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the
LIBRARIAN
of
BOONE'S
HOLLOW

a novel

Kim Vogel Sawyer

AUTHOR OF A SILKEN THREAD

The Librarian of Boone's Hollow

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Books by Kim Vogel Sawyer

Unveiling the Past

A Silken Thread

Ours for a Season

Beneath a Prairie Moon

Bringing Maggie Home

Echoes of Mercy

Grace and the Preacher

Just As I Am

The Grace That Leads Us Home

Guide Me Home

Room for Hope

Through the Deep Waters

What Once Was Lost

When Grace Sings

When Love Returns

When Mercy Rains

The Librarian of Boone's Hollow

A Novel



KIM VOGEL SAWYER



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THE LIBRARIAN OF BOONE'S HOLLOW

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

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In memory of *Mom*, who taught me to love books,
to follow Jesus, and to always be kind
(even to those who don't "deserve" it)

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I say unto you which hear, love your enemies,
do good to them which hate you.
—Luke 6:27

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Mid-May 1936
Lexington, Kentucky
Addie Cowherd

DURING HER THREE YEARS AS A STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY of Kentucky, Addie had never been summoned to a dean's office. Until today. Her roommate, Felicity, had proclaimed with typical dramatic flair that being asked to meet with Dean Crane first thing on a Friday morning would have cast her into an endless pit of nervousness. Addie wasn't nervous. Curious? Most certainly. But not nervous. At least not much.

She traveled the wide hallways of the campus's main building, the heels of her freshly polished black patent pumps clicking a steady rhythm on the marble tile. Why did Dean Crane want to see her? Felicity suggested perhaps she'd been voted one of the campus beauties. Last night before bed, she had fluffed Addie's hair with her hands and exclaimed, "Oh, to have hair that lays in such delightful waves, all on its own accord! And what a wondrous color—blended pecan and caramel. Mine's as straight as a pin and so blond it's almost white. Surely I'm not the only one who's taken note of your physical attributes."

Addie's heart now gave a little flutter. Could it be? What girl wouldn't be flattered by the title of campus beauty? But then she dismissed the idea. She was too tall, too thin, too . . . bookish to be a beauty. The petite girls with button noses, sparkling blue eyes, and infectious giggles—the ones like Felicity—always seemed the

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top picks for popularity. Besides, senior girls were chosen as campus beauties, and Addie was only a junior.

She climbed the stairs to the building's second level, other possibilities creeping through her brain. Were her latest test scores the top in her class? Did he want her to mentor a younger, less confident student? Probably not the latter, as the year was nearly over, but the former could be true. Wouldn't Mother and Daddy be proud when she told them? She rounded the final corner and approached the secretary's desk positioned outside the dean's office door.

She smiled at the gray-haired, thin-faced woman sitting behind the oversize desk. "Hello, I'm Addie—er, Adelaide—Cowherd. Dean Crane sent a message saying he wishes to speak to me."

"Adelaide Cowherd . . ." The woman checked a notebook lying open on the desk's pull-out shelf. "Yes, his nine-fifteen appointment. You're right on time." She pressed a button on a little box and leaned close to it. "Dean Crane, Miss Cowherd is here."

"Send her in," a voice crackled from the box.

The secretary gestured to the richly stained raised-panel wooden door behind her. "Right through there, young lady."

Addie took one step and then paused. Should she have worn her Sunday suit? Although at least two years old, the navy-and-white plaid shirtwaist she'd selected from her array of everyday dresses showed no frays or stains. Even so, perhaps it was too casual an outfit for meeting with someone as important as the dean of students.

"Miss Cowherd, Dean Crane has a busy morning ahead. Please don't keep him waiting."

"Yes, ma'am." Too late to worry about her dress. She'd have to go in. But she smoothed the front of her pleated skirt, centered her belt buckle, and straightened her spine—no slouching, Mother always said, even if she was tall for a girl—before giving the brass doorknob a twist. The door swung open on silent hinges, and she

crossed the threshold. She sucked in a startled breath. Built-in bookcases packed with books, some standing vertically and others stacked horizontally, filled three walls all the way from the floor to the ceiling in the spacious, windowless office. She'd thought Daddy's study at home and his collection of printed works impressive, but Daddy had only two stacks of barrister shelves, four sections each. A desire to peruse the dean's shelves made her insides twitch.

