Passage ON THE TITANIC

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Passage ON THE TITANIC

a novel

ANITA STANSFIELD

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Published by Covenant Communications, Inc.
American Fork, Utah

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, names, incidents, places, and dialogue are either products of the author's imagination, and are not to be construed as real, or are used fictitiously.

Printed in the United States of America
First Printing: February 2012

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN-13: 978-1-60861-856-9

For Irene.
And to all of the passengers and crew of the *Titanic*:
the more than fifteen hundred who died with her that night
and the seven hundred and five survivors, who suffered most.
May you all rest in peace.

And a special thank you to Gary Cook,
who made this story happen.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I was told the story of Irene Colvin Corbett, a quiet stirring awakened in me, and in time I knew that I needed to tell her story. I have come to believe that it was something I had agreed to do in another time and place. It is my deepest wish that Irene and her family have made peace over the tragedy that took her life in 1912.

This is the first time that I have attempted to weave real people into the lives of fictional characters. I humbly petition my readers to be patient with me in any way that I may have fallen short in this endeavor. Allow me to clarify where those lines are crossed in order to avoid any confusion. Irene's story is true, and I have done my best, based on the information available, to accurately portray the kind of woman I believe her to be. William Thomas Stead is also a real person, and I have also tried to portray him accurately. Reading his documented interviews with young women in Ella's situation prompted me to make that a part of the story. He actually did write two pieces of fiction that seemed to have some foreboding implications about what happened to the *Titanic.* The story of the Mormon elders who were supposed to be on the *Titanic* is also true. I invite my readers to take advantage of the rich resources on the Internet and find out more about these great people, since I have only scratched the surface in honoring them and the part they played in the *Titanic* drama.

Beyond this, all of the characters portrayed in this book are fictional, although I hope that seeing the story unfold through their eyes offers an accurate scope of how it must have been to experience the tragedy firsthand. All of the information portrayed about the *Titanic* and the events surrounding it have been written about in an accurate way to the

best of my ability. I hope that in reading this book you might acquire a greater understanding about the event, information that you might not have known before; but there is so much more to be learned. Pardon the pun, but I was only able to portray the tip of the iceberg in regard to all that I discovered through my research.

The very name *Titanic* implies the enormity of undertaking an attempt to tell the story and add this book to the many books and films and other forms of media that have endeavored to tell other views of the same tale. For my own storytelling style and purposes, it was not so much the technicalities and facts of the event that I felt were important to relate, but I chose rather to focus on the human element, the emotional and psychological impact on the lives affected by this monumental disaster. And we are affected still today. I believe our human fascination with the event—one hundred years later—is greatly tied into the way it forces us to face our own views of mortality. The *Titanic*'s tragic demise stands as a vivid metaphor of man's pride and the need for God in our lives. Whether the disasters we face in life are personal or global, our connection to God is the only path to finding peace. I hope this book offers that message to all who read it.

PROLOGUE

The Atlantic Ocean — April 15, 1912

Ella could hardly breathe as the shock of icy water grabbed hold of her feet and ankles. She looked down as if her eyes might convince her of what seemed impossible for her mind to believe. Lifting the hem of her skirts out of the water, she watched the fabric dripping and heard the sound of the drips intermittently hitting the water, like the span of time between the flash of distant lightning and the ensuing echo of thunder. It seemed to take several heartbeats for her mind to absorb the message. It was true! The *Titanic* really was sinking! It could no longer be denied as a possibility too horrible to consider. The life belt she wore seemed inconsequential in light of the temperature of the water in which she stood. What point might there be to floating in such water, when its icy fingers promised to strangle the warmth out of any blood flowing through human veins? Ella gasped as a familiar hand took hold of her arm with an unfamiliar force, startling her back to the moment.

"Don't just stand there," Irene ordered and turned Ella around on the stairs. "We've got to get out of here. Getting on one of those lifeboats is our only hope of surviving this."

"What about the children?" Ella demanded, resisting Irene's firm tugging. "What about—"

"You mustn't think about that now," Irene said, exerting more effort in moving Ella along quickly.

Ella's feet felt bitterly cold as she dragged them up the stairs, but her heart froze in her chest at Irene's implication. She stopped in her tracks and stubbornly resisted Irene's efforts to budge her. "What on earth do

you mean?" she asked, as if Irene might actually have a sensible response to such a question.

