughed the confusion off, even as her stomach clenched. “I’m sorry, Betty. My home.” She thought of London and of Aberdeen, of babies, her sisters, the East End, her father’s store, her ever-young mother, and of leaving both places. “Yes, I do miss it.”

Betty was wheeled back into place next to Shelagh. The young woman sniffled as the nurses lowered her bed, readying the ward for evening. It was a visitation day and Betty had been at the ward visitors’ window, speaking with her sister. As they entered an active phase of healing visitors would be allowed in the dayroom, but until then all visitors were to remain apart, seen only through glass. Turning her head toward the young woman, she longed to offer words of comfort, but hadn’t any to share whilst the nurses continued their evening rounds. They moved quickly and quietly, efficient but without emotion as they checked limbs and removed trays.

The patient on Betty’s other side fitted in his sleep, plaintively calling his wife’s name as his eyes opened. The young nurse lowering his bed seemed unmoved, checking his vitals before moving on to the next bed. Irritated with the lack of empathy, Shelagh wished to stand from the bed and hold the man’s hand, to ask him of his wife and to ease his discomfort. Settling back against the pillow, Shelagh added this irritation to several others that tallied in her mind -- a pair of nurses had spent an inordinate amount of time discussing popular music whilst on the ward, another’s ability to make up a bed seemed somewhat lacking, and now this emotionless response….

Ashamed at the cranky turn of her thoughts, Shelagh offered up a prayer. She was being unfair to the nurses. A small knot of guilt lodged itself into her stomach. It was easier to quibble over the nurses’ perceived slights than to wish to be among them, to be rid of the sick bed and to be back with her patients. The days were long and the silence deafening. During the daylight hours Shelagh could find some respite in the sunny window, but even still she spent most of her time in a half-doze, hoping that the absolute rest was healing the ravage that had been done to her limbs by the polio. A natural planner, Shelagh found herself floundering without lists to make and tasks to complete, her waking mind full of thoughts of regaining her health to walk away from the hospital.

Mrs. Breckinridge’s letter was at the periphery of her thoughts, though it exhausted her to dwell on. She wanted to see her contract through. A commitment had been made to the people of Beech Fork, and she intended to fulfill it, Lord willing. The needs of children and women had drawn her to Kentucky to offer care and that need was still evident. There had been a need in the East End of London yet she had walked away from that, feeling as if she were in the wrong place; living the wrong life. The feeling had left her with doubt. The worry that she had imposed her will on the Lord’s to come to Kentucky continued to concern her. Yet, when she thought of babies Hiram Ray and Leslie, of Cora, and Timothy, and Dr. Turner, she thought that perhaps the Lord had His hand
at her back, leading her to a community in which she could give but also receive…

Startled from her thoughts as the nurse lowered her bed, Shelagh closed her eyes to adjust to the darkness as the ward lights were dimmed. Releasing a sigh, she watched the flashes of light against the backs of her eyelids, pondering a question she had asked before. “What now, Lord?”

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Nurse Lucas had a thin line of sweat at her brow as she leaned over Shelagh’s bed. “It’s like a wet blanket outside already,” she said, helping Shelagh into a sitting position. “Mid-August’s like that, though.”

Shelagh nodded, looking to the window and the dark blue of the late morning sky. “Hotter than the devil’s living room,” she said, “or, at least, that’s what they said in Hyden.”

Laughing, Nurse Lucas held out a thermometer. “They’re not wrong!” She waited a moment and then took the stick back, checking the temperature. “Normal! Any tenderness remaining?” She pulled back the blanket to look at Shelagh’s legs. The weeks had passed in slow silence. Pain had been replaced with a feeling of needles and pins in Shelagh’s legs, the flaccid limbs regaining some strength.

“None,” Shelagh answered. “Will I begin muscle testing and advanced physiotherapy now?”

“They say its doctors make the worst patients!” Nurse Lucas chuckled. “But I think we’re a close second!” She made a notation on Shelagh’s charts. “The team will test you later today and you should begin the hard work tomorrow!” She tucked the chart back into the slot at the end of the bed. “It’ll continue to be a long, slow recovery, Nurse Mannion.” She smiled gently. “But I’d say you’re really on the road to it!”

After a prayer of thanksgiving, Shelagh settled in with her lunch as Nurse Lucas moved on to Betty’s bed, pulling a curtain round. The tray held a bowl of potato soup and a small slice of cake. Carrot, from the looks of it, and Shelagh thought of Sister Monica Joan and her love of cake and sweets. The slightly smashed piece of dessert would not much appeal to the elder nun, but the thought of her made Shelagh smile. The sun shifted behind a cloud, darkening the ward slightly. Shelagh looked out to the barn. The horses were away in the distance and she glanced back down to her meal. The cake was chewy, but sweet. Looking out of the window once more, she was startled to see a dog run underneath the plank fence. It stopped under a tree and eyed the horses before running once more and out of Shelagh’s sight. She continued to watch but it did not return. Dr. Turner had once asked if she was still in want of a mutt. She’d had the horse, but never the
dog. She glanced out of the window again and thought of Hyden, of polio, and the doctor...

Her mind raced with possibility. She wondered when she might receive her possessions, her stomach tightening with the thought of letters that might have arrived. Since the note from Mrs. Breckinridge she had heard nothing further of Hyden, and the epidemic she had left behind haunted her. She prayed nightly for the children and families affected and for him. Her mind drifted further as she finished her meal, looking once more into the bright sunshine. Upon receiving her possessions, she thought that she might draw the barn and horses that now occupied so much of her time. Timothy would enjoy the view from her window.

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The mood in the ward was light, anticipation bringing smiles to weary faces. After weeks of absolute rest, their treatment was now moving into a more active phase, which meant that visitors, recreation, and letters from home were now encouraged. Shelagh was wheeled into the Day Room, along with her ward mates. It was filled with guests, and even those who were without family or friends present couldn’t help but smile at the happy chaos. Intending to sit with Betty, who visited with her sister, Shelagh was startled when a familiar voice called out.

“Nurse Mannion!” Lisette came into the room, beaming a lovely smile.

For a moment Shelagh had a hard time reconciling the Lisette in front of her with the Lisette from Hyden. She seemed to not belong in Lexington. And her fashionable traveling dress was so very different from the workday trousers and jacket she wore as a courier. “Lisette!” She reached out for the girl’s hand, suddenly overwhelmed with happiness to see someone familiar. “Are you well? How are the patients?”

Lisette squeezed her hand before collapsing into a chair. “The ride from Hyden is brutal,” she said, stretching. “The patients are fine, but they all miss you! I’m on my way home for my sister’s wedding. My Mother hopes it’ll encourage me to stop riding horses and to find a husband!” She laughed. “The last report on your health said that you might be ready for visitors soon, and so I took my chances to stop in!”

She opened her bag and handed Shelagh a small matchbox and card. She also gave her a cake tin and a letter bearing the official FNS emblem. “The box is from Timothy Turner. Mrs. Tucker made the cake in the tin and said to tell you that she did not use buttermilk even though it would have thickened the batter. The letter is from Mrs. Breckinridge.”

Shelagh laughed at Cora’s tease and took the letter, placing it aside, to read once back at the ward.
She looked at the small card, a smile threading across her face to have a note from Timothy. Not wishing to be rude, she looked up at Lisette.

The girl gestured at the box. “Go ahead!” She shook her head. “Timothy was so covert that I’ve just been dying to know what’s in that box!”

Imagining Timothy’s mischievous smile, Shelagh opened the card.

*Nurse Mannion, This is a papilio glaucus. I found it dead on the windowsill. Only Mrs. Cora said I couldn’t put it in a letter or the postman wouldn’t take it. Also, it would crumble all over the envelope. Luckily, Miss Dupree said she’d give it to you for me. Do you think the doctors can give it a diagnosis? From Timothy*

Smiling widely, she pushed the box open. Indeed, inside was a butterfly with a pin sticking through it.

“A dead butterfly?” Lisette shook her head. “I’m not surprised!”

“He’s an inquiring mind! He asks that I have the doctors diagnose it.” She smiled fondly. “Apparently it’s not his father’s area.” Closing the box, she looked down for a moment, before asking, “How is…?” she paused for a beat, before amending her question. “How is everyone?”

“It’s been a hard few months,” Lisette said, rolling her shoulders. “Couriers have been running regular trips to Hazard, every Tuesday and Friday—and you know how tough that trip is! I almost wrote to Mother to inquire as to whether I could miss the wedding, but we’ve just had a new nurse and two new couriers join. The epidemic took a lot out of everyone and new blood was needed.” She sighed, before brightening. “I’ll be back on the trail before long. With you coming home, it’ll be just like old times!”

Before Shelagh could respond, Lisette handed her a package. “Just a few things I found in your bedroom when I packed your case.” She paused. “I thought you might want some of your own things, especially since you were sent out of Hyden so quickly on the train.”

Shelagh took the package. “Thank you,” she said, touching the flap. “It was all very hazy.”

“It was difficult.” Lisette blew out a breath. “Several children were paralytic and Drs. Turner and
Gratz worked around the clock. They didn’t lose one child, however.” She paused for a moment, before looking to Shelagh. “I think Dr. Turner took it especially hard. I suppose he felt that he should have been able to care for you better. He apparently rode out to Hazard to see you, but you’d already been moved to Lexington. Mrs. Tucker said he came home looking like a ‘hanged dog’.

Heart in her throat at the revelation that Dr. Turner had tried to visit her, Shelagh imagined how overwhelmed and exhausted he and Dr. Gratz must have been to deal with so many cases of illness. “Praise the Lord,” she said, voice trembling. “Has the epidemic passed, then?”

“Oh, yes,” the girl said, a smile lighting her face. “I’ve been lending a hand to the nurses, given my basic training in bandaging and rocking the ‘least ones’.” She grinned. “It’s back to business as usual. Babies, deworming, and vaccinations.”

They laughed together, Shelagh happy to see her young friend. But as they talked, her mind would drift, thinking of Dr. Turner on a lonely ride to Hazard and back.

Later, after Lisette had gone on her way, Shelagh opened the package. Inside were some personal papers and a drawing notebook. Nestled in between these possessions was Dr. Turner’s copy of *The Lancet*.

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That evening, Shelagh sat at her tray, idly flipping through the medical journal after finishing Mrs. Breckinridge’s letter. She gave up on reading after staring at the tiny ink for many long moments, looking instead out of the window. As the sun began to set her mind wandered, the barn and bluegrass she had come to know replaced by Nonnatus House’s garden. She remembered walking there, among the vegetables and flowers, receiving the wise counsel of Sister Julienne. She had spoken to her Sister about the want of other things and of a new path, opened by God, which would lead her beyond Nonnatus.

Sister Julienne had said that Shelagh was embarking on a journey that would not be an easy one. *You must be sure that it is one you wish to pursue.* And it had been. As hard as it had been to leave the life she had chosen, it was also the right choice to leave it, to pursue that new road the Lord had placed in front of her.

A road that had led her to Kentucky.
Mrs. Breckinridge’s letter had spoken of new plans for FNS, plans involving a graduate school of midwifery, to train a future generation to provide care to those in need. It could be an opportunity, Mrs. Breckinride had written, for Shelagh to continue her contract once she was healed, should she wish to remain in the States and with the Service. It was a future Shelagh could imagine herself in. She knew the Lord had answered her repeated question of “what now?”. He had set her upon a path and she would follow. A weight lifted from her at the thought of going home.

“Nurse Mannion?”

Shaking her head, Shelagh looked to find a young orderly standing before her. “Yes?”

“Nurse Lucas sends this box of your possessions.”

He handed it to her and smiled, walking away before she could thank him. Her mouth dried as she contemplated the box. It was a tangible sign of her recovery, right on the heels of her realization of home. Heart pounding, she opened it to find a stack of letters. Spreading them out onto the tray, she smiled at the wealth of them, noticing the names of friends, colleagues, the Sisters, patients, Cora, and…. him. Most of the envelopes bore his name. She picked up the first, fingers light as she traced over the writing on the back of the envelope. She had once felt foolish as she traced a finger over a circle he had drawn in his journal, but now, she let her fingers slide gently over the name of the one that she had missed the most.

The ward was quiet, other patients having been discharged or taken to physiotherapy.

Unable to keep a smile from her face, Shelagh opened the letter. And began to read.
Letters Have No Arms

...Timothy is writing this for me. I’m just as concerned them Lexington doctors don’t know a thing and you’re still suffering. If you can, write back, so we know you’re doing just as fine. We all miss you. It’s been a hard summer for all of us, but mostly for you and the dear least ones who have been down with sickness...

Shelagh leaned against the wall to steady herself. The calipers were unwieldy. Walking the length of the corridor exhausted her.

“Turn and walk back when you’re ready,” the physiotherapist said.

Keeping a hand at the rail on the wall, Shelagh turned and made her way back into the therapy room. She settled into a chair as the therapist removed the calipers and began therapeutic massage. Young children were in the room undergoing the same treatments. Shelagh smiled at a little girl in the next bed. The girl grinned widely. A therapist approached the bed with small calipers. He held one up. “This one is for your right foot,” he said to the girl. “Can you tell me which is your right?” The little girl pointed to her correct foot. “Very good!” He held up the other caliper. “And which foot is this for?” The tiny girl pointed to her other leg. “The wrong foot!” she crowed.

Trying to hold in her laughter at the girl’s antics, Shelagh looked away. The child’s accent was charming; different from the harsher tones of the children in Hyden. The little ones were so very dear and Shelagh found that her heart was lighter when she was among them, as if their joyful spirits buoyed her own. Learning to use the calipers had been a daunting task, but one she gladly met. Each day she grew more sure of herself in and out of the appliances, and watching her fellow ward mates and the sick children succeed brought her such a sense of accomplishment. As her treatment ended, and with calipers firmly in place, she made her way back to bed.

