

The
M I D W I V E S
B O O K 3

CHOICES *of the* HEART

A N O V E L

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For my mother. To say why would take at
least a chapter's worth of words.

Author's Note

Although most of the feuds of the Appalachian Mountains started after—and because of—the Civil War, not before (when my story is set), the practice of fighting between families came over from the Old Country, where warring clans were still the norm when many of these people immigrated to America.

This location is fictitious, but the beauty and wildness of the mountains in western Virginia are not. The reason for the beginning of this family feud happened in Kentucky. As I mention in these pages, local sheriffs and federal agents discovered that finding and arresting the perpetrators was nearly impossible. Getting lost in “hollers” or over a ridge was just too easy, and people didn’t tattle on their kinfolk. Some feuds lasted for thirty years or more. For all we know, some are still going on.

When I was a graduate student at Virginia Polytechnic and State University in the late 1990s, a friend from the area I’ve written about told me that some roads you come across you just don’t go down without an invitation. Of course, he might have been pulling my leg.

I lived in Appalachia for many years and still have family there, and I can imitate the dialect. For ease of reading, I have kept idiomatic expressions and spellings to a minimum. The one I employ here the most, I still use myself upon occasion—the insertion of “right” as an adjective, adverb, or whatever one needs it to be. I figure if it charmed me as a younger, single female, it would charm my heroine.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1–2

Seabourne, Virginia
April 1842

Esther Cherrett removed the sketchbook from her satchel and lifted it to the highest shelf in the armoire. She didn't need pictures of men whose form existed simply in her imagination's portrayals, in colored chalks—not where she was going. And drawings of her family would only make her sad. Make her feel guilty.

She didn't need the satchel either. Its packets of herbs, rolls of bandages, and canvas apron for protecting her dresses during a lying-in would be of as little use in her new position as were the drawings. She started to hoist it up to the shelf too, but her arms shook as though the black leather bag weighed a hundred pounds instead of ten, and she let it drop.

It landed on the blue floral rug with a thud. The latch sprang open and poked up like an accusing finger. *You shouldn't be doing this*, it seemed to say in the voice of Letty O'Tool, the eldest congregant in the church. *You aren't answering to your calling*.

Esther snapped the latch back into place, then popped it open again, retrieved the sketchbook from its shelf, and shoved it amongst the instruments of the profession she had

determined to leave behind in Seabourne. Leave behind with the scorn and ridicule she'd faced over the past four months.

"I'm ready now." She glanced around the room growing dim in the April twilight to see if she had forgotten anything essential for a 350-mile trek across the mountains and her new life beyond the Blue Ridge. Nothing on the dressing table, inside the armoire, beneath the bed. She had squeezed all she could manage into two carpetbags and an oilskin pouch. Everything else must remain behind.

"Except—" She dove beneath the bed and reached up between headboard and wall. Her fingers encountered stiff paper, and she yanked at it.

A bundle of foolscap and fine stationery tied together with a black ribbon dropped into her hand. She should either take the letters or burn them before she departed, whatever necessary so her parents didn't find the condemnatory, derisive, even threatening words from people they thought they knew well—her father's parishioners, her mother's patients. People her parents thought liked them and respected them, but who condemned them as well in the missives.

"Once I'm gone, they'll see it's not your fault," Esther said to the mental pictures of her parents.

She shoved the written messages into the oilskin pouch amongst her books, then turned to the door. The time had come to tell her parents about her plans to spare them all from more heartache.

Head high, knees wobbly, she descended the steps to the first floor—the ground floor, Papa called it in his confusing English way. At that moment, on that late April evening with the celebration of her youngest brother's wedding behind them and the guests about to depart, it was the crowded floor. Laughter and the clink of china cups on saucers rang out from the parlor. In the music room, someone played the pianoforte, accompanied by the chime of silverware in the

dining room, where the maids cleared away the supper dishes. The scent of lilacs and squeals of delight drifted through the open windows as children chased moths through Momma's garden.

Momma herself stood in the front hall, a shawl flung around her shoulders and her satchel in hand. She glanced at Esther, and her heart-shaped face lit with the warmth of her smile. "Are you coming with me after all?"