Irene came back down two steps to face Ella directly. The chill in Ella's feet rushed all the way up her body and back down again as this woman she'd come to call her dearest friend in all the world looked into her eyes with a gaze so intense and foreboding that Ella found it difficult to breathe. "Listen to me well, my friend," Irene said in a voice that matched the intensity of her eyes. "I don't know how all of this will end, but I know what I have to do, and I know what *you* have to do."

"How could you possibly know *that*?" Ella insisted.

"I've explained to you more than once how such a thing is possible, but now is not the time to quibble over details." Tears appeared suddenly in Irene's eyes, tears so hot that Ella almost expected steam to rise off of them. Ella wanted to know if they were tears of fear or of some kind of resolve. She suspected the latter but didn't have a chance to ask before Irene headed up the stairs again, dragging Ella along. "We must hurry," was all she said.

Conversation became difficult in their earnest trek toward the lifeboats that were stretched out along the massive deck of the ship. Chaos and noise threatened to swallow them, but Irene pressed forward as if she were a torpedo aimed at a very specific target. By some miraculous means that Ella could not account for while her brain was in shock and her surroundings were in pandemonium, she found herself scrambling into a lifeboat, aided by the capable hand of a uniformed member of the crew. She had to squeeze herself in but still eased over as far as she could to allow room for Irene, certain her friend was right behind her. She was barely seated when the lifeboat jolted into movement, and she realized it was being lowered. Sitting next to her was a young woman, crying and waving good-bye to a man near her age standing on the deck.

"No!" Ella shouted and tried to stand but could not find the balance to do so. "No!" she shouted louder and tried again, gripping the edge of the boat as if she might leap out of it to reunite herself with her beloved Irene.

"You've got t' sit down, miss," she heard a male voice say, and a firm hand on her shoulder made it impossible to ignore the command. But Ella's eyes were connected to Irene's. In a matter of a few seconds, all they had shared through these months of friendship raced through Ella's

mind. Irene had given hope to the hopeless and life to the doomed. Ella had been both. How could they possibly be separated by whatever this terrifying disaster might entail?

Ella convinced herself in the next few seconds that Irene would get into another lifeboat and they would soon be reunited. She shouted toward her, hoping to be heard above the din. "I'll see you soon. Go and find yourself a seat and—"

"Whatever happens," Irene called back, and even from the distance Ella could see those steamy tears once again glimmering in her eyes, "you must live your life to its fullest. Promise me."

Ella hesitated, refusing to accept the implication that they might *not* see each other again. "Promise me!" Irene shouted.

"I promise!" Ella called back. After all that Irene had done for her, how could she refuse *anything* this great woman might ask of her?

Irene's countenance softened and she actually smiled. "All will be well," Irene called back, her voice becoming more difficult to hear, and her face more difficult to see, as the lifeboat was lowered farther toward the frigid, black ocean below. "I know what I have to do," Irene shouted, as if she desperately needed Ella to know. "Whatever happens, never forget . . . that I know what I have to do, and all will be well."

While Ella was trying to think of appropriate words to say in return, something that could be shouted with the hope of being heard amidst the chaos, the lifeboat jolted as the ropes on one side slid a little more quickly than on the other. The frightened voices of the women and children in the boat with Ella distracted her from her conversation. When Ella looked up again at the deck of the mighty ship, becoming ever farther away, Irene was no longer there.

CHAPTER ONE
Moment of Decision

London, England — One Year Earlier

Ella Brown walked at an unusually hurried pace through the dirty streets that had become so distastefully familiar to her. She shut out the sounds of crying babies and begging children, unable to consider the possibility that her own child might one day be among them. She refused to take in the smells of rotting garbage, and carefully avoided the sewage running in the streets. This was the part of London that her parents had taught her to forever shun. Liquor and brothels were in ample abundance. Good food and any sense of safety or security were brutally absent.