On her tray was a half-finished picture. She had spent time carefully drawing the foal’s long legs, trying to share with Timothy the piece of the outside world that had become so important to her. Closing the drawing pad, she removed the braces and settled into her bed for the evening. Outside, dusk was falling. Here and there, a small pinpoint of light would flash. “Lightnin’ bugs,” the locals said, explaining how children would catch them in jars. Shelagh wondered if Timothy were as interested in lightning bugs as he was in butterflies. She longed to go outside and catch one of her own, to see it’s light and feel it’s fluttering wings against the palm of her hand. She closed her fingers softly, the tip of the index finger just brushing against her palm’s now healed graze.

Tidying away the picture, she stopped on a sheet of writing paper on which she had written “Dearest Patrick” and nothing more. There were so many things to say to him, so many replies to his lovely letters. So many things jumbled in her heart. Her breath caught to think of being with him, telling him her private feelings. The words would come, of that she was certain, but for now,
her eyes glided over the loops and swirls of his name. She had never uttered it aloud, but in her mind she thought it now. *I miss you, Patrick. I want to be with you, Patrick.*

--

Walking in the calipers was never easy. They made movement possible, but one had to be careful to keep a slow pace. For the first time in her life Shelagh felt that she could not rush. As a nun-midwife she had sought peace in her religious offices, but the thrill and want of a midwifery case never left her. Biking around Poplar had been when she had felt her most free, filled with duty and determination as the world passed by in a sea of color. Now she had no offices to keep, no patients to dote upon, and her only task was to heal. Still, she found herself marking milestones of her own—the first time she could once more wiggle her toes, the strengthening of her calves, once more holding her weight on her own two legs.

It was exhausting work, but there was an exhilaration to finding her way back to health. Each day that passed was a day that she was closer to going home. She’d written, but not yet sent, letters. She had finished the drawing along with a short note to Timothy, a letter for Cora, one to her former Sisters and another for her fellow nurses. Patrick’s letter remained unfinished. Time and again, she began to write, only to erase lines or become frustrated when her feelings did not seem to translate to the page. She looked down at the blank paper before her, determined not to waste another sheet. Deep down she knew that Patrick would be pleased with any correspondence from her, yet she wished to say just the right thing, something as appropriate as his letters had been. Sighing, she set the pencil on the tray.

In the next bed, Betty tutted. “Ain’t you gonna write that feller? He’s probably standin’ on his head, awaitin’ you!” Laughing gently, Betty fiddled with the golden ring on her finger. “A man don’t need pretty words. He just wants to know you’re feelin’ what he’s feelin’.”

Shelagh folded her hands together, a blush spreading across her cheeks. “Oh, Betty.” She looked around at the others, but none seemed to be listening to their conversation. “Everything I write seems to be…” she shrugged helplessly.

“Tell him you’re doing better! Tell him you miss him! Tell him about your lovely new friend Betty!”

They giggled, as Betty cleared her own tray. She held up an envelope. “Lord, I just wrote Joseph an account of my noon dinner plate. It might not be the most excitin’ thing, but it was a part of my life he don’t know a thing about!”

Shelagh laughed again before sobering, thinking of the distance between she and the doctor. He had once had his own sojourn in Lexington. Looking around at the hospital walls, Shelagh thought
perhaps he could understand more than she realized. “Thank you, Betty,” she said, smiling at her friend. She looked down at the paper.

“Now, remember to tell him I’m lovely and smart.”

“Oh!” With a grin, Shelagh picked up her pencil.

17 September 1935
Dr. P. Turner
Hyden, KY USA

Dearest Patrick,

Soon I shall be coming home….

--

As September passed, summer blurred into autumn. The foal grew stronger, running now with the adults or standing calmly at the fence. The tree leaves began to change into glorious reds and oranges before beginning to fall. Shelagh worked every day at her strength exercises, growing more certain on her own two feet. She could walk now without the calipers, and though it exhausted her, it was also exhilarating, knowing that she was nearing discharge. The doctor examined her weekly, and smiled at her now, testing her reflexes.

Relaxing as he placed her leg back onto the bed, Shelagh stretched her toes. “I feel as if I have made rapid improvement,” she said, covering herself.

The physiotherapist laughed. “Do you?” He made a note on his clipboard before pretending to page back into her file. He looked up with a grin. “Extremely rapid,” he agreed. “In fact, I’m noting here that if your next muscle test is on par with this one, or shows improvement, that you’ll be released to continue your convalescence at home.”

Shelagh’s heart skipped. “My next muscle test is Tuesday. After that I’ll be discharged?”
“From your smile I deem this good news!”

Nurse Lucas entered the curtain as the doctor finished his notation. He placed the clipboard on the bed and took a cigarette and ashtray from the nurse. “I don’t think we’ll be seeing this one much longer, Nurse.”

“Well, we couldn’t be discharging her to a better place to recover!” Nurse Lucas replaced the clipboard to the end of the bed and inclined Shelagh’s bed as the doctor left. “You’re still smiling,” she said, a laugh in her voice.

“I’m afraid that I can’t quite help myself!” Shelagh settled herself into the bed.

“Does it have anything to do with all of those letters that you keep reading and re-reading?”

Shelagh’s cheeks warmed. “Many in Hyden have written to me.”

“One of them a bit more than others, I think!” Nurse Lucas grinned as she opened the curtain. “Keep your secrets if you must. I’ve just never seen anyone so excited to get back to those mountains.” Her eyes twinkled as she laughed again, before moving on to Betty, drawing her curtain.

Shelagh placed her hand under her pillow, feeling one of the letters that Nurse Lucas mentioned. Self-conscious now, she did not take it out to hold and to read, but instead thought of how he must have looked as he wrote it, sitting perhaps at his small desk at Hyden Hospital, or at home, a place she had never seen. A fanciful part of her wondered if he had gone out onto his land to write some of his beautiful words whilst underneath the black gum tree where they had once shared a meal. Closing her eyes, she could picture him - back straight against the bark, hair gently waving in the breeze, as he squinted in thought at his paper and pen.

Nervous excitement churned in her stomach. She had received further letters from Hyden but none in reply to the letters she had written. The mail often ran very slowly over the mountains. It made her laugh to think that she may make it to Hyden before they did. It hardly seemed possible that she would soon see Cora, Mrs. Polly, Nurse Wright, Anna Jane, Timothy, Patrick ... It was easier to think of the many things to take care of before she left; a train to book, continuing care instructions to learn, and seeking passage across the mountains. Taking a diary from her bedside tray, she turned to Tuesday’s date, a mere four days away. She made a note in the book, turning with a wide smile as Betty’s curtain was pulled back and the young mother gave a happy laugh.
“Oh, Shelagh!” Betty clapped her hands together. “Ain’t it wonderful? We’ll both be goin’ home!”

The mood in the ward was light with happiness, so many of them being discharged or nearing that date. Later, after the lights were dimmed and most had dropped into a heavy slumber, Shelagh took the letter from underneath her pillow. It was dark, but she could just make out the words from the light at the window.

I’ve only realized that I just met you this past spring. Now it is hot summer and my mind can only remember that stormy, cold morning that Lisette and I found you at Beech Fork. It haunts me, as I continually ponder what might have happened had we not found you in time. I must remind myself that we did and that you are doing the hard work of healing, far from home and those you know and love.

I rode to Hazard to see you. Upon arrival, I learned that you had been moved. I could not be upset over that development. The hospitals in Lexington are fine and I knew there you would be well taken care of during your convalescence. Only -- I wished to see you. Not just to know that you are well and once more thriving, but also because I find that I miss you and the promise of what we might have found together. I do not want to suppose or assign my hopes as yours. Though I do feel that there are many things for us to talk through, should you also hold that wish.

I fear that in this letter I might say too much, or perhaps, not enough. There was so little time before you were taken ill….

She refolded the letter, but kept it in hand as she settled into the pillow. In four days she would be discharged. One more weekend in Lexington, in hospital, and then she could go home to Hyden; to her new life and to him.

--

It felt strange to step into traveling clothes. A small suitcase had been delivered to her during the early stages of her convalescence. Upon opening, she found that her clothing had been packed with care, among the items a blouse and suit that she had worn upon embarking the ship that would bring her to the States. Used now to her FNS uniform, she remembered how conspicuous she had once felt in trousers. Buttoning her jacket against her silken blouse, she felt free to move about in a way that she had not in her hospital gown. She tried to look at herself with the small hand mirror, but gave up, unable to see more than her face. Bringing a hand to her hair, she tucked a loose wisp
behind her ear, cheeks flooding with color at the realization of her impending departure. The smile reflected in the mirror was one that could not be squashed, but she tried to dampen it anyway, concerned at showing too much elation to those outside of her privacy curtain.

Snapping the case closed and picking up her thin handbag, she gave a cursory look to her bed and tray, before opening the curtain to meet Nurse Lucas’s smile. She settled into the pushchair the nurse offered and waved at those still left on the ward. She caught one last glimpse of the horses at the fence outside of her window before she was whisked away and into the corridor. Nurse Lucas asked about her future plans and Shelagh answered vaguely, grateful to the nurse, but shy of discussing her return to Hyden. At the hospital entrance she stood from the chair, no longer uncertain on her feet, but still mindful of her condition. “Thank you, Nurse Lucas,” she said, holding out a hand.

The nurse took her hand and smiled. “Maybe save a horse for me, hm? Sometimes I think I’d like to get away from the sterility of this place! Perhaps I’d find out what’s so interesting in those mountains...” Laughing, Nurse Lucas turned the pushchair and went back into the hospital.

Shelagh’s smile dropped into a sigh as she stood at the front of the hospital, looking out over Maxwell Street. Stepping forward, she heard her name called and stopped, looking to a streetcar ahead of her. Betty had her head half-out of a window, calling to her. “This one stops down to the train-station!”

Entering the car, Shelagh smiled at her friend, settling in beside her. “I thought you would already be gone!”

“So did I,” Betty said, blowing out a breath. “It took longer to finish the paperwork than I thought. I was gettin’ concerned they’d ask for my first born!”

Shelagh laughed. “Soon you’ll be home with your little one,” she said, holding on to the wooden seat back as the car began to move.

“Soon we’ll both be home!” Betty grinned. “Jus’ promise you’ll write?”

“Of course I will!” Shelagh watched the city streets pass, noticing a photography studio, a hat shop, and a diner before losing track, listening to Betty speak of her daughter. The antics of the little girl were a familiar tale to Shelagh now, and she was sad not to meet the daughter of her new friend. Yet as they passed the post-office, Shelagh’s mind wandered to the telegram she had sent to Dr. Turner mere hours before.
She turned the words over in her mind. He may not have received her letters as yet. And so she told him in the telegram that she had written to him, hoping to let him know that his letters had been not only received, but cherished, and that she was coming back. Once in Hazard she would hitch a ride with the courier service, as Lisette had said during her visit that they now ran twice weekly mail runs to the post-office there. Her stomach bubbled with anxiety and hope; if all went well, she could be back in Hyden by late evening or early next morning.

The streetcar stopped at the station and she and Betty disembarked, leaning in to hug one another.

“Momma!” A little voice called out. Betty stiffened, pulling away from Shelagh. She began to cry, falling into the arms of a tall, blond man and clinging to the curly-haired toddler he held.

Grinning and wiping at her eye, Shelagh made her way to the ticket counter to give the family a hint of privacy. Ticket secured, she stepped back, smiling at her friend and her daughter, who gently patted her mother’s cheeks.

“Oh, Shelagh!” Betty beamed. “This is my little Connie.” She leaned her head against the baby. “And my husband, Joseph.”

“She’s lovely!” Shelagh waved at the child, who buried her face in her mother’s neck.

Seeing the small family made Shelagh yearn for her own homecoming, though it was still far away and it would perhaps be several days before she saw Patrick and Timothy. Subdued, she said goodbye to her friend and waved to the young family from her seat on the eastbound train. Her spirits lifted once more as the train pulled away from the station. She was truly happy for Betty and said a little prayer for the small family. After witnessing their reunion, her seat felt lonely. Her mind could not help but cast back to the last time she had been on a train, sick, delirious, and scared. Her departure from Hyden had been urgent and she found herself wondering if all of the memories would ever be restored to her. In the flashes of memory, however, were all the reasons she needed to prove to her that Hyden was now her home -- the care and concern shown her by her colleagues and friends, their careful handling of the situation, and Dr. Turner’s desperate ride with her in his arms.

Reaching into her handbag, she gently touched the letter she had stowed there. Keeping it in hand, she watched the countryside pass by her window, each mile taking her closer to home.
...Mrs. Breckinridge’s letters made Hyden seem tangible, a place in which I could picture myself. I set to work quickly. The patients and locals were nothing but kind and I found joy in my vocation once again. Even still, I expected only to serve my two years, to parlay the experience into a new life once I returned to London. In previous letters, dear Sister, I have touched upon my concerns for this unexpected course in my life. My time in hospital has shown me that this was the path He intended all along, and indeed what awaited me upon arrival in Hyden was a home....

Shelagh’s legs ached for the last half of the train ride. The final mile of the trip was nearly intolerable. Her desire to begin her journey home coupled with the discomfort arrowing down her legs, making her anxious. As the train pulled alongside the depot in Hazard, she breathed a sigh of relief. Standing, she flexed her legs, waiting for others to depart before taking her own case and leaving the train. The depot was set just outside of the town at the intersection of two roads, one leading from town and one down into Hazard’s main street. With a hospital, post office, and thriving businesses, Hazard was a small, mountain coal town, but world’s apart from Hyden.

These features were hidden as Shelagh left the train and emerged into a misty afternoon. Cool air and rain had pushed in over heat, the sun hiding itself somewhere along her journey. The bustle of people disembarking the train made her pull away, concerned that she might be unable to keep up with the crowds in the grey haze. As she walked, the discomfort in her legs lessened but eventually she sat on a bench, waiting for the crowds to thin. She watched the people as they moved, concerned when she did not recognize any FNS couriers or fellow nurses. The post-office was across the street, but through the fog she could make out that there were no FNS horses there, only a few hitched mules and local residents going about their business. Her watch read half four. It was possible the couriers had already visited Hazard, and if their load was light, headed back across the mountains to beat the rain and rising mists.