"Coming with you?" Esther blinked. "There's a lying-in?"

"Yes, Mrs. Parker's time has come." Momma's eyes glowed as they always did at the prospect of bringing a new life into the world. "I thought you would have heard their boy come to fetch me. But no matter. I can wait a few minutes if you wish to come."

Momma's half smile, her downcast eyes, conveyed her longing for Esther to say yes, she would go. The cord that had held her to her mother's profession for nearly six years tugged at Esther's heart, urging her to go, to experience the moments she had found so precious. She took a half step forward.

Then she saw the words from more than one missive emblazoned on her mind's eye. *Jezebel* was the kindest of them. If she went, she could further harm the career of midwifery at which her mother had worked for over forty years.

Esther retreated to the first step, her back against the balustrade. "Thank you, but I . . . can't." Esther's eyes burned, and she looked away to avoid seeing Momma's tightened lips.

Six years ago—no, six months ago—she would have been the one waiting for Momma before dashing out the door. For most of her life, she had eagerly awaited the day she would become Tabitha Eckles Cherrett's new apprentice midwife, carrying on a family tradition that had been passed from mother to daughter for generations, beginning in England and continuing in America.

And now Esther must break the chain so Momma could continue her work of delivering babies and healing.

“I came down to—to speak to you and Papa for a few minutes,” Esther added. “But if you must leave . . .”

She would have to tell Papa and let him break the news to Momma. Surely that would be easier than seeing Momma’s heart break.

“It can wait a bit,” Esther continued.

“Not if you’re troubled.” Momma set down her satchel. “I’ll send the boy ahead to tell them I’m on my way. They’re only across the square, so if there’s a need for me to be there sooner, I can run over.” She turned toward the kitchen, where the Parkers’ servant would be waiting to accompany the midwife across the darkening town square. “Your father is in his office looking for a book.”

“Her father is now in the hall to see why his two best ladies are talking about his whereabouts.” Papa emerged from behind the staircase with the languid stride not in the least diminished by his fifty-seven years. “Going out, Tabby?”

Momma turned to him like a compass to the North Star, her mouth relaxing into a smile again, her eyes more shining blue than gray. “Yes, Mrs. Parker’s time has come.”

“That’s wonderful news.” Papa laid his hand on her cheek and kissed her on her widow’s peak.

Esther clutched the newel post and fought a surge of pain in her middle strong enough to give her nausea. Since she’d turned sixteen, she had sought for a man who would make her look at him as Momma did Papa, and the other way around. She had conjured his image in her mind and set her dreams in colored chalks in her sketchbook. She observed her brothers courting, marrying, and the eldest two producing children. At the same time she watched the men on the eastern shore of Virginia shy away from her, call her Queen Esther behind her back, and end up marrying other females who didn’t have

an English marquess for an uncle, a mother who knew all the town's secrets, and a profession of her own.

Now the eligible young men simply ran from her as though fearing for their virtue.

"Are you going with her, Esther?" Papa turned to her, eyes wide.

"No, I—" Esther made the mistake of looking into his face, the eyes she dared not call beautiful since the same dark brown orbs with their gold flecks and ridiculously long lashes peered back at her from every mirrored surface, as did her own delicate version of his aristocratic features.

She flicked her gaze right and down, concentrated on a drift of lilac petals fallen from a vase and onto the polished floorboards. "I still can't. I—" She took a long, shuddering breath and gripped the newel post with both hands, curling her fingers into the carved leaf design like marlinespikes holding a sail line in place—holding herself in place before she raised her eyes to her parents' faces. "I'm leaving Seabourne."

Momma caught her breath and pressed her hand to her lips.

Papa's eyes widened further, and his chin hardened. "By whose leave, young lady?"

"Mine. That is—" A lifetime of obedience crowded down upon her shoulders. "I have to go. I have . . . no future here now."

"Of course you do." Momma spoke hastily. Perhaps too hastily. "Your sweet spirit will overcome the talk."

"When some new scandal comes along?" Esther cast her parents a smile that barely moved her lips up at the corners. "Perhaps in another thirty years or so?"