Not so many months ago, Ella had lived in a lovely house with comfortable beds and elegant decor. There had been ample to eat, and even a couple of servants who took care of any task too distasteful for Ella's parents. Ella had been protected from the fact that her parents had been spending themselves into enormous debt, apparently with no thought of the consequences to themselves or their daughter. Everything had seemed to fall apart in a day. Ella knew now that her security had been crumbling slowly for a long while, but she didn't have even a slight suspicion of it until the grim reaper of debt had come calling to collect. They lost everything! The servants were off to stay with relatives until other employment could be found, but Ella *had* no relatives. Her parents had deliberately alienated themselves from every family member, and their estrangements had been carved in stone for too many years to ever be reversed. Ella had never once even *met* a relative. The true

shock for Ella had been hearing her mother's screams when she'd found her husband dead—by his own hand. Ella's mother had immediately reverted into some kind of mentally detached state that kept her completely oblivious to the incomprehensible horror that her life had become. In her mind she was still attending extravagant parties and wearing lavish clothes and jewels, apparently not recalling that her husband was dead, her house and belongings had been taken by those to whom she owed money, and her daughter was out on the streets—quite literally. For the first time in her life, Ella had been glad to be an only child, if only because that meant she would not need to care for and protect any younger siblings. Taking care of herself was challenging enough. How would she have ever kept anyone else from starving? She'd managed to get away with her own jewelry hidden in the two pieces of luggage she'd carried out of the house that fateful night when her world had crashed down around her. But work had been impossible to find, and her resources had disintegrated quickly in just trying to pay rent on the sparse and pathetic room where she'd been living and in keeping enough food in her stomach to stay alive. Her attempts to find a suitable job had all fallen short because she had no training or experience in *anything*, no skill whatsoever that would warrant anyone wanting to pay her for her services.

When her situation had become desperate, Ella had taken the advice of a woman who lived in the same building. Laetitia had been very friendly to Ella. She had been the only person to show any kindness whatsoever to Ella since she had been plummeted into a world that surely resembled hell on earth. Therefore, Ella had naturally felt drawn to her, and had mistakenly trusted her. *You'll make a lot of money,* her friend had told her. *Supposed* friend. No true friend would have ever lured an unsuspecting young woman into such a horrifying and degrading situation! No friend of any kind would have suggested such a thing without some kind of forewarning or explanation! Ella had been entirely innocent; young and naive and utterly gullible. She'd been raised by good parents—in spite of their penchant for spending more money than they'd had. She'd gone to church every Sunday, always holding in her heart the fear of God and a desire to please Him rather than do anything to incur His wrath. Now she had no doubt that she had disappointed Him in the worst possible way. What she had done was unforgivable, even if she'd had no idea *what*

she was doing until it was too late. Ella felt certain she was now on a cursed path that could never be reversed. Her life had been ruined—surely and irrevocably. She had indeed been given a great deal of money, and Laetitia had laughed off Ella's traumatized reactions with that reminder—as if money might make everything all right; as if money might buy back what Ella had lost. In Laetitia's defense, Ella had spent enough time among the barely surviving souls of the earth to know that desperation drove people to do unspeakable things, and Laetitia had spent a great many more years living in that world than Ella had. She'd been hardened by it, no doubt. But Ella still wanted to believe that no amount of hardness or suffering could justify the deceptive methods Laetitia had resorted to in order to get Ella into that situation. And since Laetitia had taken a cut of the money for closing the deal, she'd certainly had ulterior motives. Ella now believed that Laetitia had never truly had any personal interest in being a friend to Ella. She'd simply been luring her into a trap all along. A horrible, inescapable trap. And now! Now . . . the unthinkable had come to pass. It had only happened once, and Laetitia had assured her that pregnancy was not a possibility after just once. Again Ella cursed herself for trusting such a woman and believing that *anything* she'd said was true.

Following the initial trauma, Ella had wanted to die, and she'd seriously considered—more than once—following her father's example of leaving this world by choice. But she couldn't bring herself to do it, not certain if that made her a coward or abstractly more courageous. Now as she walked blindly through the streets, trying to take in the reality of what she'd realized just this morning, she considered that choice once again. But now there wasn't only her own life to consider, but that of a child. Could she be responsible for taking the life of a child as well as her own? On the other hand, how could she be responsible for raising a child, for keeping it fed and safe in such a world? The clear memory of a terrifying sermon on the prospect of endless fire and torment tilted the scale in her mind more toward choosing to remain alive. But she couldn't completely rule out the possibility that she was already doomed to endless fire, unwed and pregnant as she was; and one more bad choice might not make any difference.