Standing with a wince, she walked to the post-office to inquire from the postmaster. Her supposition correct, she left the building and settled back on the depot’s bench, spirits flagging at the unexpected delay. She would have to find lodging in Hazard for the night and wait for the next courier run, two days away. Her eyes shifted to Thousandsticks Mountain, cloaked in mists. To be so close to home, but stymied, was cruel. In her mind’s eye she could picture the path down from the mountain, Hyden Hospital and her colleagues, the dusty main street, the path and creek beds that led to Beechfork, the mountain trail that led to her friends and patients, and the stretch of bottom land along the river that belonged to Dr. Turner--Patrick. Her heart clenched to wonder what he and Timothy were doing at that moment. As she looked at the mountains, it seemed almost as if she could step home, through the mist and fog, to make her own way back to Hyden.

Her legs grew uncomfortable and so she rose, stepping out onto the road that led from Hazard. She would book lodgings, but wished to stretch her legs first, fancying that somehow she might actually walk home if she just kept going. It was foolish. She should walk back into town. Yet she continued to place one foot in front of the other, walking deeper into the mist. Clutching her jacket about her, she startled at the rumble of an engine. Moving to the very edge of the road, she began
to see the outlines of an automobile emerging from the fog. As the vehicle came abreast of her, it stopped, the loud engine sputtering into silence. Placing her suitcase onto the ground, Shelagh gaped at Patrick as he stared at her from the windscreen.

Her mind was unable to fathom how he came to be before her as he stepped from the vehicle, closing the door decisively behind him. Unable to take a breath, she watched helplessly as he ran toward her, like something out of a dream.

He paused but a hands-breadth away, hesitating slightly before placing his warm palm to her cool forehead. “I thought to find you at the station,” he said, his voice tender and raspy. “What if you had taken a chill?”

Shelagh trembled at the look in his eyes. “I was cold,” she managed, barely able to breathe. He removed his jacket and wrapped it about her shoulders, holding it closed at her neck. Surrounded by him, she managed to breathe, still in awe to be near him after so many months apart. “I was looking for a way home,” she murmured.

“I was on the right road,” he said, stepping even nearer, still holding onto his coat.

“Yes,” Shelagh agreed. During the months of her convalescence, she had longed for him and now she could only say what she wished for him to know, after the way they had parted. Taking a breath, she said, “I know you so little. But I couldn’t be more certain.” She looked into his eyes, hoping that he could read all that she could not yet say.

“I am completely certain,” he answered, keeping one hand at the coat’s collar and lifting the other to cup her face. “I received your telegram. You didn’t sign it.”

“I knew that you would know it was from me,” she said, voice dipping slightly as she finished with his given name, “Patrick.”

A grin broke over his face and he released a joyous breath before sliding his hand from her jaw. Inside the warmth of his jacket, he clasped her hand in his. “I hoped it was from you before I even read it, Shelagh.”

She exhaled and smiled, squeezing his hand. “Then we’ve made a start.”
The sky began to lighten as they stood there, unable to take their eyes off one another. Rays of sunlight started to break through the fog. “The storm is over.” Patrick looked back to the car and then at Shelagh. “We might yet make it home.”

“Home!” Shelagh’s heart fluttered. Moments before she had thought it impossible that she should make it back to Hyden. Holding the coat’s lapels together, she followed as Patrick lifted her case with one hand, while keeping her hand in his other to walk toward the vehicle. It was then that she noticed the other passenger. “Timothy!”

“Nurse...er... Miss Mannion! Dad said we were gon’ get you and that you’re all better!” He seemed as if he were ready to burst with news. “We rode in this Model T and it was jus’ like we were flyin’!”

Shelagh smiled into a laugh, still unable to believe that they were both there before her. Looking up at Patrick, her breath caught once more at the wink he gave in answer to the boy’s prattling. She knew then that home was with the two of them. As if he understood her thought, Patrick ran his thumb over her palm before assisting her to step up and into the vehicle, settling her case at her feet.

“...it really is like flyin’! I never knew we could go so fast in the whole world! Jus’ wait ‘til Jack hears. He won’t believe it!” He took a breath. “And the road was not bumpy at-tall! It was just as smooth!” He grinned widely, holding out his arms. “I can’t wait for roads to come to Leslie County!”

Shelagh released Patrick’s hand to turn in the seat and smile at Timothy. “Your trip sounds very exciting! However did you find me?”

From the driver’s side, Patrick began to unbutton his shirtsleeves. “Go on and tell ’er,” he said, shaking his head. “I still can’t believe we did it!”

“What are you--” Shelagh’s cheeks warmed as he continued to roll up his sleeves. She tried to look away, but found that she could not.

“Dad’s gotta crank the car so it’ll start!” Tim leaned over the seat, tapping Shelagh’s arm. “Did you ever ride in a vehicle before?” He did not wait for an answer, too full of his news. “Dad said
you were comin’ into Hazard. We were down to the Thousandsticks Post when he got your telegram from that courier. He didn’t think MG would make it in time.”

Shelagh watched Patrick at the front of vehicle as Timothy talked. After turning the crank, he looked up over the hood, his hair falling into his eyes. Shelagh’s stomach flipped as he smiled at her. She smiled back, feeling shaky as she turned her attention back to Tim.

“...and then Mrs. Breckinridge came in for her messages and said we could use the Frontier Model T that they keep over here to Hazard! The fog was so thick! But we missed the rain so Dad and I put down the roof!” He grinned, looking somewhat mischievous. “I spotted ya in the road, which was some awkward, since Dad was the one a-comin’ after you!”

“Timothy!” Patrick’s cheeks flushed. He stepped up and into the vehicle, reaching for the key. “It has been quite the adventure but now we have to return the car, if we’ve any hope of getting back across those hills.”

“Already?” Tim groaned before brightening. “Just wait ‘till you see how it goes, Miss Mannion!”

Shelagh looked to Patrick as he turned the vehicle in the road. His cheeks were still a bit ruddy, and she smiled to herself, knowing that he was as enamored as she. Timothy leaned over the seat, close to her. “Is ‘Miss Mannion’ okay? Dad said maybe I could call you that right now.”

“Oh!” Shelagh smiled at the boy. “Of course!” Feeling slightly unsure at what Timothy knew or did not know, she reached into her handbag. “I wanted to thank you for your letter! Also, I have your butterfly!” She removed the matchbox from the bag and handed it to him. “The doctors weren’t able to give much of a diagnosis, I’m afraid.”

“Thanks for tryin’,” he said, opening the box slightly. “Only Dad and I looked through my book and found a diagnosis!”

“Did you?” Shelagh smiled at Patrick, feeling bold as cool air rushed through the car. “Are you branching into entomology?”

He gave her a sidelong grin, his hair moving about his face in the wind. “ Couldn’t let those Lexington doctors get one over on me.”
Her heart fluttered and she had to look down to control her smile. Before she could reply, Timothy sat forward again. “Are you all better now?” His voice was quiet, the exuberance replaced with concern.

“Oh, Timothy,” she said, lightly touching his arm, as the vehicle headed into the breaking sunshine, “I feel wonderful.”

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The mountain was alive with sound as MG picked his way up the final ascent to Hyden Hospital and its nursing quarters. The Leslie County evening was sticky with heat, the rain never having made it to Hyden. Perspiration ran down Shelagh’s temple and her cheek felt damp as it rested against Patrick’s back. Though their ascent brought cooler air, here and there lightning bugs lit, small dots in the growing blackness. Once into Hyden Patrick bade Timothy to ride to his flat on the main street. The boy, full of adventure and stories to dream, rode on, but not before ascertaining that he would see Shelagh very soon. Shelagh smiled now, nuzzling her cheek against Patrick’s warmth, thinking that she must already be in the midst of a lovely dream.

When they had first settled on the horse she had held herself somewhat rigid, shy of touching Patrick. Her shyness came not only from the idea of having her hands at his waist, but also at having Timothy see. He quickly disabused her of that notion, squinting his eyes as Patrick took her hand in his, gently squeezing it. “I’m happy we found ya, Miss Mannion! But y’all won’t always be this love dubby, will ya?” he’d asked, and Shelagh had startled, wondering if their romance was that plain to see. Patrick had once more exclaimed the boy’s name, but Timothy was smiling as he rolled his eyes.

Now, Patrick tightened MG’s reins to slow him. “I don’t want the ride to be over yet,” he said, voice quiet in the midst of the wild cacophony.

Shelagh gently touched his shoulder. “Neither do I.”

He stopped the horse in the shade of the tree they had once sat under while drinking Coca-Cola. “I’m coverin’ for Dr. Gratz tomorrow,” he said, turning his head back to lean into her. “Perhaps I’ll see you then?”

Giggling, Shelagh pulled back as he dismounted the horse. “You may,” she teased, breath catching as he gazed up at her. A pain shot through her calf and she looked away, flexing her legs.
“That was a long ride for you,” he murmured, gently helping her to the ground.

Shelagh blushed at the feeling of his hands at her waist. She looked up, trembling slightly in his hold. “Yes,” she agreed, dipping her head. “But now I’m where I wanted to be.”

His smile was shy, eyes glittering in the darkness. “Where I’d hoped you’d be.” He removed his hands after a beat, ascertaining that she was able to hold her weight. Untying her case, he handed it to her, his fingers brushing softly against her hand. “Tim will want to see you tomorrow; along with the whole of Beech Fork!”

“I’ll want to see them, too,” she said, smiling softly before looking up into his eyes. Having him near and being back among those she had grown to love overwhelmed her, tears prickling at her eyes. She took a deep breath and exhaled—exhausted, thrilled, and in love. “Oh, Patrick!” She grinned, radiant in the evening heat. “I’m home!”

“You’re home,” he repeated, voice once more gone raspy and thick with emotion. Taking her hand, he helped her up the steps before raising it and brushing his lips against the back of it. “Tomorrow?” He continued to hold her hand as he took a step down.

“Tomorrow,” Shelagh whispered, heart thumping as he left the steps and regained his horse, riding away. Behind her, the hospital’s side door opened and she turned, smiling into a breath as she took another step toward her future.

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Settling in at the nursing quarters was not hard. She stayed there for her first month in Hyden, as she had taken the required horseback refresher and learned how the Frontier Nursing Service operated. Nurses Wright and Barron currently occupied the quarters, Nurse Parrish having assumed the nurse/midwife role at Beechfork in her absence. “I think she’ll be more than happy to have you back,” Nurse Wright laughed. “The patients ask after you constantly!”

It was little surprise to her, then, to open the door to the nursing quarters the morning after her arrival to find Cora on the other side. “Oh!” Cora’s eyes were wet with tears. “Patrick done told me you was home!”

Her own eyes prickled with tears as Shelagh placed her arms around her dear friend. “I’ve missed you!”
Cora stepped back to examine her. “I’m gon’ have to fatten ya again,” she sighed. “I brung the cornbread.”

Shelagh laughed and placed a kettle on, sitting at the table as Cora began to cut the thick, crusty bread. “They had cornbread in Lexington,” she said, accepting a slice. “It wasn’t at all like this!”

Sniffing haughtily, Cora settled into her chair. “Well, you can’t never tell what them Lexington people are cooking with. Probably some mix,” she said, voice dropping in disdain. “But it does seem…” her voice broke slightly.

“Oh, Cora!” Shelagh reached for her friend’s hand.

“...it does seem they cured ya, and I’ll always be grateful to ‘em fer that.” She squeezed Shelagh’s hand. “I was just as worried.”

“As was I,” Shelagh said, squeezing back. “I was in pain and scared and all I wanted was to come home.” She smiled at Cora. “And now I am.”

“*I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever,*” Cora quoted. “The Lord is good.”

“He is,” Shelagh said, a smile spreading across her face. “He gave me a home and expanded my-" Heat rose to her face and she took up another piece of cornbread.

Shrewdly, Cora looked into Shelagh’s face. “Your family? I thought Patrick seemed awful pleased with himself this morn’...”

Blushing, Shelagh stood to remove the hot kettle. “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Happy to be together, the two friends laughed.
“Lord,” Cora said, placing her empty teacup back onto the table. “The two of you make a pair. No wonder you had to meet wandering out in the mist. A sunny day would have been too easy!” She laughed to herself before patting Shelagh’s hand. “I’m just as pleased to have you home!”

“It really was all that I could think about,” Shelagh said, wrapping her hand around her lukewarm cup. “It wasn’t only….” She looked into the cup before glancing back to Cora. “It wasn’t only Dr. Turner and Timothy,” she confessed, smiling softly. “I thought about you, and Mrs. Polly and little Hiram Ray, Lisette, and all the patients at Beech Fork, and oh! Mrs. Williams and Felice! Have you had any word?”

Nodding her head, Cora took her pipe from her bag, but didn’t light it. “Done spoke to Fonnie Lynn over to Jettown. She’d been up to Ohio and come back for the las’ of her children. Said Wilma and Felice are doin’ jus’ as fine, and the baby is growing and sassy.” Cora laughed. “Like her momma and great-grandmomma afore her!”

“The little dear!” Shelagh smiled, thinking of the tiny baby Leslie had been. She would now be sitting up and possibly teething. “I hope they’re finding a new community in Ohio.”

“Well,” Cora placed the pipe on the table. “All I got is green baccer,” she said, nodding to it. “I’ll take it outside in a little. As fer Wilma, I know they’ll be jus’ fine. They got their family. Afore they went I stood up in church and asked if anyone had vittles or clothin’ to send along. Yer Mrs. Polly sent baby clothes and a blanket and some of the others give, too; Mercy and Lauriette and some women. I sent things I’d canned for winter. It weren’t much, but it was all I could give ‘em.” Cora took a deep breath. “When I went to say goodbye, Wilma give me a hug an tol’ me take anything I wanted from her house, but all I needed was the memory.”