"Sarcasm is not attractive in a young lady," Papa said. Then he sighed. "But I wish it didn't hold at least a drop of truth." He closed the distance between them and rested his hand over hers on the newel post. "You aren't going to brazen this out, my dear? Have I raised a craven for a daughter?"

“I think so.” Esther blinked back tears and would not meet his gaze. “I’m running away, I am well aware. And I see no other choice.”

“You could have discussed it with us.” Momma joined them at the foot of the steps. “If you want to go, we can send you back west with the Dochertys.”

“I thought about that.” Esther glanced toward the parlor and the remaining guests who had come for the wedding. “But they know.”

“They’ll never tell anyone,” Momma said.

Esther nodded. “I agree. But they know, and perhaps they have their doubts about me. About whether or not I’m telling the truth.” She removed her hand from beneath Papa’s and backed up a step. “I just wanted to tell you of my plans so you wouldn’t worry.”

“As if we won’t.” Papa reached out his hand to her.

Esther’s fingers twitched to take it and go down to him and Momma, let them hold her as they had when she was small, as they had four months earlier, as they had every time she hurt and needed comfort. The idea of living without their loving arms around her whenever she needed reassurance, which seemed like every day now, felt like a hole ripping open inside her.

She backed up another step, out of arm’s reach. “I need to go where no one knows anything more about me than they need to.”

“But you can’t, child,” Momma protested. “How will you live? You might not be safe on your own.”

Esther bit down on her tongue to stop herself from reminding them that she hadn’t been safe living at home.

“I won’t be on my own,” she said instead. “The families I’ll be working for are coming to fetch me.”

“Indeed.” Papa’s supercilious eyebrows arched toward a hairline now more silver than the deep brown shot with cop-

per and bronze that Esther had inherited. “And when is this, and who are these families?”

Esther crossed her arms over her chest. “S-soon, and no one you ever heard of. They live on the other side of the commonwealth. I didn’t want to leave without letting you know first.”

“I suppose we are honored,” Papa murmured.

Momma laid her hand on his arm. “Sarcasm, love.”

“Ah, yes, my dear conscience.” He smiled at Momma.

Esther’s heart crushed down on her stomach, it hurt so much to see how deeply they loved one another even after thirty-three years of marriage. She had dreamed of having that kind of future with her husband. Now she would never have a husband.

“Please,” she whispered, clasping her upper arms with her hands, “just let me go.”

Papa gazed up at her, the corners of his mouth tight. “Esther, we would be neglecting our God-ordained duty if we let you go without knowing to whom and to where.”

“And if they are godly men and women,” Momma added before drawing her lower lip between her teeth. She failed to stop a tear from slipping from one corner of her eye.

Esther’s own eyes burned. “I can’t. I mean, I’d rather no one here know so the letters can’t—” She clapped her hand over her mouth.

Papa’s eyes narrowed. “What letters?”

“Nothing.” She started to turn away.

“Do not!” Papa surged past her up the steps and blocked her way. “Esther Phoebe Cherrett, what letters?”

She looked up at him without meeting his eyes. “Some notes people have sent me, is all.”

“And why were we not told about them?” Papa demanded.

Esther shrugged, realized how disrespectful that was, and shook her head. “Please don’t make me tell you. They were mean.”

“Did they suggest you leave town?” Momma asked.

Esther nodded.

Papa ground his teeth. “And you think you’ll give in?”

“To protect all of you, yes.”

“Protect us?” Momma began.

“Regardless of why,” Papa said at the same time, “you will go nowhere without telling us where and with whom.”

“Nor without us meeting—” Pounding on the front door interrupted Momma.

“Mrs. Cherrett,” a shrill voice called through the panels.

“Mrs. Cherrett, quick.”

Momma dropped her head for a moment, then straightened her shoulders. “Dominick, I am so sorry to have to leave you, but duty calls.”

“I know, Tabby. It is quite all right.” Again he gave her that devastating smile that must have melted Momma’s heart the first time she met him.

Esther closed her eyes and considered making a dash for the rear staircase while he was distracted with Momma’s departure. She took a step down.