That night Ella lay curled up on her poor excuse of a bed in her poor excuse of a barely livable room and wept herself into shock. What

on earth was she going to do? How could she ever care for herself and a child when she was barely surviving as it was? The very fact that she had a fair amount of money currently in her possession felt like a sick kind of taunting when she thought of what she'd suffered in order to get it. Her rent was paid for some months in advance, and if she used the remainder of it very carefully in acquiring sufficient food for herself, she could perhaps manage to get by for a while yet. If she had any hope of surviving, she had to find the means to earn some money—if it were even possible to do such a thing and remain respectable. Perhaps that was no longer an issue. But even if she managed to hold everything together until she could give birth to this baby, then what? She couldn't even begin to imagine!

Ella forced herself beyond her shock and fear in order to reach into the deepest part of her soul enough to do the only thing she knew how to do under such desperate circumstances. She prayed. She prayed with all the energy of her heart and mind. She prayed like she never in her life prayed before. While a part of her wondered if the prayers of such a woman might even be heard—let alone answered—she had to hope for the tiniest chance that God would have mercy on her and give her the strength and means to survive. Although she'd been oblivious to the passing of time, she had been conscious of the bells of a distant church tower ringing enough times to mark more than two hours while she continued to pray in the midst of contemplating the nightmare her life had become. An unpremeditated thought occurred to her that increased her hope just a bit. She recalled clearly a sermon she'd once heard about how compassionate and forgiving Jesus had been while He'd lived on the earth. He'd even offered forgiveness to a woman taken in the very act of adultery. Maybe, just maybe, if that were true, Ella too could be forgiven for the grievous sin she'd committed. As she allowed the idea to settle into her spirit, she felt her hope increase even further. Like a light in a dark room, the warmth began to tangibly fill her, starting in the center of her chest and filtering outward. By the time her every nerve became permeated with warmth, her desire to live and make a new life for herself had far surpassed any idea she'd ever had to leave this world and its misery behind. Contrary to every bit of logical assessment in regard to her present circumstances, she found it possible to believe that somehow, some way, someday, her life could be better than this. She was

determined to find a new path and do whatever it took to travel that path with courage and enough strength to sustain herself and her child through whatever the future might bring.

* * * * *

Utah Valley, America

Irene Corbett sat down hard on the steps of the back porch, forcing herself to take a deep breath and reach somewhere deep inside herself where she might be able to take hold of the belief that she was not crazy, and perhaps more importantly, that she was not somehow wicked or rebellious for wanting to pursue the course before her. She knew well enough that being a devoted wife and mother was her most important calling in this world. It was not only strongly taught as part of her religious beliefs, but she knew it for herself, from within her own spirit. She loved her husband and children, and she wanted to do right by them. But she also knew that women had been created to do great things. The Relief Society organization for the women of the Church had taught these principles from its very beginnings, nearly seventy years earlier. Women were created to make a difference in the world! Prophets had said so, and there were many shining examples of women in the scriptures and throughout the history of the Church that proved to Irene she wasn't alone in her thinking. Then why did she *feel* alone?

The frustration she felt grew to such a force that it hurtled her right off the porch and into a briskly paced walk about the yard. She was glad the children were sleeping, and grateful for the pleasant air of a summer evening. The sun had recently sunk beneath the western horizon, and had taken with it the intense heat of the day. She pondered the conversation she'd just had with her husband, and wondered why she had expected the outcome to be any different. Perhaps because she'd hoped and believed that he would be able to understand her reasons for wanting to take this step in her life. But she should have known better. Walter was a good man, and she loved him. But she knew well enough that he'd be more happy and content with a wife who was happy and content to simply care for her home and family. For all the countless conversations she'd had with Walter about the fire that burned inside

of her, spurring her to the belief that she needed to do more, he simply couldn't seem to grasp it; he simply didn't understand.