"Miss Cowherd?"

Addie forced her attention to the dean, who stood beside a gleaming mahogany desk in a slash of pale lamplight, his pose as dignified as that of a judge overseeing a courtroom. Some of the rowdier students called Dean Crane Ol' Ichabod, a title Addie had always found offensive, but seeing the unusually tall, thin man up close, she understood the nickname. "Yes, sir?"

The dean peered at her over the top of a pair of wire-rimmed half-moon glasses, which sat precariously at the end of his narrow, hooked nose. "Please close the door and have a seat."

Addie snapped the door into its casing, shutting out the bright light from the hallway's many hanging pendants, and crossed the thick carpet to a pair of matching round-back, padded armchairs facing his desk. She perched on the brocade seat of the one on the right and placed her laced hands in her lap. She offered the dean a smile.

Fine tufts of white hair that stuck up like dandelion fluff on top of his head and bushy salt-and-pepper muttonchop whiskers gave him an almost comical appearance. But his stern frown spoiled any cheerful effect. A curtain of dread fell around her, and her stomach performed little flip-flops. A man who appeared so dire wouldn't deliver good news. Felicity's endless pit of nervousness suddenly seemed less far-fetched.

He settled in his chair. "Thank you for coming, Miss Cowherd. I know this is a busy time for students, preparing for final examina-

tions.”

“Yes, sir, it is.” She forced herself to speak calmly. “But I presumed it was something important.”

“You presumed correctly.” He opened a folder that lay on an exceptionally large blotter, his movements slow and painstaking, giving the impression the card stock folder was actually formed from a slab of stone. He tapped the top page of the short stack of papers inside the folder with his long, bony finger. “Your academic achievements are impressive, Miss Cowherd. Yours are among the highest scores in the junior class.”

The acrobats in her stomach slowed their leaping. Perhaps his grim countenance was by habit. Even Preacher Finley back home in Georgetown was a somber man who rarely smiled but had a very kind heart. She placed her hands on the chair’s carved wooden armrests and crossed her ankles, allowing her tense muscles to relax. “Thank you, sir.”

He slid the sheet of paper aside, his gaze seeming to follow its path, then lifted a second page and squinted at it. “Every report from your professors is positive, praising your deportment, responsibility, and morals.”

Addie lowered her chin, battling a wave of pride. Her mother stressed humility. She wouldn’t shame Mother by gloating, but it surely sounded as if she were about to receive some sort of award. She coached herself to respond appropriately when the dean finally explained why he’d called her to his office.

“Which is why it saddens me to dismiss you as a student.”

She jerked her head upright so abruptly her neck popped. A spot below her left ear burned as if someone had touched a match to her flesh. She rubbed the spot and gaped at the man. “Dismiss me? But why?”

He closed the folder. “Lack of payment.”

Addie’s jaw dropped. “L-lack . . .” She shook her head. “There must be a mistake.”

"There's no mistake, Miss Cowherd. The tuition and board payments ceased to arrive in February. Your parents were allowed our standard three-month grace period, but despite repeated letters requesting payment, no monies were sent. Thus, we have no choice but to prohibit you from attending classes."

"But it's only a week to the end of the term. Won't I be allowed to take my final examinations?"

"I'm afraid not." The man's expression and tone revealed he took no pleasure in delivering the mandate, but that recognition did little to comfort her. "Campus personnel and each of your instructors have been informed of the decision. Any attempts to enter classrooms or the cafeteria will be met with an immediate response from security officers."

Who would escort her away in humiliation. She'd witnessed such happenings more times than she cared to recall during her years at the college. With so many families struggling financially due to the stock market crash of '29, college was a luxury many couldn't afford. She never thought she'd be one of the unfortunate ones, though.

She shifted to the edge of the chair and implored the man with her eyes. "Dean Crane, there must be some sort of mistake. I'll call my parents. I'm positive they'll send the money right away." They'd never denied her anything she truly needed. And she needed her degree. "If they promise to do so, may I stay?"

"It's been three months, Miss Cowherd."

Fear and worry battled for prominence. "But my father never lets bills go unpaid. Not ever. The payments must have gotten lost in the mail. Or stolen." Yes, that had to be it. She stood. "Aren't there desperate people everywhere? Someone must have known there was money in the envelopes and taken them before they could reach the college. There can be no other explanation."