“Oh, Cora.” Shelagh patted her hand. “I know you miss them.”

“Law, I miss so many people, Shelagh. But you never know who you’re gon’ meet next.” She grinned. “I’m just as glad yer back to keep me busy! I go on over to Beech Fork sometimes, but it hain’t the same without ya. But that little Lisette. I think maybe she’s got the makin’s of a fine nurse. She’s been a-runnin’ and a-carin’ for all the folks up the trail.”

Shelagh smiled at the thought of Beech Fork and her patients and friends. “I hope to visit soon!”
“They’ll be right happy to see ya, honey.” Cora stood from the table, smiling down at her friend. “But not as happy as I am.” Puttering toward the door, she looked to the wedges of cornbread left. “I’m gon’ have a puff. You eat. I aim to keep ya healthy this time!”

Smiling at her sweet friend, Shelagh picked up a slice of cornbread and took a bite.

--

Once more, her days took on a pattern. No longer carrying active disease, she could traverse the hospital corridors and take her meals in the small cafeteria. The nursing quarters became a place of refuge. She still tired easily and suffered leg pains and moments of weakness. She longed to ride a horse on her own but knew that it would take time and that she must continue to heal.

The bustle of the hospital called to her. After her afternoon rest, she would sit with patient families in the waiting room, speaking with women she knew and smiling and playing with the young children. Dr. Gratz undertook her case, paging through the notes she had brought with her from Lexington and examining her legs to create his own muscle chart. Free to wander the grounds, she visited with Mac and October the cow, feeding the sweet-toothed bovine a piece of cake left over from her own lunch.

The best part of the day, however, was when Patrick would stop by before his rounds, knocking at the door of the nurses’ quarters and bidding her to come and sit with him on the bench round the side of the hospital. She felt impossibly greedy in his presence. There never seemed to be enough time for them to be together and the moments they did spend on the bench, walking the grounds, or even in the cafeteria felt fleeting and over too quickly. He was not allowed into her quarters and any time they spent together in the hospital seemed to be scrutinized by every colleague and each patient, most of whom boasted that they had known something was brewing between the handsome doctor and pretty nurse--why, it was as plain as the noses on their faces, as one patient had opined.

The talk was somewhat embarrassing, but Shelagh knew they meant no harm and were happy for her and Patrick. Exhausted from a long day of exercise and visiting, Shelagh slept through Patrick’s Friday call, waking to quiet quarters. Hungry, she made a small meal and then redressed, massaging her legs as they dully ached. Stepping out into the hospital yard, she began to walk, slowly stretching the tired muscles. Though it was still warm and summer-like outside, leaves on the mountain were beginning to turn brilliant shades of red and gold. Turning the corner of the hospital, Shelagh saw Patrick sitting at the bench by the door, holding a sheet of paper. He looked up as she approached, and she recognized her own handwriting. “They came then?”

“I stopped by but Nurse Barron said that you were sleeping.” He picked up his mail and made room for her to sit next to him. “Just today,” he said, answering her question by indicating a letter.
“I was going to wait but…”

Shelagh smiled. “They were meant for you to open!” Still, the good humor in her voice could not quell the nervous flutters in her belly. “I had so much that I wanted to tell you.”

“As did I,” he said, leaning back against the bench. “I sat right here most evenings and wrote to you, wondering how you were healing and what we might speak of if you were next to me.”

“We parted rather suddenly,” she said, thinking not only of her illness but also of her words to him concerning her wish to follow God’s path for her life. “Even before my departure there was much to discuss. When we…” Shelagh’s glance flickered to Patrick and she dipped her head slightly. “That day, at the fair. I was overwhelmed.”

He turned to her. “Though you have said that I did not, I have worried that I went too far…. That perhaps I should not have--.”

“I’m no longer a religious sister, Patrick.” Shelagh’s voice was quiet as she gently took his hand in hers. She looked around but found that they were quite alone. “I told you in my letter how I chose the religious life, but not why I left it.” She paused, collecting her thoughts. “I was happy in my vocation for many years. But as time passed, I began to feel that I was in the wrong place. That I was living the wrong life. The feeling began to grow and pull at me until I could not ignore it any longer.”

“I know how important your faith is,” he said, rubbing his thumb against her sensitive palm. “That night, at Thom’s house, when you spoke of faith and wishing that it could make a difference…” he trailed off before raising her hand to his mouth and kissing it lightly. “I knew then that you were a woman of great faith and someone that I wanted to know.”

Remembering the way their eyes had met and clung at Thomas and Anna Jane’s kitchen table made her cheeks heat. “When I thought to leave the religious life I worried that I had lost my faith. But my faith and the path the Lord set me on sent me here.” Fingers light, she took his hand and slowly raised it to her mouth. She closed her eyes and gently pressed her lips against the warm skin before pulling back. “To the right life. In the right place.”

His eyes glittered as he looked at her. “The right place,” he echoed, rubbing his thumb against her cheek. “I was also overcome when we kissed.” He lowered their now entwined fingers from her flushed face. “Marianne’s passing took quite a toll on me,” he said, looking out into the field. “She was -- we were -- happy and then…” He squeezed Shelagh’s fingers. “We buried her on a Monday. On Tuesday, I went back up to Hyden Hospital. It was easier to work, to worry about
other people’s pain. Timothy went that evening to spend the night with Thom and Anna Jane. One night turned into a week, and then a month, and a year…”

His breath hitched and head dipped. “I’ve got a lot to make up to him. But also to myself.” He looked up, into her eyes. “There were times that I wondered if I were in the wrong place.” He shook his head. “I wasn’t. I jus’ wasn’t living much of a life.” He squeezed her fingers and placed their clasped hands onto her letters. “But when I’m with you, I know where I belong. And I think…. Well, that we could find that right life together.”

Shelagh smiled up at him. “Yes,” she breathed, “we will.”
Love's Come Over Me

...find a letter in the post, bearing your handwriting, overwhelmed us all. Our dear Sister Monica
Joan intends to send you an early treatise on the Hippocratic approach to healing. Sister
Evangelina insists that you continue to rest, not isolating yourself. As she has said before, the
presence of another person is the best medicine for pain! I would ask that you keep us informed as
you continue your convalescence, my dear friend. Also keep in your heart that the Lord is your
guide. He never falters and shall always light your way. As you forge forward, remember this
Proverb--In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths...

The next morning, a letter came addressed to Shelagh from Mrs. Breckinridge, in Chicago on an
extended annual appeal. The letter welcomed her back and outlined Mrs. Breckinridge’s ideas for
Shelagh’s placement in the New Year. During her hospital stay, she and the FNS director had
spoken about the continuation of her contract in general terms. Now that she was home, the idea
of medical records keeping began to appeal to her, as did the ideas that Mrs. Breckinridge put forth
regarding a graduate program of midwifery. To help envision the school and its curriculum, and
then to teach--Shelagh felt energized by the chance to equip others in the art of caring. She had
once taught young postulants and midwives the basics of midwifery. Drawing diagrams and fetal
presentations on the rolling chalkboard at Nonnatus House had been something that she had
enjoyed and excelled at. She could envision herself, once more working with young women who
were eager to take up the fight for the lives of women and children. It was not exactly the romantic
ideal of the horse and dog at her side that the initial FNS advertisement had promised, but it was a
future she was ready to build.

Included in the envelope was a preliminary contract for her to read. Committing to it would mean
that she would no longer ride the trails, but she would continue in this place that was now her
home. As she read over the words, she found that she couldn’t stop the smile that was spreading
over her face. Medical records were terribly important to a physician or nurse’s job. Her mind
bubbled over with ideas on improving the patient cards that were currently in use and of storing the
records not only in Hyden but also in the Outposts. Unable to resist, she opened her diary and
began to record the thoughts, overflowing with purpose and intention. For good measure, she
flipped the page and included a few thoughts on the graduate midwifery program, though she knew
she was being a bit premature. Lastly, she took a fresh sheet of paper and, feeling a sense of intense
familiarity, wrote:

11 October 1935

M. Breckinridge

Chicago, Illinois USA
Dear Mrs. Breckinridge,

It fills me with great joy to write to you, once more, to accept my amended contract and to remain with our Nurses Brigade...

--

Saturday afternoon, Shelagh stood at the mirror, smoothing her hair. The nursing quarters were quiet in the late afternoon. Nurse Wright was asleep, due for the overnight shift. Moving quietly about the quarters, Shelagh dressed and tamped down the excitement in her stomach. A small window was open to let in a breeze, and she sat at it, watching for Patrick. It was still humid and hot outside, not rare, apparently, for October. As the afternoon stretched into early evening the chorus of tree frogs and katydids called to mind a summer evening, and Shelagh felt as if she was regaining some of the time she spent in hospital.

After their evening talk at the bench, Patrick had walked her back to the door, shyly asking if she would like to step out with him, to take supper and walk through Hyden. Their conversation made her feel as if a new intimacy had grown between them, and she felt for a moment that he might kiss her again, standing under the moonlight outside her door. Instead, he had brushed the hair from her eyes and smiled his crooked smile, leaving her breathless and aching with love. Looking from the window now, she thought back to the single kiss they had shared and found that she was ready to try again, eager to once more feel the soft touch of his lips. The very thought made her blush.

Patrick’s quiet knock at the door set her heart to pounding. She looked in the mirror once more to find her cheeks pink from her thoughts and sheer anticipation. Smiling at her reflection, she turned to open the door. “Hello, Patrick,” she breathed, body tingling with his proximity and the promise of their evening.

His grin seemed almost as helpless as hers. “Timothy is cross as two sticks that I didn’t bring him out with me.” His smile was conspiratorial. “Only I told him there might be some of that ‘love-dubbin’’ that he might not wish to see.”

Shelagh giggled. “Oh, Patrick!” MG waited patiently for them, and she touched his neck gently, smiling as he tossed his head for further attention. Once into town, Patrick sheltered MG at his stable and offered his arm. She took it as they made their way to the street. “Where are we going?” Hyden’s main street consisted of a drugstore, a diner, the bank, and courthouse. “We could have eaten in the hospital’s cafeteria,” she teased.

Patrick laughed. “I was thinking the diner, though I also have my basket of foods from the church
“Hm.” Shelagh smiled. “When Cora visited she offered a few kitchen lessons. I’m not certain I’ll be up to the task!”

“Tim likes to poke fun of my lack of kitchen skills. You can be his next target.”

Shelagh giggled. “Seeing Cora was wonderful. I’d love to go to Beech Fork for Tuesday clinic to see the rest of my patients.”

He looked down at her, smiling. “I think that can be done easily enough.”

Pressing her cheek to his arm, they walked on through the dusty street. Cattle and mules grazed at the edges of the dirt road and a few men sat outside the courthouse, laughing and joking with one another. Hyden was full of life on this early evening and it struck Shelagh anew that this was now her home. She shared the news of her letter to Mrs. Breckinridge with Patrick as soon as it was posted and the memory of his warm smile had her pressing even closer to his side as they walked. She enjoyed being so near him on their first real night out together. They reached the diner all too soon, only to find the door was locked, no light or sound coming from the establishment. “Oh!” Shelagh furrowed her brow. “I’ve never known it to be closed this early!”

“Mrs. Dally’s closed it a time or two when she ran out of ingredients or patience,” Patrick muttered. He sighed, carding a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry, Shelagh.”

Leaning against his arm, Shelagh shook her head. “You weren’t to know, Patrick.” She tugged at his hand, intending to walk back toward his flat. “You did mention your basket--” she cut herself off as she noticed a display in the drugstore window.

“Shelagh?” Patrick followed her gaze to the druggist window. “Do you want a Co-Cola?”

She smiled. “Do you remember--”

His grin returned. “Do you think that might count as the beginning of our courting?”
Shelagh’s lips twitched. “Oh!” She squeeze his hand as they crossed the dusty street. The shop bell rang as they stepped through and into the drugstore. They purchased two cold bottles of Coca-Cola and a large packet of peanuts and settled outside of the drugstore on an alley bench. Shelagh sank gratefully back into the seat and flexed her legs. The small alley separated them from the dust and bustle of the street. The passing animals and people added to the cacophony of the evening and she reveled in the noise and company. She accepted the packet from Patrick, pouring her peanuts into the fizz, smiling at him before taking a swig.

The side of his mouth hitched up and he took his own drink, chewing slowly. He took her hand in his and rubbed his thumb over the back of it, before bringing it to his lips for a kiss. “I’m sorry we’re out here on an old bench in the dust and muck.”

Shelagh placed her bottle on the ground and turned to him. “Patrick,” she whispered, “there’s not another place I’d want to be.”

His eyes glittered. He leaned in and slowly lowered his head. She met him halfway, sighing against his mouth as twilight fell around them.

Patrick pulled back, his hand cupping her shoulder. “It’s gettin’ dark.”

Shelagh looked to the sky. “So it is,” she murmured, taking his bottle and setting it in the dirt. She chanced a glance over her shoulder at the street. “I suppose we should go back…”

“Hm,” Patrick, murmured, leaning into her, his nose tracing a path against her cheek. “You’re right. This night air. We should… get on…”

“Yes,” she agreed, clutching his shoulders. She trembled in his embrace, unable to think of anything but him.

He lowered his head once more, his mouth barely brushing against hers. As he pulled back, she exhaled a shaky breath and his hand twitched against her shoulder. “Perhaps a few more moments,” he rasped. “After all, I did promise some ‘love-dubbing’…” He kissed her chin before dipping, teasing her sensitive neck with his roughened cheek.

“Patrick!” Shelagh’s cheeks heated as she breathlessly giggled, shifting even closer on the bench, the cola and peanuts long forgotten.
Early Tuesday, she met Patrick outside of the hospital after his morning rounds. “Good morning,” she said, the butterflies in her stomach dancing as he drew near, softly kissing her cheek. She turned toward him before he could pull away and lightly brushed her lips against his.