Irene was an educated woman. She'd thoroughly enjoyed acquiring her education at Brigham Young Academy, and she'd immensely enjoyed teaching school following her graduation. But as soon as she'd become engaged to be married, she'd had no choice but to forfeit her teaching job. Married women weren't allowed to teach, a concept that Irene could *not* understand—and to this day, if she let herself think about it too much, she could become rather riled. She had gone into nursing in search of an alternate route of opportunity for making a difference in the world. She'd found a great deal of fulfillment and satisfaction in the way her knowledge and skills—and even her personality—had contributed to aiding people through times of suffering and pain. The doctors she worked with were impressed by her abilities, and more than one had encouraged her to continue her training so that her influence could be broadened. The first time Irene had heard the suggestion that she might travel to London and be trained in obstetrics, she had trouble not laughing out loud. *London?* The very possibility seemed absurd and too far out of reach. But the suggestion had come up again and again, and it had begun to grow in Irene's heart until it had filled her spirit so fully she could not deny that she was being guided to pursue this course.

Irene had grown up with the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ in her life. It had always been her guiding star, her deepest love, her most ardent affection. She had learned through much practice and experience how to hear the still, small voice of the Spirit, and she had actively applied Its guidance in every aspect of her life. When she unequivocally knew the source of that voice, and what it was telling her, how could she possibly deny it simply because there were people around her who could not capture the same vision or understand the urgency she felt? The very fact that the path before her was lacking in logic and practicality seemed all the more evidence to her that God's hand was in it. The desire was so strong in her that she almost felt as if she might die if she didn't do it. It wasn't that she believed she would physically lose her life, but she felt certain a part of her spirit would shrivel up if she could not go to London and be trained in all of the state-of-the-art procedures of midwifery. The area in which she

lived was in great need of trained professionals who could help women through the process of safely delivering their children into the world. And Irene wanted to be able to do that. She wanted it every bit as much as she wanted to be a good mother to her children. A nagging voice in the back of her mind tempted her to believe that she could *not* be a good midwife and a good mother at the same time. But Irene knew the source of *that* voice as well, and she knew better than to listen to it. God had created women to do great things, and Irene was determined to heed His call, wherever it might take her!

It was completely dark when Irene finally went inside to find Walter sound asleep. She sat in the parlor near a lamp to read from the Book of Mormon, according to a lifelong habit. The book was undoubtedly her most priceless possession. It had been the source of peace and answers for her more times than she could count. She didn't read long, but set the book aside feeling more determined than ever to follow her heart. As she quietly got ready for bed, trying not to disturb Walter, she kept hearing in her mind the words of Nephi—a great prophet and an amazing man—echoing through her mind. *I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.*

Irene knelt to pray and silently poured out her heart to her Father in Heaven, speaking to Him as candidly as if He were there at her side, listening with perfect compassion to her pleas. She expressed a sincere desire to do His will, whatever it might be, and she asked for guidance in being able to know beyond any doubt the correct course for her life. She prayed for the hearts of her loved ones to be softened, and she concluded her prayer with the knowledge that if it was meant to be it would work out. At this point she couldn't even imagine how she would come up with the money to go, or how she would possibly arrange for the care of her children in her absence. She only knew that the need to go felt all consuming and it couldn't be denied.

Irene slept well in spite of her churning thoughts. The exhaustion of a busy life overruled her busy mind. She woke early, got dressed, and smoothed her dark, wavy hair. She had breakfast nearly ready before Walter and the children were up and about. Irene found great joy in helping the

children get dressed, intermixing some play and teasing with the necessary tasks. Little Walter was getting old enough to start dressing himself with only a little occasional assistance. Roene was beginning to say some words here and there, but she was still in diapers, as was the littlest, Mack, who was crawling everywhere and quickly figuring out how to get into everything.

At breakfast Walter was polite but subtly aloof, and Irene knew only too well that his mood was focused on their conversation of the previous night and his resistance to her leaving the family in order to receive medical training. She could understand his reluctance, and she'd told him so. But she also needed him to understand how strongly she believed this was right for her. For all her efforts to communicate her feelings to him, he *didn't* understand. And that was the problem. Irene was praying very hard for his heart to be softened, but a part of her knew that she couldn't take away his agency any more than he could take away hers. He was entitled to his opinions, and as his wife she needed to prayerfully consider his wishes. But she had been taught all her life that her most important relationship was between herself and God. She had to honor God's will for *her* above all else if she wanted to be at peace with herself.

By the time breakfast was over, Irene had become decidedly discouraged. She wondered if she'd been overtaken by some kind of insanity to believe that such an endeavor might be possible. Needing some sound advice and a listening ear, she gathered up the children and paid a visit to her parents' home. She'd been hoping to have a good conversation with her mother, but considered it a great blessing to find her father at home as well. Now she could speak with them both, and if she was indeed losing her mind, they would kindly put her straight.