Dean Crane stared at her for several seconds, lips set in a grim line, beady eyes narrowed. Finally, he sighed. "Very well. Contact

your parents. Ask if they sent payments for March, April, or May.” He pulled a gold watch from his vest pocket and scowled at it. “Come back at three o’clock and apprise me of their response. If there’s been, as you suspect, a mistake, I’ll speak with the committee about making an exception.”

Addie nearly collapsed from relief. “Thank you, sir.”

“Although you may not attend classes or take meals in the cafeteria until the financial matter is rectified, you may remain in the dormitory until the end of term. I understand from the business office manager that your room bill is current.”

“Yes, sir. I work all day Saturday and a few hours each Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday cataloging books at the city library to pay for my room.”

“Very commendable.”

“Thank you.” Daddy had insisted she contribute toward her education, claiming she would appreciate it more if she helped pay the bill. She’d resented it at first, but she’d come to realize he was right. Even though she had to give nearly every penny she earned to the college, it gave her a sense of pride and satisfaction to know she was helping to pay her way.

“Dean Crane,” the secretary’s voice intruded from the little box on the corner of the dean’s desk, “your next appointment is here.”

He rose with a slow unfolding of his legs and rounded the desk, gesturing for Addie to precede him. At the door, he offered the closest thing to a smile she’d seen since she entered the room. “I wish you well in your search for answers, Miss Cowherd. I’ll see you at three.”

Addie scurried out, avoiding eye contact with the student waiting to enter. Was he facing a similar fate? She set a quick pace up the hallway, grateful the pleats in her skirt allowed her to take long strides. The sooner she reached a public telephone and called Mother, the sooner this embarrassing situation would be put to right.

She pattered down the stairs to the first floor and joined the flow of students. The scent of waffles and syrup wafted from the cafeteria. Her stomach growled, and she placed her hand against her belly, grimacing. She'd skipped breakfast after taking a little extra time preparing for her meeting with the dean. If she'd gone with Felicity for her customary coffee and toast with jam earlier that morning, would she have been barred from entering the cafeteria? Imagining the humiliating scene was enough to make her cheeks burn. She needed to straighten out this embarrassing situation as quickly as possible.

She wove between others, perspiration prickling her skin. Not yet ten o'clock, and already the air creeping through the open windows was hot and humid. She'd likely need a change of clothes before she met with Dean Crane again. At the very least, she'd give herself a quick wash in the dormitory lavatory. What a relief to know she wouldn't be booted from the campus, thanks to her paying her room bill separately. She wouldn't receive another paycheck from the library until the end of the month, and she didn't have enough money for train fare to go home to Scott County. But how could she remain on the campus and not attend classes without feeling completely out of place? Although only five and a half years old when she was ushered through the door of the Kentucky Orphans' Asylum, she'd never forgotten the feeling of displacement, of knowing she didn't belong. She had no desire to revisit that uncomfortable feeling.

She reached the section of the building that housed the business office. Swiping away the perspiration tickling her temples, she trotted the last few yards to the end of the wide hallway, where a row of booths holding telephones were available for the students' use. A female student stood in the far right booth, chattering animatedly about attending a recent fraternity dance. Addie took the booth at the far left. She sent up a quick prayer that the girl wouldn't overhear her conversation, then lifted the handset from its cradle.

Placing it to her ear, she poked her finger in the little circle for 0 and rotated the dial. She cringed at the discordant *ack-ack-ack* as the dial spun back into place.

An operator answered.

Addie cupped her hand around her mouth. "Yes, would you please connect me to the operator in Georgetown, Kentucky?"

"One moment, miss."

Addie tapped her foot and sent surreptitious glances over her shoulder while she waited for a connection. When she thought her chest might burst from impatience, a voice crackled in her ear. "Georgetown. Your number, please."

Addie recited her family's number and pressed the phone tight against her ear while shifting from foot to foot. She willed Mother to answer quickly and ease her fears, as she'd done since Addie was a child of six. Even though she hadn't been born to Penrose and Fern Cowherd, they'd always treated her as if she had. How she loved and appreciated them for taking in a sad little orphaned girl and giving her such a grand life.

"Miss?"

Addie groaned. The operator's voice again. Which meant the line must be busy. Sociable Mother was probably talking to one of her many friends.