After a moment, he stepped back, tilting his head as a smile bloomed across his face. “Good morning, Shelagh.” He helped her onto the horse. “I knew I’d best hurry out,” he said, walking toward the trail. “I figured on you being ready to ride at first light!”

Shelagh laughed with him, but blew out a breath as they rode away from the hospital. She was ready to get back to Beech Fork. Her stomach clenched with anticipation as they trod the familiar path, the warm October air muggier than the May heat she had left behind. The hills and trees were bright with color. Shelagh held to Patrick’s waist and exclaimed over the sea of russet and amber leaves picked through. The land stretched before them, the same yet different to her eyes for the autumn color and season’s change.

“What’s that you’re humming?”

“Oh?” Shelagh looked away from the horizon. “Was I humming aloud?” She blushed. “It’s only a hymn that I remember from childhood. About the glory of the earth and all the Lord’s creation.”

“Sing a piece?”

“Patrick!” Shelagh’s face grew hotter as she looked around them, though she knew they were alone on the trail. Hesitantly, she began to sing.

\[
\text{This is my Father's world:} \\
\text{I rest me in the thought} \\
\text{Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;} \\
\text{His hand the wonders wrought.}
\]

She intended to let the note fade on the wind but Patrick picked up the tune, his quiet voice clear and strong.
This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their maker's praise.

Breathless, but joyful, she joined with him to finish the verse.

This is my Father's world,
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

As their voices ebbed, the sounds of birds, MG's steady step, and the rustling of leaves seemed to be sharper, more defined, as they rode the trail. “I didn’t think that you would know the song,” Shelagh whispered, gently touching his back.

“I knew it once, years ago,” he replied, softly. “Didn’t ever mean a thing to me until now.”

“Oh,” she murmured, closing her eyes and offering up a prayer of exultation. “Oh, Patrick.”

They rode on through the morning, reveling in being together in nature and God’s glory.

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As they forded the Middle Fork, Shelagh’s heart began to pound, expectation making her at once both giddy and nervous. They rode in from behind the Center. As they made their approach Shelagh could hear the chatter of women and shouts of children. Unexpectedly, her eyes began to tear. Blinking back the emotion, she clutched lightly at Patrick’s shirt before withdrawing her hand. As they turned the corner of the building, a shout went up and several women left the line to stand around MG, looking up at she and Patrick.
“Well, look who’s done back!” Mercy Sutherland grinned, Lillian perched on her hip.

“Oh!” Shelagh’s hand flew to her mouth to see how the baby had grown. “Oh, it’s so wonderful to be here!”

Patrick dismounted and helped her from MG’s back, where she was swallowed into the crowd of women. Overwhelmed, she took notice of Mrs. Johnson in the crowd, along with Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Webber… so many dear familiar faces, along with the children, Mrs. Sutherland’s Sara, Jack Smith, Charley--

“Nurse Mannion?” A soft voice behind her bade Shelagh to turn. The tears she had been holding back began to fall when she saw Mrs. Polly’s bright smile, and the big, blue eyes of little Hiram Ray.

From the porch Nurse Parrish called Clinic to order. Patrick ran up the steps, stopping for a moment to catch her eye in the crowd. She nodded, cheeks flushed as she realized the women, in their usual titter over the doctor, had noticed his concern. Several grins broke out through the crowd, but Mrs. Sutherland began to herd the women inside. Grateful, Shelagh sank down onto the bench at the porch, Mrs. Polly settling in next to her. The baby blinked up at Shelagh, his mouth opening to reveal two tiny bottom teeth.

“He’s lovely, Mrs. Polly!” Shelagh smiled at the baby, unable to help herself, though her stomach was twisted now with worry over the knowing looks from the other women.

Mrs. Polly grinned. “Ain’t he? He’s the best baby ever borned. I thank the Lord for him ever’ day and for you and the good doctor helping him on his way.”

Shelagh’s cheeks flushed once more at the mention of Patrick. “The hard work was yours, Mrs. Polly.”

“You’ve worked hard too,” she said, bouncing her baby on her knee. “I kin see it. I was jus’ as worried for ya. Prayed ever’ day over you, too.” She smiled, tears now filling her eyes. “And I kin see the prayers worked! The Lord is good, Nurse Mannion!”

“He is,” Shelagh agreed, smiling softly at the lovely young mother and son.
“Would you like to hold ‘im?” Without waiting for an answer, Mrs. Polly handed Hiram Ray to Shelagh.

“Oh, you are precious,” Shelagh said, smiling at the baby, who opened his mouth in a grin, drool running out. She accepted a flannel from Mrs. Polly and wiped at the baby’s face as he tried to stick his fist into his mouth. “He’s grown so much!” She turned to Mrs. Polly. “It seems like only yesterday…”

“Sometimes it does for me, too. But you’ve been gone so long--well, I didn’t know if you were a-comin’ back. And…” she trailed off.

Shelagh settled Hiram Ray against her side, smoothing a hand over his red curls. “What is it, Mrs. Polly?”

The young woman blushed. “I was just a-goin’ ta say that them women didn’t mean no harm smilin’ at you about the doctor. It’s jus’ he’s not been himself since you’ve been gone and, well, we’re all happy to see the both of ya again.”

“Oh,” she said, looking to her friend, thinking that Mrs. Polly had said exactly what she needed to hear. “I’m so happy to see all of you.” She looked down at little Hiram Ray and tickled his tummy. “Especially you!”

The baby laughed as Shelagh looked to Mrs. Polly and they shared a grin. Inside she heard Patrick call to a patient and she sighed in contentment at the warm weight in her arms, the friend at her side, and the open valley before her. It was wonderful to be back at Beech Fork Clinic.

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As the rush of women leveled off, Shelagh and Mrs. Polly ventured inside, Mrs. Polly joining the weighing queue. Nurse Parrish and Lisette came to hug Shelagh, welcoming her back. Patrick was behind the curtain with a patient and Shelagh sat in the waiting area, catching up with patients and with Ma Perkins on the radio. Mrs. Johnson opened her son’s mouth to show his teeth, four more now aside from his natal teeth. “I’ve had a time,” she said, and the women laughed. The screen door opened and Cora came in, holding the door open for a man and woman with several children.

Recognition hit Shelagh in a flash. “Mrs. Kenton?”
Mrs. Kenton turned, most of her children settling in with the others, save a small girl wearing calipers. Patrick came out from the curtain and smiled, shaking Mr. Kenton’s hand, before kneeling down in front of the young girl. “How are you today, Linda?”

The little girl smiled shyly and whispered that she was fine. Taking Patrick’s hand, she walked with him to another curtain, her parents following behind. Cora sat next to Shelagh. “Linda just come home from the hospital over there to Hazard. I never thought to see the day a Kenton shook a Turner’s hand, but times keep on a-changin’.”

Clinic wound down through the afternoon, Hiram Ray proving to be as healthy as he was bonny, and Mrs. Polly promising to come to Hyden Hospital to visit Shelagh, and to have her - and Dr. Turner - over to supper just as soon as she felt well enough to make the visit. Women stopped to hug Shelagh, to welcome her back, and to inquire as to her health. “The whole of the mountain’s been prayin’ for you,” Mrs. Sutherland said, as she stepped out of the door. “We’ve all missed you!”

Overwhelmed with love with gratitude, Shelagh tried to pitch in with the cleaning as the last family left. Lisette gave in and allowed her to pre-clean instruments, while Nurse Parrish brought in instrument trays, Cora swept the floors, and Patrick finished writing patient notes. Scrubbing a scalpel, Shelagh felt invigorated, happy to contribute. “It was so lovely to see everyone,” she said, carefully placing the instrument in the pile to be sanitized. “Though a few were missing!” She thought back over the days before her polio diagnosis. “Was little Loren Woods diagnosed with polio?” Shelagh often remembered his worried mother, kneeling at his bedside, and prayed for the family.

“He was still in Hazard at my last home visit with Mrs. Woods,” Nurse Parrish answered. “She said that he was coming along very well. The ability to diagnose and move patients quickly kept the virus from spreading to other districts.”

“Thank the Lord,” Shelagh said, flexing her leg in reassurance. “How did the patients handle the summer heat? I was concerned it may be too much for the expectant mothers.”

Lisette stood to take a tray to the boiling pot on the stove. “It was almost too much for me!” She laughed, dropping instruments into the scalding water. “I was only here last spring and missed the worst of the heat.”

“It’s certainly a damp heat,” Nurse Parrish agreed. “We only had one fainter, though. She came around quickly, but I kept her tucked up here for a day or two. It’s cooler in the valley.”
Shelagh thought of the nursing roster before she left, trying to think of which patients might still be expecting. She remembered scared dark eyes and asked after Arletta Roberts, the young girl facing an unexpected pregnancy and forced marriage.

Cora reached out and patted Shelagh’s hand. “She’s makin’ the best of hit, honey. Set to have hit at any time.”

Patrick looked up from his notes. “I’ve spoken with her and requested that she be booked into Hyden a week prior to her due date. Mrs. Breckinridge has allocated funds for those in need of extra care.” He fiddled with his pencil. “I thought it would give her support.”

Looking between Patrick and Cora, Shelagh felt that perhaps they were remembering the young girl they had once lost to childbirth. She would also remember Arletta and her baby in her prayers. “Perhaps I’ll see her there,” Shelagh said, smiling shyly at Patrick, whose eyes glittered at her before he looked back to his papers.

“We’ve practically switched spots, you and I,” Nurse Parrish said, wiping down the counters. “You’re at Hyden Hospital now. Do you plan to stay?”

“For the time being,” Shelagh demurred, polishing an already clean instrument. “In the New Year I may ease into bookkeeping and medical records to continue my contract.”

Lisette grinned. “Perhaps you’ll become something of a FNS librarian! Goodness knows there are books and manuals aplenty at Wendover and Hyden Hospital!”

“Speaking of librarians,” Nurse Parrish said, turning to Shelagh, “have you heard about the Packhorse Librarians? Soon we’ll have company on the trails. Women to deliver books to those unable to make it to a library.”

“It’ll be good for the least ‘uns,” Cora said, taking out her pipe. “Might could be Timothy would read to an old woman now and again.”

Patrick laughed. “I believe that could be done, Mrs. Cora!”
“It’ll be wonderful.” Nurse Parrish finished the counter and leaned against it. “And one of our own will be Beech Fork’s librarian. Pauline McMillian.”

“Mrs. McMillian?” Shelagh looked up in surprise. “Is she… is she well?”

“She’s… coping,” Nurse Parrish said.

“When last I saw her she was mourning a lost pregnancy. Her husband--”

“Her husband drowned, Shelagh. They found his body after the flood waters receded back in early June.” Cora looked out through the darkened window in the direction of the river. “He musta been drinkin’ and tried to cross…”

Shelagh thought back to the time she spent in Mrs. McMillian’s cabin. “She’s been through so much,” she murmured. “I hope she’s found peace.”

“Well, honey,” Cora puffed at her pipe, “now she has the chance.”

--

After the clinic was cleaned, Nurse Parrish and Lisette brought out their prepared supper and shared it, as they sat chatting into the evening. Shelagh looked to Patrick to see if he were ready to leave and was about to inquire when Lisette cleared her throat. “I have news that I’d like to share.”

The table quieted as all eyes turned toward the young courier.

Lisette looked at Shelagh. “Last year I came to Hyden to ride horses and make friends, and if I did a little helping around those edges, that was all the better! I came back this spring with a similar mindset, but that all changed the morning Dr. Turner and I found you here, when you were taken ill. I realized then that beyond the horses and the friends that I really wanted to affect change.” She paused for a beat, and grinned. “To that end, I am being sent to London to be trained as a nurse-midwife. Mrs. Breckinridge’s signed papers came just this morning!”

“Oh, Lisette!” Shelagh hugged the girl, eyes prickling at the thought of Lisette’s tender care of her the morning of her diagnosis. “I’m pleased for you! You’ll make a wonderful nurse.”
As the others congratulated her, Lisette grinned. “My Mother is beside herself. I was supposed to be a courier for a season and then find a suitable husband! Instead, I found a career.”

“A calling?” Shelagh asked, voice soft.

Lisette nodded, eyes bright. On that happy note, Patrick, Shelagh, and Cora took their leave, walking out into the cool evening. “Hit’s a nice night for a ride,” Cora said, looking to the full moon. “Romantic-like.”

“Cora!” Shelagh’s cheeks flamed.

Cora grinned, unrepentant. “Fount and I used to love to ride out into the meadows and look at the stars.” She gave a happy sigh. “Don’t let this time pass you by. Soon you’ll be old as me. Well, one of you quicker ‘an the other.” She winked at Patrick.

“Mrs. Cora, you know how to keep me in my place,” he laughed, leading her horse from the barn. “Would you like us to ride with you a-piece? See you home?”

“Lord, I don’t need to be tended as a least ‘un,” Cora said, kicking her horse to ride. “Though remember to come and see me oncet in awhile!”

Shelagh laughed as Cora rode away, but stopped, listening closely to the soft knickers in the barn. “Oh!” She looked up at Patrick before walking inside, eyes straining from the dim lamp.

Stamping her foot, Mrs. B demanded Shelagh’s attention.

And got it.

--

The warm spell continued through the last days of October. Shelagh grew steadier on her feet and felt almost too rested as she watched her colleagues work around her. The nursing quarters were
quiet each afternoon. She would sit and read, jot down ideas, or sew during those hours, but late one afternoon a quiet knock at the door set her to her feet. She opened the door to find Timothy, shyly kicking his toe in the dirt. “Dad said you were here and could use some company.”

A wide grin split her face. “Oh, Timothy,” she said, ushering him inside. “I always want your company!”

He smiled, placing a case on the table and taking a seat. “Aunt Anna Jane said to tell ya that she’ll come to visit jus’ as soon as Walter’s feeling better. He’s got the grippe and she doesn’t want to share it with you.”

“Oh, dear. Do tell her that I will come if she needs me.”