Levi and Alice Colvin were some of the finest people that Irene knew, and she counted herself very blessed to be their oldest daughter. Her father had served as a bishop for nearly two decades. In fact, it was difficult to remember when he *hadn't* been a bishop. He was kind and wise, as was his wife, and Irene knew she could speak candidly to them about the deepest feelings of her heart.

"Oh, how good to see you, dear," Alice said when Irene came through the back door with Mack in her arms and Roene and little Walter running in ahead of her.

"Hello, Mother," Irene said, and they exchanged a tight hug, with Mack getting caught in the middle. As the hug ended, Irene transferred Mack to his grandmother's arms, and Alice laughed as she kissed her little grandson.

"Oh, he gets cuter every day," Alice said.

"He does indeed," Irene said and turned to receive an embrace from her father.

"What brings you out for a visit?" Levi asked with a smile. "Not that I'm complaining, but I know how busy you are."

"I confess that I could use a listening ear," Irene said. Her tone must have come across more gravely than she'd intended by the way her parents' expressions both clouded over at the same time.

"Is something wrong?" Alice asked.

"No, everything is fine," Irene assured them. "I just . . . need some advice."

Alice said she just needed a few minutes to finish up something in the kitchen, and then she could sit to visit. Levi helped find some toys to occupy the children, then the adults all sat down around the kitchen table, where they could keep an eye on the children as they played nearby. Irene dove right into the conversation with words she'd been memorizing through the last hour. She got to the point very quickly, and wasn't surprised to hear her father say, "London?"

"As far as that?" Alice asked. "It's most of a continent and an entire ocean away."

"Yes, I know," Irene said, "but the General Lying-In Hospital in London is absolutely the best place at this time to learn midwifery. They are pioneering the way in using antiseptic techniques that lower the risks of infection related to childbirth. Think of all the good I could do with such training!"

Irene could see that her parents were a little startled with her idea, or perhaps with the intensity of her enthusiasm. They only stared at her, eyes and mouths wide for a long moment, so she went on with the details she had learned.

"They have nurses' housing adjacent to the hospital, and I would be able to live right there while I receive my training, which would take about six months. I would leave in the fall and return in the spring. It's not so very long when you think about the span of a lifetime and all the good that I could do with such training!" She realized she'd said that twice now, but it was the most prominent thought on her mind.

"How would you afford it?" Levi asked.

"I have no idea," Irene said, feeling a deep chagrin settle into her heart.

"What would you do with the children?" Alice asked. "Walter could never care for them if you were gone."

"Again, I have no idea," Irene said and looked down at where she was wringing her hands on her lap. She looked up again, attempting to convey in her expression the conviction she felt. "I only know that it feels like I'm *supposed* to do it. I feel like I *must* do it!" She put a fist to her heart. "I don't know how it's possible, or how to go about it, but I have to at least try."

"I shouldn't have to ask if you've prayed about this," Levi said, "but I need to anyway."

"I *have* prayed about it," Irene said. "I've prayed very much. At first I felt sure that praying about it would quickly bring the answer that it was out of the question, and that I would find peace with letting it go. But the opposite has happened. I *can't* let it go—even though Walter is opposed to it. I know I need to honor my husband, but I also need to honor my heart, and he has trouble understanding that."

"You *do* need to honor your husband," Levi said, "but it's not news to any of us that Walter has difficulty with the idea of women doing anything outside of caring for the family."

"Yes, and so does his mother," Alice pointed out in a tone that expressed what Irene also knew. Her mother-in-law would be outraged by such a decision, but Irene had learned long ago that it was more important to be right with God than it was to concern herself with anyone else's opinion—*especially* that of her mother-in-law. Mrs. Corbett was a good woman who meant well. She simply had a very different personality from Irene, and she had been raised with very differing views. For all that they shared the same religion and its corresponding values, their different interpretations of *a woman's place* and *a woman's purpose* had come between them many times. Since Walter had been raised by this woman, his views naturally leaned toward her beliefs on the topic. But Irene had been raised to follow her heart and honor her God-given gifts. Her beliefs were being put to the test, but she had to regularly remind herself that her desires were not wicked or rebellious. In fact, her desires were entirely righteous, even if people around her couldn't see or understand that. She wanted to serve God with the gifts and talents He'd

given her. She wanted to help build His kingdom and aid His children in their suffering.