"That number is not in service."

Addie drew back and frowned at the telephone. Had she given the wrong series of numbers? Granted, she hadn't called for quite a while, but surely she hadn't forgotten her parents' number. She closed her eyes and searched her memory. No, she'd been correct. "Are you sure you connected it properly?"

A huff met her ear. "Yes, miss, I'm sure. The number is not in service."

Maybe the telephone was broken. Telephones could break, couldn't they? Addie took a slow breath, forcing her racing pulse to calm. Daddy would be at the bank. Although she hated to bother

him at work, this was an emergency. "All right, then, please dial Georgetown Citizens Bank." She gave the number and gnawed a hangnail on her thumb, her pulse galloping.

"Citizens Bank. May I help you?"

Addie didn't recognize the man's voice, but she'd been away long enough to forget many of her father's coworkers. At least she'd reached the right place. "Yes. I'd like to speak to Mr. Cowherd, please."

"Penrose Cowherd?"

How many men with the surname Cowherd worked at the bank? "Yes, Penrose Cowherd."

"He's no longer employed here, miss."

Addie's legs turned to jelly. She slumped against the wall and slid down until her bottom met the narrow bench. She clung to the telephone receiver the way a drowning man gripped a life preserver. "What do you mean he isn't employed there? He's been employed there my whole life." Except for the two-year period when the bank was forced to close its doors. But the moment they'd opened again, the president had put Daddy back to work.

"Am I speaking to Addie?"

She managed a raspy yes.

"Addie, this is Mr. Bowles."

Oh, yes, Mr. Bowles—a middle-aged man with coal-black hair and a mustache to match. He'd given her clove-flavored candy sticks on visits to the bank when she was a little girl. She could speak freely with him. "Mr. Bowles, I don't understand. Why is Daddy not employed there anymore?"

"The bank got bought out. The new owner let go any man older than fifty-five. Your daddy's in his sixties, so . . ."

"When did this happen?"

"Last October."

"October?" She squawked the word. Seven months ago? How could she not have known? Yes, Daddy had been home her entire

Christmas break. But when she asked why he wasn't going to work, he kissed her cheek and said, "*I'd rather spend the time with you, sugar dumplin'.*" She'd never suspected he wasn't telling the full truth. "They probably can't afford to keep the telephone connected."

She didn't realize she'd spoken the thought until Mr. Bowles's voice rumbled in her ear. "They lost the house a month ago. According to bank gossip, they took a room in Mrs. Fee's boardinghouse."

Addie envisioned the huge clapboard building on a rise at the edge of town. With peeling paint, missing spindles on its porch railing, and a dirt yard dotted with weeds, the Fee boardinghouse was the saddest looking dwelling Addie had ever seen. Even sadder than the ramshackle orphans' home where she'd spent a dismal nine months before Mother and Daddy adopted her. Tears pricked, and she bit the inside of her lip—the tactic she'd used since childhood to prevent herself from crying.

"I can give you the number there, if you want it."

She closed her eyes and rested her forehead against the wooden barrier. Her chest ached. She could hardly bear to think of her beloved parents residing in a room in the Fee boardinghouse.

"Addie? Do you want the boardinghouse's number?"

If she didn't say something, Mr. Bowles would think she'd hung up. She swallowed a knot of agony and forced her tight vocal cords to speak. "Yes. Thank you." She didn't have anything on which to write, but she chanted the number to herself as she hung up and then hooked her finger in the dial.

But she didn't turn it. She stared at the wall, puckering her brow.

Why hadn't Daddy let her know things were so bad? Why hadn't Mother told her they'd moved? Anger churned in her belly. She wasn't a child to be coddled anymore. They should have been honest with her. How cruel to let her find out on her own. She expected better from her ordinarily loving parents. Even if they couldn't

call, they could have written. They should have—

She jolted. Maybe they *had* written. When had she last visited her mail cubby? She cringed. Six weeks ago, at least. Caught up in sorority activities, studying, and other end-of-year programs and events, she hadn't even thought about checking for letters from home.

Guilt chased away the anger. She smacked the receiver into its cradle, bolted from the telephone booth, and headed for the mail cubbies.



Addie

HOLDING HER BREATH, ADDIE LEANED DOWN AND peered into her mail cubby. Three letters waited in her box. Her breath burst free on a little cry of regret.