Timothy nodded in agreement. “When I see her. I’ll be stayin’ with Dad until it passes, even though Dad done looked in on him and said he’d be feelin’ well enough again in a few days.” He fiddled with the clasp of his case for a few moments.

“Would you like a biscuit?” Shelagh took a tin from the shelf and placed a kettle on the cookstove.

The boy took a biscuit and chewed slowly. Once he swallowed he said, “People that don’t know us always think Uncle Thom is my Daddy and Aunt Anna Jane my Momma.”

Shelagh slowly took two teacups from the shelf. “What do you think when that happens?”

“I don’t know,” he said, placing his cookie on the table. “I know they love me. But…” he paused. “It ain’t the same.”

Pouring hot water into the cups, Shelagh began to steep the tea. “No,” she said, thinking of her own childhood. She felt as if she needed to tread carefully. “It’s not.” She settled into her seat. “Now that you’re staying here in Hyden we’ll have to visit every day!”

Timothy’s eyes lit up. “You want me to visit every day?”
“Of course I do!” Shelagh hesitated for a moment before reaching across the table to pat the boy’s hand. “I so look forward to seeing you.”

Pink cheeked, Timothy mumbled, “Dad said you were jus’ as happy to see me as him over to Hazard when we found ya.”

Shelagh smiled gently, understanding what he was trying to ask. “I was, indeed.”

A small, mischievous grin spread across Timothy’s face. “Then it was a good thing I spotted ya first!”

Laughing together, Shelagh nodded toward the case. “What’s all this?”

“Oh!” Timothy bounced up in his seat. “When you come to sup, I didn’t get to show you my butterfly collection on account of you having to go to a birthin’!” He flipped open the latch, revealing the carefully labelled butterflies. “I’ve only got a few,” he said, modestly, taking out the carefully tacked insects.

“They’re quite impressive.” Shelagh looked at each specimen carefully. “I love butterflies.”

Timothy grinned. “What about dogs? Aunt Anna Jane says I bring in more dogs and bugs than all the other least ‘uns put together!”

Shelagh laughed. “I also love dogs.”

As he looked up at her with his irrepressible smile, Shelagh’s heart swelled for the precocious little boy who wanted her love as much as she longed to give it to him.

--

The next morning was cool, weak sunlight breaking through the mountain mist. Shelagh stepped outside for her morning walk, buttoning her jacket against the chill. Walking through a shower of red and gold leaves from the gently swaying trees, she moved slowly through the crunch of the fronds. The crisp air invigorated her as she looked over the sea of beautiful color that stretched
from Thousandsticks down into Hyden. Turning, she made her way to the familiar bench and the man who stood at it, awaiting her. His face lifted as he spotted her, a dear smile brightening his features. Overwhelmed, she dipped her head, almost unable to believe that the look of love was meant for her. He had looked at her that way each day since she had returned, and she knew her own gaze was one just as smitten.

She drew near to him and he held out a hand. “I was on my way to call on you,” he said, squeezing her fingers.

“I couldn’t wait to get outside,” she said, smiling at him. “Or to see you.”

He opened his mouth as if he were going to respond, but exhaled instead, looking down briefly before taking a small, wrapped box from his jacket. “Shelagh,” he said, voice gone husky, “this is for you. It’s from me and… someone else.”

A shiver of anticipation arrowed through her body, coming to rest in a pleasant tingle in her stomach. Accepting the box, she slowly opened the paper, surprised to see words neatly printed inside a border of carefully drawn puppies and butterflies. “Won’t you please marry my Dad?” she read, body thrumming with expectation and happiness. Looking up into his glittering eyes, she saw that he waited for her answer. She grinned, overcome with joy.

Smiling in jubilant relief, he opened the ring box, placing it on the wooden seat. Taking her hand, he slid the gold ring into place, before lifting it to his lips, softly kissing the back of it.

“Oh, Patrick,” she whispered, turning her palm to cup his cheek. As he moved forward she leaned in, sealing their engagement with a soft kiss.
This last chapter is very long, but I didn't want to cut it into pieces. The epilogue will be posted on Monday. Thank you for reading.

...treasured our correspondence as I have shared with you so many new things. I've made mention of cornbread, horses, and the weather. You must now feel as if you know Hyden and Beech Fork down to the floorboards, and also FNS policy, my patients, and colleagues. The advice you’ve sent in return has been invaluable. I hope the recipes, journal clippings, and my prayers have also been well received. Through my words, dear Sister, I wonder, if you have noticed an absence. Perhaps you have been able to read between the lines of things I was too reticent to say. Now that I am sure of my heart, I wish to tell you of two who have become beloved to me....

Cora fussed with the cookstove, removing an iron skillet of cornbread from the oven. “I jus' knew it was a-goin’ to happen.” She winked over her shoulder at Anna Jane and Margie, who sat opposite of Shelagh at the worn table. “First time I laid eyes on her, I jus’ knew she was a-one of us.”

“First time I saw the way she was a-lookin’ at Patrick I figured I might jus’ gain a sister,” Anna Jane teased, grinning at Shelagh. “Course he was no better, goin’ on and on about her over supper.”

Shelagh blushed. “I’m sure that wasn’t the case!” She looked to young Margie for help.

Margie giggled. “Uncle Patrick didn’t hardly tell no tales afore you come,” she said, her mischievous smile so like Timothy’s. “But after you did, we heard all about Hyden Hospital and Beech Fork…”

Cora slapped her thigh as she laughed. “You don’t know how good it is to see ya both so happy.”

Embarrassed, but pleased, Shelagh looked down at the small diary she had brought with her. “Yes, well…” she pushed up her glasses and picked up a pen. “Patrick told me that many marry at the courthouse but I would like a church wedding.”

Cora nodded approvingly as she placed the cornbread on the table. “I went on and asked Brother
Sean when we could have use of the church. He was ready to haul you both in there today but I told him to give us a little time.”

Anna Jane laughed. “I think the whole of Leslie County is ready for the two of you to wed.” She paused. “That or Brother Sean jus’ wants to get Patrick in the door.”

The women broke into laughter and Shelagh sighed, hiding a smile. “He’ll be there,” she said, with quiet confidence, and the women stopped their giggles.

“He thinks the world and all of you,” Cora said, her eyes misting. “I hoped…” she sat down next to Shelagh. “I’m jus’ as happy.”

“Oh, Cora!” Shelagh leaned into her, hugging her. “Thank you.”

“We all are,” Anna Jane said, reaching across the table to pat Shelagh’s hand. “If I were you, I’d go on an’ marry afore the cold sets in,” she said, looking out the window at the swaying branches. “Much into December and it’ll be freezin’ with cold and you might catch ill.”

“And Timothy and I have a bet on when he’ll get a baby brother brought up in a saddlebag,” Margie piped up. “I said next summer, so you got to go on an’ get hitched!”

Anna Jane and Cora broke into laughter again, while Shelagh once more tried to calm her red cheeks.

--

“Do you think the sisters would like me?” Timothy looked at the blank sheet of paper on the table in front of him. “What if they don’t?”

“The sisters will like you very much,” Shelagh said, taking up a pen. “I think they would especially enjoy your fiddling!”

Timothy nodded thoughtfully. “Aunt Anna Jane says I always make friends.” He paused. “What about Dad? Won’t they be mad he’s keeping you here?”
“Timothy!” Patrick managed to look at once amused, annoyed, and slightly panicked.

Shelagh smiled. “It’s not only your father that’s keeping me here,” she said, feeling shy as Patrick’s gaze rested on her. “I don’t think the sisters will be ...upset, but perhaps a wee bit shocked.”

“So we’re all gon’ write notes to them and then... well, do you think they’ll write back to me?” Timothy’s eyes widened. “I always wanted to get my own mail!”

“I’m fairly certain they’ll write back to you, dearest,” Shelagh said, smiling at Timothy before creasing her forehead, realizing that this was the first time she had called Timothy by an endearment. Her heart thumped as she worried that he might be flustered, but she exhaled happily when his eyes sparkled, even as his cheeks flushed.

He looked toward his father, as if seeking to deflect the attention. “Are you gon’ to write to ask if you can marry Shelagh?”

Patrick looked as if he might snap at the boy, but Shelagh placed her hand over his. “Your father has already gained the only permission he needed to marry me.”

“Mine?” Timothy grinned, unrepentant.

Both Patrick and Shelagh laughed. “Let’s get to writin’,” Patrick said, looking at his paper. “Else we’ll never make the post!”

Shelagh couldn’t help but smile as the scratch of their pens filled the quiet room. Patrick’s small flat was right off the main street in Hyden, but the heavy door blocked out the sounds of the road. Tapping her fingers against the tabletop, she thought of what to say in her letter, how to convey the enormity of her feelings for Patrick, for Timothy, for her colleagues and patients, and for Kentucky. The explanation that she would not be returning was one that she didn’t wish to dwell on, but she would make clear that she was still on God’s path for her life. She felt certain that her former sisters would, with time, understand. The letter would need also to tell of the wedding and their simple plans; a small church ceremony with her new congregation, a dress made by Cora, a brooch borrowed from Anna Jane, Timothy as best man, and a cake shared with their family and friends after vows were made.
She looked at Patrick, his hair falling over his forehead as he wrote. He glanced up and caught her eye, smiling devilishly as he indicated his paper. “Don’t be copying my words as your own, Nurse Mannion,” he said, a smile breaking over his face.

“Oh!” Shelagh gave a startled laugh. “I’m not certain I could read them, at any rate! I’m going to set you handwriting exercises.”

Patrick laughed and their eyes met, only to break when Timothy piped up. “How do you spell ‘Evangelina’? I want to tell her that y’all can be exasperatin’!”

Unable to help themselves, the new family broke into giggles.

--

“There,” Shelagh said, affixing a stamp to the last letter. “I’ll add these to the hospital post bound for Hazard.”

“Will they get there afore the wedding?” Timothy looked at Shelagh’s diary, open to the calendar. “It’s only just over a week away!”

“I’m afraid they won’t.” Shelagh placed the envelopes in her bag before beginning to tidy the table. “But I’d like to think that they’ll be happy for us and send many prayers and warm wishes in return!”

“Of course they will,” Patrick soothed, taking Shelagh’s hand.

Timothy rolled his eyes at the display but dutifully picked up his pen and the remainder of the paper to place on the bookshelf. He settled onto the chair, looking out onto the street.

Shelagh gathered her own papers and diary while Patrick placed his pen into his pocket. He opened his mouth to speak but was cut off by Timothy, who was still looking out of the window.

“Do I have to go back to Uncle Thom and Aunt Anna Jane now?” His voice was quiet, with none of his usual humor.
Heart pounding, Shelagh looked to Patrick. Timothy had been staying with his father since Walter had been diagnosed with the flu, but since the baby’s recovery neither he nor Patrick seemed in a hurry to send him back to Thomas and Anna Jane. In one of their evening conversations, they had spoken of the possibility of Timothy coming to live with them after the wedding, but hadn’t yet broached it with the boy, unsure of how he would feel, leaving his uncle’s house after having lived among his cousins now for so many months. Holding back, Shelagh watched as Patrick approached his son, kneeling in front of him.

“Timothy,” he began, voice near to breaking. He paused for a breath and began again. “Timothy, when your Mommy died, I felt that I was unable to care for you as I should.”

Wiping a hand across his eyes, Timothy looked once more out of the window. “Cause you had to work all the time.”

Patrick held out a hand, his thumb and forefingers brushing together briefly. “Yes, because of the work, but mostly because I thought that staying with Thom and Anna Jane and all of your cousins would be better for you than staying here, on this dusty old street, with only me.”

“But I like bein’ in town,” Timothy said, before sniffling. “I like being with Uncle Tom and Aunt Anna Jane and Robert and Margie, too. An’ I don’t want to hurt their feelin’s, but…”

“No one is going to be hurt,” Patrick said, reaching out to cup Timothy’s face. “I thought maybe you wanted to stay with Thom, an’ didn’t want to push ya.” He leaned in close to his son. “But I’ve been hopin’ that you’d like to come and live with me again.” He turned back to look at Shelagh before looking once more at Tim. “With us.”

Timothy cleared his throat and blinked rapidly, as if dispelling tears. “Will Shelagh cook more ‘an jus’ fried bread?”

With a laugh, Shelagh stepped forward. “I think that’s quite a good possibility.”

He grinned before sobering, his forehead creasing in worry. “Y’all won’t be love-dubbing all the time, will ya?”

“Hard to say,” Patrick replied with a teasing grin. “Maybe we’ll save some of it for you!” He ruffled the boy’s hair and laughed as Timothy protested and giggled.
Dabbing at her wet eyes with a handkerchief, Shelagh watched as Timothy reached out to hug his father, matching smiles on both dear faces.

--

It grew colder as the week passed. Thousandsticks Mountain was now home to a million leaves, spread in thick blankets over the grass. Bare tree limbs whipped in the mountain air, but inside the Nursing Quarters it was cozy as Shelagh watched from the window. It was quiet in the early evening hours, most nurses out on calls or at work in the hospital ward. Nurse Parrish slept down the hall, and it was just as well. Shelagh feared that she would not be good company, should any come to call. Her heart and her mind raced. On the eve of her wedding she was not nervous, nor was she unsure, but still a part of her was melancholy, as thoughts of her parents, dear Sisters, and friends far away had her imagining a different wedding, in a different time. A reading of the banns, All Saints Church, her Sisters in the front pew…. Shelagh drew a finger over the cold windowpane.

The pride of place for her mother and father would sit empty, whether in Poplar or Kentucky. The pang that squeezed her heart was bittersweet. Her imagination could not, perhaps would not, place them in the church in Poplar, nor in the church at Cole Fork. But as she pondered the wedding, the crowd, the church, the vows, two constants remained: Timothy and Patrick, awaiting her at the end of the aisle, as she concluded her long journey toward them. Closing her eyes, she could picture as Patrick turned, his face open and awash with love, his eyes sparkling as she drew near. As she approached she would turn to see a second sweet face, mischievous eyes flashing under unruly hair. With a smile for him, she would step forward, looking up into Patrick’s eyes, as his hand enclosed hers.…

A burst of cold air came into the room as Nurse Wright stepped inside. “The bride-to-be!” She hung her coat and sat to remove her boots. “No need to worry about cold feet,” she said, wiggling her stocking toes. “I’ve got them for you!”