"But you shouldn't mind that," Levi said. "You must follow your heart, so long as it's in alignment with God's will."

"Yes, I know," Irene said, feeling so deeply validated that she wanted to cry.

"It's a mighty big undertaking you're talking about," Levi added in his most fatherly tone.

"I don't know if I can make it work," Irene said, "but I feel like I have to try. I've not only prayed, I've fasted as well. I pondered it a great deal before I even brought it up with Walter, but . . ."

"I take it he's not pleased with the idea," Alice said.

"Is that a surprise?" Irene asked. "I can't blame him for wishing his wife would be more conventional, but he *did* choose to marry *me*. I'm afraid if he loves me, he's going to have to love me the way I am. I certainly love *him* the way he is, even though I don't necessarily agree with all of *his* attitudes on certain topics."

"Marriage is full of give and take," Alice said. "If this is truly the right course, you'll know what to do."

"Maybe I'm just dreaming," Irene said.

"No harm in that," Levi commented with a warm smile toward his daughter, "as long as you don't have your head in the clouds." He glanced toward the children. "You're a good mother, and you do a great deal of good elsewhere too." He looked back at Irene. "I couldn't be more proud of my daughter. Just take care that you don't get too headstrong. Be considerate of your husband and continue to be prayerful. If it's right, it'll work out."

They talked a long while about the possibilities of how such an endeavor might come together, and Irene and the children stayed for lunch. When she left to take the children home so that the younger ones could take a nap, Irene felt validated and comforted by her parents' advice and support, but she also felt discouraged. Perhaps this was just some kind of test, and in the end it would simply not come to pass.

Over the next few days, Irene didn't bring the topic up again with Walter. She kept pondering and praying, and she fasted again with the same question prominent in her mind and heart. Her feelings didn't change, but she knew that Walter was likely hoping that the idea had been forgotten, and she dreaded bringing it up again. She finally *did*

bring it up, and wasn't surprised by his aversion to talking about it at all. She assured him that her desire to do this was not a reflection of her feelings for him or her place with him as his wife and the mother of his children. But she wasn't certain he believed her.

"What will people think?" he asked. "If you run off to a foreign country to do something . . . so rash, people are sure to believe that there's something wrong between us."

"It shouldn't matter at all what people think as long as we know in our hearts—and between us—what the truth is."

Walter just shook his head. "I just don't see how it's possible. Even if it's what you want to do, there's no way we could ever afford it." He left the room as if that should conclude the conversation—and the very idea. Irene cried once she was alone, but she couldn't let go of the belief that somehow this would work out.

Several more days passed while Irene tried not to think about her dilemma, but it preoccupied her thoughts continually, nevertheless. She continued to pray that it would either work out or that she could feel peace over letting it go. But her feelings didn't change, and she knew that Walter was likely praying that she would let go of this ridiculous notion and just be content with the life she had. She sincerely wished that she could be more the wife that Walter wanted, but she couldn't deny who and what she was—who God had created her to be.

The following Sunday, early in the evening, Irene was pleasantly surprised to have her parents stop by for a visit. She realized within a few minutes that while they were glad to see Walter and Irene and the children, they had come with something specific in mind.

"Might we sit down and talk?" Levi asked Walter, then he glanced at Irene. "The four of us?"

"Of course," Irene said. Walter didn't comment. He just took a seat and waited.

Irene's heart pounded as she waited for what she believed would be some gentle guidance from her parents in believing that she should let go of the idea of traveling thousands of miles to engage in something that was full of uncertainty and so utterly impractical. She saw her father reach for her mother's hand, which implied that they were completely united in whatever they had to say. But it had always been that way. Even when they had disagreed, eventually they would come to an agreeable

compromise, because they were both willing to go to the Lord, and that meant they would be able to know the Lord's will when it came to important matters. She wished that Walter could understand the true source of her desires, but looking into her parents' faces, she felt certain that her dream of going to England was about to come to an end.

"We've been thinking about what you came to talk to us about," Levi said.

"What would that be?" Walter asked.

"About going to England to study medicine," Irene said.