She pulled them out. A quick glance confirmed all were from her parents. She pressed the envelopes to her aching chest and bit the inside of her lower lip. Hard. Punishingly hard. When they hadn't received a reply to their missives, Mother and Daddy must have thought she didn't care at all. And they were right to make such a presumption. How could she have been so neglectful?

She arranged the envelopes in chronological order according to the post office date stamps but then impulsively slapped the most recent one, sent the third of May, on top. She would read it first, although she already surmised what she would find inside, given her conversations with Dean Crane and Mr. Bowles.

Likely, the letter would confirm no money was coming. She wouldn't be allowed to take her final examinations. The entire semester, all the studying and completed assignments, was wasted. Sadness—or was it anger?—struck with force. Facing Dr. Crane and admitting that her parents were unable to pay the bill would require courage. Maybe she wouldn't meet with him after all. What was the use?

With the letters gripped firmly in her hand, she set a straight

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path for Patterson Hall, ignoring the winding sidewalks and crossing the recently mowed grass instead. Students were discouraged from treading upon the lush lawns, and she'd always made use of the established walkways. But she wasn't a student any longer, and therefore, the rules didn't apply to her. Besides, if she didn't reach her room quickly, she might not be able to hold back the tears pressing for release. She'd nearly bitten through the tender skin behind her lip, and it wasn't helping. If she was going to cry, she would do it in private.

She reached the women's dormitory, trotted through the foyer, clattered up the staircase, then burst into her room. Felicity leaped up from the desk in the corner and spun toward the door, her blue eyes wide and her slender hand pressed to her lace bodice.

"What are you doing here?"

They asked the question at the same time. Felicity sounded confused, but aggravation tinged Addie's tone. She tamped down the unwelcome emotion and spoke more kindly. "Why aren't you in class?"

"Professor Dunbright had a toothache and canceled. So I decided to study for my biology examination, even though the subject positively bores me to tears." Felicity perched sideways on the chair, draped her hands over the chair's ladder back, and rested her chin on her knuckles. "Tell me about your meeting with Dean Crane. Was his office as dark and spooky as my guys say?" Felicity always referred to the half dozen boys who regularly ran in their circle of friends as her guys. Sometimes Addie found it endearing, and other times childish. In her present mood, the reference rankled.

"It was dark but hardly spooky." Addie plopped onto the corner of her unmade bed, sliding the letters from Mother under the rumpled sheets. "I keep telling you not to listen to the guys. They like to exaggerate."

"I know." Felicity wrinkled her nose, giggling. "But they're so

cute. I can't ignore them."

Addie lowered her head and fiddled with the envelopes, stifling a sigh. How had she and Felicity formed such a tight bond, given their many differences? Felicity was an active member of the arts-and-theater sorority, while Addie had pledged the literary sorority. Felicity was flighty and prone to giggles, but Addie—having been raised by loving but older, no-nonsense parents—rarely indulged in giggling or impulsive behavior. If thinking before speaking was a sport, Felicity would always be at the bottom of the heap. Even so, Addie had grown to love her roommate as a sister, and she didn't doubt Felicity felt the same way about her. Could she trust her with this recent, unsettling news?

She looked up and started to speak, but Felicity was bent over the desk again, apparently studying. Knowing how difficult it was for the girl to stay focused for any length of time, she chose not to disturb her. She slid the latest letter from beneath the sheets and carefully opened the flap. After stretching out on her side with her back to Felicity, she removed the sheets of Mother's flowered stationery from the envelope and unfolded them.

Our dearest Adeladybug . . .

The childhood nickname took her back to rosy days of love and laughter. How writing this letter must have pained Mother, whose kindness was such that she couldn't even swat a fly without feeling guilty for ending its life. Tears filled Addie's eyes, and she blinked to clear them.

I'm sorry to send so many dismal missives. We are sure you are reeling and uncertain how to respond. Yet your daddy and I believe you are old enough to accept these realities and need to be aware of how our lives have so rapidly changed. Or perhaps not so rapidly, as we have been on a slow descent for quite some time.