The parlor door opened, and her four brothers, their wives, and two guest couples spilled out, chattering and laughing and talking about joining the children on the lawn. People Esther loved so much she couldn’t breathe. Her heart raced at what she was about to do, but she had no choice. She flung herself into their midst and followed them into the yard and the growing darkness. Behind her, Papa said something about her coming back. She ignored him. If she turned back and read the pain on his face, she wouldn’t be able to leave for anyone’s sake.

The cool, damp air of mid-spring wrapped its arms around her, a contrast to the cold fog that had clutched her as she ran home in January. Ran away from the disaster she had surely brought upon herself.

Run. Run. Run now and don't look back.

Not yet. She couldn't leave her things behind. She wanted to see her family one more time.

She ran to the garden gate and opened the latch. The wrought iron swung out on well-oiled hinges.

And two shadows detached themselves from either side of the opening.

She gasped, choking on a cry, and flattened herself against the gate, hand groping for the latch.

"You're safe." The voice belonged to a female, gentle and low with the hint of a mountain twang. "I'm Hannah Gosnoll. My brother Zachary Brooks and I are here to carry you west."

"But I thought—I thought—" Esther's breathing and heart raced as though she'd been running. She took a deep breath to steady herself. "I thought the Tollivers were coming to fetch me."

"They were." The voice of the taller shadow—presumably Zachary Brooks—was deeper, smoother than his sister's. "But our cousin Griffin suffered an unfortunate accident on his way here."

"An accident?" Esther's mind raced over the letter she had received from Mrs. Tolliver, the plea to take the work for the sake of her younger children. She had warned that life in the mountains could be difficult but not dangerous. "What sort of an accident?"

"Nothing serious," Hannah said.

"As long," Zachary added, "as that knife in his belly didn't go through his innards."

2

Miss Esther Cherrett caught her breath, started to say something. At least she made a noise in her throat like intended speech, but nothing emerged.

Hannah kicked Zach with the narrow toe of her boot. If he hadn't worn thick leather over his ankles, the strike would have crippled him for hours. As it was, he grunted from the impact, glared at her even though she couldn't see it in the dark, and opened his mouth to apologize for mentioning the attack on his cousin. He just blurted it out because, of course, she was expecting Griff and Bethann Tolliver, not just Zach and Hannah.

Zach opened his mouth to speak, but a gaggle of children ran across the lawn, calling Miss Esther's name.

"Midnight beneath the oak," she whispered.

The gate closed. The children swarmed around her.

Zach sighed. "I shouldn't have told her."

"Maybe she won't come now that you did." Hannah turned toward the graveyard behind which they had sheltered the horses. "Either way, I'm not waiting here." Her feet swished through the grass.

Zach all but leaned on the fence in his attempt to listen to and watch the activities on the other side. The children wanted Esther to play some sort of game with them.

"For a little while," she told them. "But then you all have

to get tucked up in your beds. It's getting l-late." Her voice broke and she sniffed.

"Are you crying, Aunt Esther?" a little girl asked.

"Of course not, Leah. What do I have to cry about? Now, let's play. You can help me count while the others hide."

She began to count in unison with the little girl, while the others scattered around the house and grounds. A man with an accent Zach recognized as English, due to visitors to the mountains, called out to Miss Esther, and she stopped counting. Several people drew closer to the gate. Zach stepped back into the shadow of the garden wall, poised to run if someone opened the gate.

Miss Esther disappeared into the gloom of falling night.

Midnight. Four hours away. That meant her family did not want her to go, but she was coming anyway, coming despite him telling her what had delayed Griff.

Four hours to cool his heels in an unfamiliar town. It was a small town, he supposed, not like some they'd seen on their way east, but large enough no one had looked at him and Hannah oddly when they rode through. They could return to the public house on the square, have dinner, learn what they could of Miss Esther Cherrett. Maybe they could find out why a young lady living in a fine house, with people who wanted her around, would choose to answer Aunt Lizbeth's advertisement in the Richmond newspaper and come teach mountain folk like them. Aunt Lizbeth said it was a calling of the Lord, most like. Hannah and cousin Bethann both said it was something else. Zach thought it could be good to have her in their midst.