Walter let out an annoyed sigh and turned his attention back to his in-laws.

"We've both prayed about this," Levi continued, "and we've discussed it a great deal, if you must know. We didn't want to support you in something if it wasn't right. On the other hand, we didn't want to *not* support you if it *is* right. The thing is . . . we're both in strong agreement that you should do this, and we want to help make it happen."

Irene sucked in her breath and couldn't let it out. She felt sure she had heard them wrong. She'd wanted so badly to hear the words that they would be supportive that she had surely misconstrued her father's meaning. Or perhaps he'd transposed words and he'd said it differently than he'd meant it. She was still holding her breath when Levi said, "We've made the decision to mortgage our home to give you the necessary funds to pay for the trip and whatever you'll need to get your training and care for yourself while you're away."

Irene's breath came out in a sharp gasp that turned to a sob before she slapped her hand over her mouth. Alice smiled at her daughter with a sparkle of tears in her eyes, as if she fully understood how Irene was feeling. She then said, "We would also like to care for the children while you're away. That way Walter won't be burdened with having to concern himself with them, and he can come to see them as much as he'd like. Knowing how much we love them, you'll be able to focus on your studies and not worry."

Irene was only vaguely aware of Walter's silence that implied his displeasure. She was more focused on the reality that all of her prayer and fasting and pondering and desires had just come neatly together in a beautifully wrapped package, a gift from God as surely as if it had come wrapped in shiny paper with a big red bow. She sprang out of her

chair and hugged her parents ferociously, laughing and crying at the same time, muttering her gratitude over and over. Alice and Levi both laughed as well, sharing in their daughter's joy. Walter just sat there, his aura of displeasure growing more visible by the moment.

When Irene had calmed down and returned to her chair, she saw her father lean his forearms on his thighs and look firmly at Walter. "I know this is hard for you, Walter," Levi said. "As your father-in-law I have no right to meddle, and I would never do so. But as a father to both of you, I would ask that you make an effort to understand Irene's need to do this. I know she loves you, and she needs your support. I earnestly believe that her desires are righteous, and her purpose in this is to honor God's will in regard to her mission in this world. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be offering my support in this way."

"I guess it's all settled, then," Walter said in a tone that sounded more like his pride had been wounded than anything else. He got up and left the room.

A wake of silence followed his departure, until Alice said gently, "You must be patient with him. Your disagreeing with him does not merit discord in the marriage."

"I understand, Mother. I've truly tried to help him understand why this is so important to me."

"A year from now," Alice said, "this will all be behind you, and you can work on putting things right."

"In the meantime," Levi said, "I would say you've got to take this to the Lord once again and be absolutely certain you're making the right choice. If you can know with confidence that you're right with Him, then you have to leave Walter in His hands and go forward."

"Yes, of course," Irene said and hugged her parents again, so grateful and happy she felt as if she would burst.

That evening Irene tried again to talk to Walter about her feelings regarding this endeavor, but he was too focused on being without his wife and children for several months, and he kept bringing up the problem of what people would think. For all of Irene's efforts to reason with him, she had to accept that he was never going to be happy about this. She assured him that she loved him, and that she would follow her father's advice to pray about it again and be absolutely certain it was the right thing. He made no comment on that, and once he'd gone to sleep Irene

cried silent tears. She felt torn in wondering how she could honor her relationship with God and follow her heart, and at the same time have it come between her and her husband. She simply had to remind herself that for all that Walter was a good man in many ways, he was human and fallible. As she was. She couldn't stand up for her own feelings on the matter without respecting his. All she could do was continue to reassure him and move forward.

Following more prayer and fasting, Irene knew what she had to do. Once she had made her decision, she put her focus on making all of the arrangements, grateful for the modern means of travel available to her that made it possible to get to London within a couple of weeks. She thought of her pioneer ancestors, just a few generations back, who had come by wagon train to this valley, enduring great hardship to establish new communities and create the way of life they now enjoyed. A decade into the twentieth century, Irene had the luxury of riding in an automobile to the train station, and then going by rail to the East Coast, where she would board a steamer in order to cross the Atlantic. A part of her felt deeply nervous to be going so far on her own, but in her innermost self she knew it was the right thing to do. She'd made her decision for all of the right reasons, and she was prepared to stand by it.