You likely noticed the new address on the envelope. We no longer

have our house on Briar Drive. The bank foreclosed on it. We are sad, but we aren't bitter. After all, we had many happy years there, and the bank is only doing what it must to recover its money. If we'd more prudently used our reserve when Daddy lost his job in '30, perhaps things would be different, but one cannot go back in time. So we choose to move forward and look for the blessings.

Addie smiled. So many times she'd heard Mother say, "Look for the blessings, Addie." Mother believed the promise in Romans 8:28 that all things—even the hard things of life—worked for the good of the believer. Mother was the most steadfast believer Addie knew. She'd taught Addie to pray and instilled in her the habit of reading from God's Word at the start of the day. Maybe when Addie grew up all the way, she would be as strong in faith as her mother.

Her smile faded, though, when she reread *If we'd more prudently used our reserve when Daddy lost his job in '30 . . .* During those two years, when the bank's doors remained locked and Daddy was without a job, they had continued to pay for her ballet and piano lessons, allowed her sweets from the candy shop every Saturday, bought her new dresses each season. Had they not indulged her, would they have had the funds to save the house? Guilt nibbled at her, and she lifted the letter again.

Our biggest concern now is for you. Our room here at the boardinghouse is spacious enough to accommodate our bedroom furniture and our favorite chairs from the parlor, so we have a sitting area in which to relax. With photographs and a few favorite pieces of bric-a-brac surrounding us, we've made it a cheerful place, but it is only one room. If you were a little girl, we could tuck a cot in the corner for you; however, you're far too grown up to share a room with your parents. The boardinghouse is full—we were fortunate to secure this room. My tears flow as I write, but I don't know where you will stay when you return to Georgetown.

Daddy is searching for employment, and you know how determined he is. As soon as he is working and we've been able to save a little money, we will move into a house with a second bedroom for our sweet little ladybug. You haven't been cast out forever. (Daddy says to assure you that the books from his study, all your belongings, and the furniture from your room are safely stored in the loft of Preacher Finley's barn. We sold many items from the house, but Daddy adamantly refused to sell your beloved books or anything else of importance to you, and I agreed with him.)

An image formed in her head of her parents—gentle Mother, proud Daddy—carefully saving the things that mattered to her but selling their furniture and personal effects to strangers or, even worse, to their neighbors. The indignity of such an event . . . Why had God allowed them to suffer so? Tears filled her eyes again. She bit down until she tasted blood, but no amount of biting on her lip could stem the tide. A sob broke from her throat, a second burst out behind it, and she dissolved into a wailing mess.

Feet pattered on the floor, and warm arms surrounded her. “Addie, Addie . . .” Felicity rocked her the way Mother had when Addie was small and frightened by a storm. “What is it, dear one? Did Dean Crane say something to frighten you? Oh, I should have paid more attention to you than to my silly biology book. I’m so sorry.”

Her parents were burdened with a guilt they shouldn’t have to bear. She wouldn’t leave Felicity to suffer self-recrimination. She pulled loose and wiped her face with the corner of her sheet. “It isn’t your fault. Of course you need to study. I’m sorry I disturbed you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You’re more important to me than any old test ever could be.” Felicity pushed a strand of hair from Addie’s cheek, then caught hold of her hands. Her full lips formed a sympathetic pout. “I’ve never seen you cry. Something must be horri-

bly wrong. Please tell me. I'll do whatever I can to help."

Addie sniffed hard, her lower lip wobbling. "I doubt there's anything you can do, but I'll tell you anyway." She relayed her conversations with the dean and Mr. Bowles and details from Mother's letter. As Addie spoke, Felicity's mouth fell open and her eyebrows shot so high they nearly disappeared beneath her carefully coiffed bangs. Her explanation complete, Addie hung her head and shrugged. "So, there you have it. I'm . . . expelled, and I have nowhere to go."

"Barred from class and even from the cafeteria? How uncivilized! What do they expect you to do, starve to death?" Felicity bolted to her feet and paced back and forth in the narrow space between the beds, waving her arms. "The dean of students is supposed to defend students, not defeat them. If Ol' Ichabod won't do his job, then I'll start a petition. I'll organize a protest. I'll paint banners and assign students to march in front of the administration building while calling for—"

Addie grabbed Felicity's arm and pulled her onto the mattress. "You'll do no such things."

"But when people know what's happened to you, they'll—"

"No, Felicity."

Felicity twisted loose and glared. "Yes, Addie. It must be done. You must be vindicated."