Zach joined Hannah with the horses, and they walked into the square. The public house looked crowded, noisy, and smoky. No place he wanted to take a meal.

"I don't mind it," Hannah said. She and her husband had lived in a town for a while. "I'll go in and get us supper." She disappeared into the sea of people.

Zach waited in the dark.

“Maybe she won’t come,” Hannah said when she emerged.

But she did. At midnight by the striking of the church clock bell, Miss Esther Cherrett appeared at the gate carrying two bags. “Mrs. Gosnoll? Mr. Brooks?” she called. “There’s more. I’ll change my dress and bring them down.”

Zach moved the bags into the alleyway but remained by the gate waiting, watching the back of the house. She would come now. She wouldn’t leave her things at the gate with them and not come back . . . would she?

No, she wouldn’t. Past midnight, according to the church clock, she appeared as a shadow against the back of the house, more bags in her hands and a bundle over her arm.

She reached the gate, breathing a little heavily, and let her parcels fall to the ground with too loud a thud. “I’m ready to leave now.”

Not a hint of a quaver, no hesitation. Only determination.

Beauty, courage, determination. As usual, Aunt Lizbeth Tolliver was right when she said Miss Esther Cherrett possessed the right character for the position.

And for a wife for either her son or her nephew.

“Her nephew,” Zach mouthed, then stepped forward to lift the first bag. The oilskin sack proved heavier than its relatively small size implied. He hefted it onto his shoulder but gave Miss Esther a quizzical glance she couldn’t possibly see.

“And I thought we were the ones with the lead mine,” he muttered.

“Books,” she said.

“Right wise of you. We don’t have much in the way of books on the ridge.”

And he hadn’t read any of the ones in his mother’s collection, not more than the bits she had made him read and take to memory. Of course this lady would be bookish. It was why Aunt Lizbeth had picked her for the position.

And she would want a man who could discuss those books with her.

So he'd be catching up on his learning. Might be good for him with the mines and all. Maybe she could start his book learning along the way, give him an advantage over Griff.

First he had to get her on her way with them.

When she turned to latch the gate behind her, Zach realized the bundle over her arm was her own skirt, or the extra fabric of the skirt. She wore a riding habit. He'd seen them on his few visits to a town. They did well for a lady riding sidesaddle.

Their horses weren't broke to a sidesaddle.

Zach's heart sank. She might refuse to go once he informed her she would have to ride astride for over three hundred miles. Might as well get it over with at once.

"Our horses ain't broke to a sidesaddle, Miss Esther."

She flashed him a smile. "Then it's a good thing I have lots of fabric in my skirt." She shook out the excess folds.

"You could make two dresses out o' that material," Hannah said. "Kind of a waste, isn't it?"

"Not to preserve my modesty, it isn't." Miss Esther sounded just a bit uppity.

Zach laughed. Hannah needed that jab now that her husband ran the mine and made more money than his in-laws did as yet, for all the Brookses and Tollivers owned it. He liked Miss Esther's spirit.

He liked her too much.

"Let's get goin'." He spoke sharply and turned his back on the women, expecting them to follow.

They did—down the alleyway and around the graveyard to a copse of trees where four horses stood. Three served for riding and the fourth for supplies. They weren't about to waste money on inns in this fine weather. For this night, they needed to ride fast and far in case Miss Esther's parents came after them.

She had chosen to come. She said she was old enough to make the decision on her own, and if she wanted to stay, Zach wasn't about to stop her. But he longed for her to come with them, to save them all from destroying one another.

They mounted and headed through the quiet village. None of them spoke. Apparently Miss Esther could ride astride without too much complaint. Zach would find out how that came to be, there on the coast where ladies rode sidesaddle or not at all. Her back was straight, her head high, her ridiculous skirt draped over every inch of her legs right to the tops of her feet. In contrast, Hannah's legs showed from mid-calf down. Boots covered her. The practice seemed normal to Zach. Compared to Esther Cherrett now, it seemed vulgar.

If Miss Esther was appalled by them, she showed no sign of it. She remained silent, riding at an easy canter. All the way to Norfolk and beyond, to where the fine plantations began to march along the James River.