Shelagh giggled and scrunched her own toes underneath the blanket that covered her. She shook herself from her daydreams and grinned brightly at her friend. “I’m not at all concerned,” she said, sliding her feet together as she shifted. “My feet are very warm, indeed.”

--

“Now, I know you said you didn’t want nothin’ too fancy,” Cora said, sweeping into the church the next morning.
“Oh, Cora,” Shelagh fretted, looking at the cloth in the other woman’s arms. She took a deep breath. There had been one fitting, but the dress had been in its very early stages. Exhaling to calm herself, she said, “I’m certain it’ll be lovely, because you made it.”

Cora laughed. “I reckon I can’t rile you none!” She shook the dress out. “It ain’t much,” she said, suddenly looking shy, and very un-Cora like, “but I hope yer pleased.”

Shelagh began to console Cora, but stopped, her heart thudding at the lovely dress displayed before her. “Cora,” she whispered, stepping forward, hesitantly reaching out to touch the smooth sateen fabric.

“How did you…” She trailed off, softly fingering one tapered sleeve. “Oh, Cora.” Her eyes brimmed with tears. “It’s lovely.”

“Don’t start a-cryin’, honey.” Cora’s own voice was hoarse. “It weren’t nothin’ but a pattern and some drapin’.” She cleared her throat. “But I know yer gon’ look fine.” She gave the dress to Shelagh. “Now, go and put it on, let an old woman see her handiwork!”

Taking a handkerchief from her sleeve, Shelagh dabbed at her eyes beneath her glasses. She accepted the gown and stepped into the Sunday School room to dress. A single hook-closure was at the back of the neck, and Shelagh held up her hair as she called for Cora to enter.

The older woman came in, immediately hooking the garment, then turning Shelagh to fuss over her, making small adjustments. Stepping back, she sniffled and said, “You’ll do.”

Shelagh laughed through tears. She brushed her palm over the dress, hardly daring to believe it was her own. “Thank you,” she breathed, touching a small knot of lace that draped her waist. “This is lovelier than I could have imagined.” She reached for Cora’s hand.

Cora took her hand and squeezed, holding onto it as she once again looked over the dress. She gestured to the lace. “I wore that bit of finery on my hat, when me and Fount wed,” she confessed, tears on her flushed cheeks. “Felt as pretty as I’d ever had in my life in it. Thought to save it fer…” she trailed off, squeezing Shelagh’s hand. “I’m just as glad it turned out to be fer you, Shelagh.”

Unable to answer through her tears, Shelagh stepped forward, drawing her dear friend into a hug.
Cora was dressed for the occasion and smelled sweetly of a powdery perfume. “As am I,” she answered softly, closing her eyes and relaxing into the warm embrace.

After a beat, Cora pulled back, and laughed, wiping at her cheeks. “Law, look at us.” She looked around the room. “If only we had a mirror for you, honey!”

“Anna Jane is bringing one, along with her brooch,” Shelagh answered, still dabbing her eyes. “And I exacted a promise from Patrick and Timothy that next month we would go into Hazard for wedding portraits.”

Cora grinned. “Yer Sister Julienne would like that!”

The sound of horses bade them turn to the door, as Anna Jane helloed from outside. Timothy’s voice piped up. “Is she here?”

“Oh!” Shelagh’s heart clenched. “Cora, will you--?”

Cora nodded and bustled out the door, as Anna Jane peeked around. “Well, will you look at you,” she said, a wide grin on her face. “You and Patrick make a pair! You with red eyes and he so wrapped up in nerves!” She stepped inside, closing the door behind her.

“Is he really nervous?” Shelagh watched as Anna Jane placed a large basket on a table, removing from it a small mirror, her brooch, and a bouquet of blue flowers.

“He hain’t quit askin’ the time since he showed up to the door this mornin’!” Anna Jane laughed. “He’s idled by love, Shelagh. And it’s plain good to see.” She held out the bouquet. “Timothy and Margie picked these for you just afore we left home. Last of the fall flowers, I’m afraid. Supposed to frost tonight!” She nodded to them as Shelagh accepted them. “Blue asters. They’ll be right pretty against yer white dress!”

“Oh!” Shelagh held the bouquet to her face to inhale their faint scent. “They’re lovely!”

“So are you,” Anna Jane said, pulling back the curtain to open the window slightly. “When your face hain’t all sploched with tears,” she teased. “Come sit over here in the cool air, perhaps it’ll help take away that redness on yer face! I brung some powder and the mirror…”
Shelagh listened to Anna Jane fuss as she sat next to the window in the sunlight, bringing her long skirt around her legs and smoothing it out. She took a deep breath of the crisp air, placing the flowers and her glasses on the table next to her. Anna Jane dashed out of the door, calling behind that she’d forgotten something in her saddlebags. Shaking her head, she settled into the chair, bowing her head for a short prayer of thanksgiving. The Lord had blessed her and she was moved to give praise. Months before she had sat in this same church, confused and unsure. Now, in the pure sunlight, there was only joy and love in her heart. Once her prayer had finished, she made to stand, to attend to her face and hair, when she heard Cora and Timothy laughing. She strained to listen, as Cora fussed over Timothy’s clothes.

“I knewed yer Aunt must have done picked this out,” she said to the boy. “Looks right nice!”

“We went to Hazard,” Timothy answered. “Dad, me, and Aunt Anna Jane. Dad spent all his time buying a ring while we had to shop for clothes.”

Shelagh smiled at the forlorn note in his voice. The smile stretched into a grin as she heard Patrick chime in.

“We had to look our best for Shelagh, didn’t we?” He laughed, then said, “Well, Mrs. Cora?”

“I’ll never forget the day a skinny slip of a boy showed up to my door, askin’ to deliver babies,” she said, her voice breaking slightly. “Now I look at you and think…. Well, you’ll do jus’ as fine.”

Shelagh’s eyes watered again, as Anna Jane walked back in the door.

“I brought--Oh, Lord,” Anna Jane said, taking in the red-rimmed eyes and tears that threatened to fall. “Don’t start again!” She reached to take Shelagh’s hand, and the soon-to-be sisters began to laugh.

--

The ceremony went by in a blur of moments, over too quickly, save the warmth that tingled against her lips from their first kiss as husband and wife. As they turned to face the crowd of friends, Shelagh caught Timothy’s eye, exchanging a grin with the excitable boy. And then she and Patrick linked arms and walked toward the back of the church, exiting into the vestibule as the crowd surged behind them. Patrick turned and took her hand, grinning as their friends and family
gathered around them. He leaned in close. “MG is just outside the door,” he murmured.

Shelagh’s eyes widened as a shocked smile spread across her face. “Patrick!”

He raised a brow at her and grinned, before turning to shake hands with Big Alfred Lowe. Her cheeks reddened but she turned and began to greet and speak with their guests, the thought of a quick escape teasing the back of her mind. She hugged and spoke with patients, colleagues, new family members, and friends until her face hurt from smiling so at every lovely comment given to her by this group of people who had once been welcoming strangers and were now her people. Eventually Anna Jane shepherded them all into the small meeting room at the back, where a small reception had been set-up.

A receiving line of sorts had formed and she and Patrick stood together, speaking to each guest in turn. The Turner family welcomed her warmly, little Margie shyly referring to her as ‘Aunt Shelagh’. Patients and friends from Beech Fork came through the line, Lisette with a bright smile, Mercy Sullivan offering her best wishes, and then it was her FNS colleagues, dressed in their formal blues. She accepted a letter on Mrs. Breckinridge’s behalf from Nurse Wright and was deep into conversation with Nurse Parrish when a silence fell over the crowd. She looked up in surprise to see Thomas Turner at the front of the crowd holding up a hand to forestall the revelry. Looking to Patrick, she saw that he was surprised as well, and reached out to squeeze his hand as Thom began to speak.

“Jus’ went outside,” he said, looking out over the crowd. “Had something to dig up.”

The crowd began to hoot and holler, and Shelagh looked up to Patrick again, this time in confusion. He smiled and a winked, gesturing toward his brother. “It’s a tradition,” he said, but stopped as Thom began speaking again.

“Lord knows we hain’t had a drop of good whiskey in awhile, but I been savin’ one back, for a special time. Las’ night I come up here and buried it, forgive me, Brother Sean.”

Brother Sean laughed, raising his hand. “Give me a sip and we’ll not worry over much about it!”

The guests roared in approval. Thom continued. “They say if you bury your bourbon afore a wedding the weather’ll be fine. Well, the sun’s out and now it’s time to open this bottle. To Patrick and Shelagh!”
The crowd cheered, as the guests lined up for their sip and their cake. Shelagh looked to Patrick. “Are there any other Kentucky wedding traditions I should be knowing about?”

“I think we’re safe from any others,” Patrick murmured, before stepping back as Thom came near. “Thank you,” he said, looking to his older brother.

“It was nothin’,” Thom said, shaking Patrick’s hand. “Congratulations. I…” he trailed off, before beginning again. He nodded toward Timothy, who ran along the back wall with Jack, Margie, and Robert. “You entrusted him to me and Annie and now yer done takin’ him back where he belongs. He’s a good boy.”

Patrick’s fingers rubbed together before he managed to speak. “I thank you--”

“It’s what family does,” Thom said, cutting him off. “He’ll be fine with us fer one more weekend, anyway.” He slapped his brother on the back. “Best get a sip afore all that whiskey’s gone!” He looked at Shelagh. “Congratulations, sister.” He leaned in and softly kissed her cheek.

Shelagh’s cheeks flamed as he walked away. “Cora once said there was just something about you Turners.”

“Is that so?” Patrick eased back into a grin. “What else did she say?”

“I’ll tell you later,” she whispered, looking up at him from under her lashes.

He stepped closer as if to kiss her, but Timothy ran up to them, breathless with excitement. “Can’t I come home with you tonight?”

“Oh!” Shelagh hugged him as he reached out for her. “You’ll have one last weekend with your cousins and aunt and uncle!”

“Besides,” Patrick said, ruffling Timothy’s hair, “you have to take care of…”

Timothy’s eyes widened. “I forgot!”
“Take care of—” Shelagh was cut off as Mrs. Polly leaned in to hug her, Hiram Ray reaching for Shelagh’s hair. “Oh!” She took the baby and jiggled him, moving her hair over her shoulder. “Mrs. Polly!” She grinned. “You’re looking lovely!”

“Please call me Janie,” the girl said, smiling prettily. “And you look a picture, Nurse Turner!”

Shelagh had opened her mouth to ask Janie to call her by her given name, but paused, taken aback by the new last name. She smiled with her sore cheeks. “You did that on purpose.”

Janie laughed. “I reckon I did, Shelagh.” She looked at Patrick, before blushing. “Dr. Turner. Congratulations to you both.” She took Hiram Ray from Shelagh as he began to fuss. “I won’t keep you none,” she said, beginning to walk away, “but don’t forget about comin’ out to supper!”

“Making friends, Mrs. Turner?” Patrick’s voice was soft in the midst of the celebration.

Shelagh looked around at the crowd. Her heart swelled. “Yes,” she answered. “Many friends.”

“Things lookin’ mighty cozy here, ain’t they Mrs. Cora?” Anna Jane’s smile was wicked as she and Cora made their way toward the couple.

“They do and I’m jus’ as glad to see it!” Cora grinned, patting Patrick on the arm.

Shelagh’s cheeks flushed, but she hugged each woman in turn. “Thank—”

“There’s no need for thankin’ us now,” Anna Jane said, squeezing Shelagh’s hand. “We were proud to do it.” She turned and hugged Patrick. “We’ll all be together again in a few weeks for Thanksgivin’. We’ll give our thanks then. But now, way I see it, the two of you got a cake to cut into….” She looked once more to Patrick. “I made yer favorite.”

“Anna Jane, you’re my favorite sister-in-law.” Patrick grinned as Anna Jane scoffed.

Shelagh stifled a giggle and Patrick turned to her, the smile still lighting his face. Their eyes met
and clung.

Cora laughed, linking her arm with Anna Jane’s. “Come on, honey, these two only got eyes for each other.”

Anna Jane’s giggles faded as she and Cora moved back into the crowd.

Patrick tugged Shelagh forward. “Anna Jane has always made delicious cake,” he said, very solemnly. “I figure we’ll need to have a piece.”

“And a sip of whiskey,” Shelagh reminded.

“Mrs. Turner!” He turned back to grin. “A piece of cake and a sip of whiskey and then…”

Shelagh’s stomach clenched. “And then a quick getaway on MG?”

Patrick winked. “That’s my girl.”

--

Weak sunlight framed the curtains as Shelagh awoke to a flash of pain in her right leg. With a gasp, she sat up to remove the blankets. Gooseflesh broke out over her arms, the thin nightgown she wore little barrier to the cool air in the room. She tensed and relaxed her muscles, attempting to stretch as she had been taught while in hospital. The raging pain eased slightly and she exhaled, turning her head to find Patrick awake and looking at her.

“Shelagh?”

The sound of his raspy voice in the dim room made her heart pound. “Go back to sleep,” she whispered. But he was already sitting up. She blushed at the sight of his bare chest, remembering the way his warm skin had felt against hers in the night. “It’s only a wee discomfort.”

He moved to her side of the bed, gesturing toward her. “May I?”
“You don’t have to do that,” she said, but lifted her leg in acquiescence.

He sat on the bed and took her legs into his lap. Touching her calf lightly, he looked at her. “Do you have pains often?”

“They happen sometimes,” she responded, very aware of how large his hands were. “The pain radiates.”