Addie took hold of Felicity's shoulders. "Listen to me. The school can't allow me to attend classes or eat meals for free. How would that be fair to the students who are paying?" What about the balance she still owed? How would she pay the outstanding bill? She dropped her hands to her lap and heaved a huge sigh. "It's not Dean Crane's fault. He's only doing his job."

Felicity blinked rapidly. "But, Addie, you're my best friend in the whole wide world. How can I sit here and do nothing to help?"

Addie sent her a sidelong look. "Do you really want to help?"

"You know I do!"

“Then”—Addie offered a weak grin—“could you maybe sneak me a sandwich from the cafeteria? I didn’t have breakfast, and I’m famished.”

Felicity rose so quickly the mattress bounced. “A sandwich? Oh, no, my dear, I’ll bring you something hot and hearty, even if I have to carry it out in my pockets.” She marched to the door, hands clenched into fists and arms pumping. “Wait here. I’ll be back in two shakes of a lamb’s tail.” She paused in the doorway and cast a sorrowful look over her shoulder. “I wish I had lots of money. I’d pay your bill.”

Addie’s heart rolled over in her chest. “You’re a good friend, Felicity. Thank you.”

With a nod, she scurried out of the room.

Addie picked up Mother’s letter. She sniffed, cleared the moisture from her eyes with a sweep of the back of her hand, and focused on Mother’s precise penmanship.

*Your daddy and I are praying for you, asking God to comfort
your aching heart and to provide for you. We remind ourselves that
He is better equipped to meet your needs than we are, and we trust
Him to guide and protect you. I do hope you’ll find the time to write.
Even if you only want to rail at us and complain, we still want to
hear from you.*

*We love you forever and always,
Mother*

Addie read the other two letters, then folded them all together. She held the stack against her bodice and eased backward until her spine met the mattress. Her feet dangling toward the floor, she stared at the painted ceiling. When she was very young, before Mother and Daddy adopted her from the orphanage, she often lay awake at night and stared out the window at the sky, searching for a falling star on which to make a wish. The wish was always the

same. She whispered it now. "I wish I had a daddy and mama to love me."

God had heard her little-girl wish and sent Penrose and Fern Cowherd to rescue her from that dreary place. Mother and Daddy often said God chose her specially just for them, but she knew the opposite was true. She had a few fuzzy memories of the parents who'd birthed her, and they had been good people, but she couldn't imagine better parents than the ones who'd adopted her.

Even if you only want to rail at us and complain, we still want to hear from you.

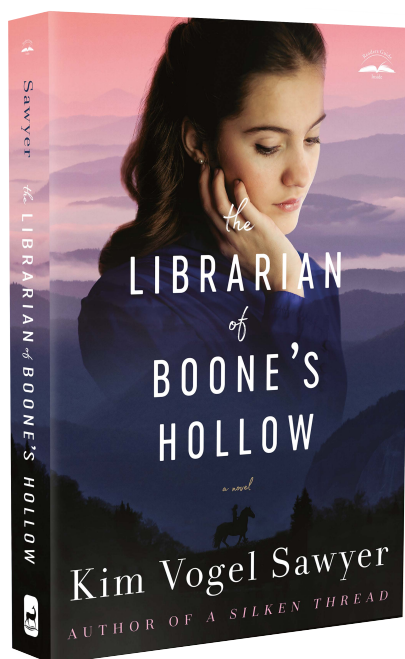
Addie pushed off the bed and hurried to the desk. She slid Felicity's books aside, retrieved paper and a pen from the drawer, and smacked them onto the desktop. A letter formed in her mind. She would not rail at and complain to the wonderful people who'd taken her into their home and loved her as their own. First, she would apologize for not writing sooner. Then she would thank them for everything they'd done for her. Finally, she would promise to get them out of that awful boardinghouse. They didn't belong there any more than she had belonged in the orphans' asylum.

A plan unfolded. She would find a job, save every cent possible, and send it to Mother and Daddy. Lexington was larger than Georgetown. Surely there were opportunities here for a girl to make an honest wage. It meant putting off her own plans for her future, but what kind of daughter would she be if she gave in to her selfish wants and left her parents in need? They'd rescued her. Now she would rescue them.

She took up the pen and wrote, "Dearest Mother and Daddy . . ."

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