“Here?” He gently worked his fingers into the muscles of her calf.

She nodded, holding herself upright to watch him. His hair was messy over his forehead, his cheeks dark with morning whiskers. New memories flooded over her, heat rushing to her cheeks.

He caught her eye. “Lie back,” he said. “Rest.”

Leaning against the pillow, she watched him work the sore muscles. His fingers slipped behind her knee, careful not to tickle. It was his physician’s touch with which he probed her leg, skilled fingers easing pain. She now knew his hands in passion, the way they had felt against her bare lower back and at her breast. In a tumble of memory she thought of the brush of his stomach against hers, the arch of his neck when he was pleasured, the overwhelming heat that had surrounded them as they moved together for the first time...

The tight muscles relaxed, the pain alleviated. “Thank you,” she breathed.

He didn’t respond right away, a look unlike any she had seen from him before falling over his features. “I don’t want to hurt you,” he said, voice soft, as he edged her nightgown up and trailed a finger over the tops of her thighs.

“You didn’t,” she murmured, placing her hand over his. “You would never.”

His eyes glinted as he regarded her. Removing his hand from her grasp, he reached out, touching her bottom lip. “I couldn’t.”
Her smile was soft as she drew him toward her. “We’ll go slowly this time,” she said, heart pounding as he settled back into the bed next to her.

“Slowly,” he repeated, gently teasing her lips with his.

Cupping his face in her hand, Shelagh deepened their kiss, loving him gently as the sun rose high into the Kentucky sky.

--

The next afternoon was chilly as Shelagh and Patrick set off to meet Timothy on the path from Beech Fork. Shelagh’s heart hammered with nervous excitement. She was thrilled to be bringing Timothy home, but also slightly overwhelmed with the thought of the three of them in one tiny flat. She was used to living among others, with her former sisters and recently among the nurses and couriers. At Beech Fork Clinic she had attempted to create a home for herself, but now found that two vital pieces had been missing. The home that they would create together, just the three of them, would become the home she had longed for. She smiled into the cool wind, thinking of the grin that would be on Timothy’s face as they met him.

Patrick deftly turned the horse to leave the path, stepping into the grass that led down into his bottom land. “Tim said he’d meet us near the black gum tree,” he said, turning his head slightly back toward her. “Thom will ride with him as far as the ridge.”

Shelagh remembered their afternoon picnic under the tree on Patrick’s beautiful patch of land. “Do you think he brought a basket of food?”

“Knowing Anna Jane…!” Patrick trailed off with a laugh.

With a grin, Shelagh looked at the land, so different now than it had been in the spring. The trees were bare and the grass dull, little hint of the vibrancy that colored the land in warmer seasons. “Oh!” She spotted Timothy and waved, smiling softly at him as Patrick eased MG to a halt.

As they dismounted, Shelagh looked back across the field at Timothy. “Patrick,” she said, turning him toward his son. “Does he have a dog with him?” Timothy’s horse walked, and at his side, trotted a dog, tongue lolling from its mouth. Shelagh gazed up at her husband with a questioning crease between her eyes.
“Still looking for a mutt, Mrs. Turner?”

Shelagh’s mouth opened slightly, but before she could say anything, Timothy sidled up and dismounted, throwing his arms around Shelagh. “Dad didn’t run you off!”

Surprised, Shelagh laughed, watching as Patrick pretended to wrestle his son. The dog barked, running around, tail wagging.

“Think your secret’s out,” Patrick said, rustling his son’s hair.

“Dad!” Timothy shook his head to straighten his hair. He turned to Shelagh. “I uh, well, I wanted to give you a wedding gift. And Dad said you were promised a dog, but never got one.”

“You didn’t have to do that!” Shelagh also looked to Patrick, who innocently shrugged his shoulders. Looking at the dog, Shelagh smiled at Timothy. “What’s his name?”

“He doesn’t have one,” Timothy said, scratching the dog’s neck. “I thought you’d name him!”

“Well, I’ve never...” Shelagh knelt down, holding her hand out to the dog. The dog cautiously sniffed Shelagh’s fingers before bowing his head to allow her to pet him between his ears. “Oh!” She began to scratch, smiling at the fast wag of the little tail. “What a wee boy!” As she began to coo over the dog it began to lick her fingers, practically vibrating from his joy. Laughing, she nuzzled him. He licked her cheek and she looked up with a bright grin. “My own dog!”

“Do you like him?” Timothy began hopping around. “I found ‘im afore the wedding and thought he would be the best present!”

“He’s wonderful,” Shelagh said, patting the soft fur and touching one velvety ear. “Thank you!” She stood, hugging Timothy close.

Patrick took his turn to pet the dog, who ran around in excitement, sniffing each family member before coming back to him for another pat. Patrick chuckled, looking to Shelagh. “Well, have you thought of a name?”
She pursed her lips, thinking of the advertisement that led her to Kentucky. It had promised her own horse and dog, adventure and service. She had been given so much more. She remembered her first real conversation with Patrick, when he asked her in jest if she had found a dog and his offer to have Timothy help her to locate one of her very own. The dog’s fur was a light brown and though he was of a medium size breed, he was still such a wee boy. In a flash, the pup’s name became clear. “Peanut,” she said, grinning at Patrick and Timothy, before leaning down to once more play with the dog as it shivered in delight. “His name is Peanut.”

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Later, Timothy and Peanut romped through the tall grass, the dog happy to follow the boy. Shelagh laughed at their antics, leaning against Patrick as they stood under the tree. He kissed her temple. “I’d like to have a house built for us here,” he murmured. “Just there,” he said, indicating the flat land near the blossom field.

Shelagh tried to imagine a cabin on the pristine land. “They’ll leave the flowers and this tree?”

“Anything you want,” he answered, hugging her close. “A cabin big enough for three and a dog… And perhaps…”

“More,” she said, grinning. “Three and a dog is a start.”

“Thom will help,” he said, brushing his thumb against her shoulder. “Big and Little Alfred, some others. Might have it up before snow flies. Won’t be much--”

Shelagh cut him off. “It’ll be everything!” She leaned against his shoulder, imagining their future.

Patrick chuckled. “It’ll need only be large enough to move in Timothy, Peanut, our basket of foods from the church ladies, your red dress--”

“With plenty of shelving for medical journals.”

“Yes, my incomplete volumes of The Lancet…”
“I still have that copy that you left behind for me to read at the church picnic one Sunday. Do you remember?” Shelagh thought of the battered magazine, safely tucked away in her trunk at the flat.

“You still have that?” Patrick shook his head as if amazed. “Believe there was an article in it that I might not mind reading again.” He grinned at her, before nuzzling her temple. “Can’t you see… hot summer, you and me sitting out here, reading together…”

Looking across the land, Shelagh listened to the wind in the trees and Timothy’s high voice as he played with Peanut. She pictured the cabin and a little bench, right where they were standing, where they had once sat in an improvised picnic. “Yes,” she said, heart swelling with joy, “I can.”
Summer 1939

“Has anyone seen my books?” Timothy stopped in the doorway and looked in at the table. “They were just there, last night.”

“I’m readin’,” Cora Julienne said, holding a book and running toward her brother. “I’m going to school, too.”

“Momma,” Timothy complained, taking the book from his sister. “Thank you, Corie, but you’re not supposed to be botherin’ with my school books.”

“I’m gon’ to school with Tim and Momma.” She set her mouth and reached for the book.

“Not yet, Corie,” Tim said, picking her up and dandying her about. Cora Julienne giggled. “You’ll stay home with Granny Cora and Teddy.”

“That’s right, Timothy,” Shelagh said, bustling into the room, fastening an earring. She took Cora Julienne from his arms. “Timothy’s school books are for Timothy. Not Corie,” she said, tapping the little girl on the nose. “Let’s sit for breakfast.”

A wail rose from the cot near the heating stove. “Oh,” Shelagh cooed, settling her daughter into a seat. “Your brother’s awake.”

“Again?” The little girl sighed. “He don’t sleep long, Momma.”

“He’s still getting on schedule,” Shelagh said, picking the baby up and soothing his cries. “He’s always hungry!”

“Like Daddy!” Cora Julienne laughed, pointing at Patrick as he came into the kitchen.
Timothy laughed, too, taking up a sausage link and a biscuit. “She doesn’t miss a trick, Dad.”

Patrick grinned and tickled her under the chin. “Tellin’ all my secrets, young lady?”

She shook her head, dark curls bouncing. “No. I want to go to school.”

“Don’t rush your ole Daddy!” Patrick grinned at Shelagh, smoothing a finger over the baby’s cheek as she came back to the table.

Cora Julienne reached across the table for Tim’s books. “I--” she knocked into the pitcher of milk. It toppled and spread quickly across the table. She shrieked and jumped from her seat. “Daddy!”

Teddy began to fuss as Tim jumped from the table. “Corie!”

“Oh, dearest!” Shelagh bounced the baby in her arms as Patrick righted the pitcher and grabbed a towel.

“Take him on out to the bench,” Patrick said as Teddy’s squalls grew louder. “I’ll clean up and talk with Corie.”

“My books are dry,” Tim said, looking at his trousers. “But I’ll need to change. Thanks, Corie.”

Cora Julienne set her lips, tears leaking from her eyes.

“Go and change, Tim,” Patrick said, taking up a rag to clean his daughter. “You must be more careful, my Corie.”

Shelagh listened to Cora Julienne’s tearful explanations as she exited the house, meeting Peanut at the step. He followed her as she settled onto the bench situated under the black gum tree at the front of the house. The baby fussed until she fed him and she sighed, running a finger over his little hands. She could not quite imagine being away from her children each day. Their family had expanded rapidly; days full of the joys and trials of raising children. The hope to further add to
their family remained in Shelagh’s heart, tucked beside the wish that was only now coming to fruition. Looking down at Teddy, she brushed the hair from his forehead, silently hoping that he would do well for the day in Cora’s care. The warm wind and quiet did little to soothe the worries battling with the excitement in her stomach. Peanut leaned against the bench arm, and Shelagh smiled, rubbing his head until the dog twitched in contentment and settled at her feet. The sound of the screen door opening drew her eyes to the cabin, and Cora Julienne who ran out, grinning.

“Momma!” The little girl ran to the bench and clambered onto it to snuggle into Shelagh’s side. “Is he done yet?”

“Almost!” Shelagh laughed. “Though I do believe he’ll be more than ready for pablum with Granny Cora when you have your dinner!”

Corie giggled and tickled her brother’s foot. “I’ll read to him. Daddy said not to read Timmy’s books, but I got this letter to read.” She held up a crumpled piece of paper. “Dear Cora Julienne, My good friend. I will come to see you soon. Love from, Sister Julienne.”

Smiling softly, Shelagh looked down at the blank sheet of paper. “Perhaps one day we’ll go to visit the Sisters,” she said, thinking of the strife in Europe and how she prayed nightly now not only for her former Sisters but also for the well being of those embroiled in what seemed to be heading toward war. “Perhaps we’ll receive a new letter from Sister Julienne very soon!”

Cora Julienne nodded seriously. “I wait every day!”

Smiling at her daughter, Shelagh buttoned her dress. She was about to say more when Patrick came out of the house, Timothy following. Patrick’s hands were behind his back. They grinned at her and she narrowed her eyes, suspicious. “What’s all this?”

Patrick gave her a pail. “Well, seeing as it’s your first day teaching, we thought we’d make your dinner.”

Teddy reached for the pail as Shelagh opened the lid. “Not yet,” Shelagh laughed, kissing the baby’s cheek. He grunted and smiled, reaching for the tin again.

“I put in some cornbread!” Cora Julienne piped up, poking the tin. “Granny Cora learned me to make it yesterday!”
“Taught you,” Timothy corrected. “I put in an apple.” He kicked his foot in the dirt. “Seeing as you’re teachin’ midwifery now…” He leaned down to wrestle with Peanut, as if embarrassed to show too much affection.

“Oh,” Shelagh blinked her eyes as she began to tear up. “Thank you!”

Patrick sat on the bench, pulling Cora Julienne into his lap. “And from me, well…” he lifted the lid and reddened slightly. “It’s not much…”

Shelagh touched the smooth, cool bottle and small packet tucked into the pail. “It’s wonderful.” She met Patrick’s eyes.

“Lord,” Timothy said, taking Teddy from Shelagh’s arms and motioning for his sister and Peanut to follow. “It’s the love-dubbing, Corie. Let’s go before we see more than we ought.”

Corie’s giggles with Tim faded as Shelagh shifted on the bench and leaned against her husband. “Co-Cola and peanuts. Our favorite.”

“Just a little something to remind you of home while you’re teaching today.” He kissed her temple. “I’m just as proud for you.”

She settled against him for just a moment, listening to the sound of the children playing, Peanut’s happy barks, Patrick’s chuckle at their antics, and the gentle wind rustling through the tree. When she had embarked on her journey to Kentucky she had expected to give; to care for those who needed her. She had done that and now would help to educate a new generation of nurse-midwives to continue that tradition. Yet for all the care she had given, she had been given even more. With a small prayer of gratitude, she peeked into the pail again, looking at the apple, cornbread, Coca-Cola, and peanuts, and smiled -- her family would be with her as she made another new start.

Chapter End Notes

The Frontier Graduate School of Midwifery was established in 1939. Today Frontier Nursing University instructs their students to 'Begin. Believe. Become.', and is still going strong almost 100 years from Mrs. Breckinridge’s initial survey of Hyden, KY in 1923. There are over 6,000 alumni and 2,000 current students.

I wrote this epilogue before series 8. I have ideas for a sequel involving May, Timothy, the Sisters, and Poplar, but for now I’m back to writing one-shots. I want to thank everyone for indulging me with this fic. It's meant so much to me. Thank you for
End Notes

This is a love letter from me to Turnadette. Thank you to my-little-yellowbird and fourteen-teacups for EVERYTHING. You gals are just the best. <3 . Disclaimer: I do not own CtM nor FNS. I write this out of love and admiration.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!