At dawn, they stopped in woods around one of those plantations.

"We'll have some breakfast here and rest the horses," Zach said. "I'll get a fire going while you and Hannah fetch water."

Miss Esther didn't follow Hannah to the creek. She stood beside her horse with her hands on her hips. "Tell me about this cousin who was stabbed."

Zach paused in the act of loosening the saddle cinch on his horse. Hannah halted halfway to the creek.

"Griff." Zach looked away, though she likely couldn't read his expression in the poor light. "He was ambushed on our way here. We stopped like this and went for firewood and . . ." He shrugged. "I best be getting that firewood or we'll be taking too much time."

She started to ask another question, but he entered the trees with a crunch of last year's pine needle carpet and scattered

cones, drowning her out. Maybe by the time he returned, he could talk about the attack on his cousin long enough to satisfy Miss Esther's questions. They surely wouldn't be too many. She had come with them, after all.

Zach paused in the act of gathering branches from a lightning-struck, dead tree.

Aunt Lizabeth had said she hadn't told Miss Esther about the fighting for fear she wouldn't come at all. "Can't have her finding out and turning back halfway here."

He shouldn't have mentioned Griff's attack, as the bruise on his ankle from Hannah's kick indicated. Esther Cherrett had come anyway, strutting out of her parents' house in her fancy city clothes like she ran off every night.

But maybe she did, and that was why she needed to start again where no one knew how to find her. A fine female to take into the Tolliver household and teach the young'uns the right way to go on in the world.

Zach smiled and ripped several branches from the downed tree. They snapped off. Good. Not rotten to the core and likely to burn too fast. A fairly recent lightning strike then. Easy wood for the small fire he wanted, just good enough to fry up some bacon and boil some coffee.

He took too long gathering more wood. Sunlight was beginning to stream through the foliage as he returned to the clearing where Hannah had already begun a small fire and set water to boil. Miss Esther perched on a log to one side, her head bowed over her hands as though she were praying. She looked up at his approach. A beam of sunlight shot between two branches and concentrated on her face.

Zach dropped the pile of branches in his arms. It crashed to the ground with a clatter, snap, and crunch of breaking, colliding wood. Hannah cried out a protest. He ignored her and stared.

Miss Esther Cherrett's beauty took his breath away. Her

hair wasn't just dark brown. It was like fine wood polished and set with bands of copper and gold. Her skin was as fine and smooth as one of Aunt Lizbeth's china bowls that she prized like her children, and wide, dark eyes gazed at him from beneath ridiculously long lashes.

"You're staring," Hannah muttered out of the side of her mouth.

"Sorry." Zach glanced away, then back.

For less than a heartbeat, his eyes met Miss Esther Cherrert's. Then her eyelashes swept down to shield those gold-flecked orbs, and her cheeks paled.

"Will you stop acting like a loon and feed the fire?" Hannah commanded.

"Yea, sure." Zach crouched to feed more wood to the fire. When he heard footfalls heading toward the creek, he made himself concentrate on the burning branches and not on watching Miss Esther walk away.

"She's right pretty," Hannah said. "And in a heap of trouble, I expect."

"Yea, she came with us for some reason, sounds like. Even with me telling her about Griff." Zach raised his head to watch Miss Esther kneel beside the creek.

She splashed water onto her face. She then took a comb from her pocket and raised her hands to her hair to twist and tuck and pat every strand into place.

Yes, she was indeed a lady, to care so much about being neat on the trail.

He glanced up at Hannah. "She's got courage."

"Either that," Hannah said as she set the spider over the fire, "or her trouble's bad enough she's willing to risk being in the middle of our troubles."

"Should we bring her along after all?" Zach watched Miss Esther rise in one fluid motion, then stand staring down at the water, her hands clasped behind her back as though she

contemplated deep thoughts, prayed, or perhaps simply admired the ripple of light on the water.

Hannah glanced over her shoulder. "I'm thinking she's wondering if she should come along."

"She'll come."

Zach didn't take his eyes off of her as she straightened her shoulders, turned, and marched back to the fire with a long-legged stride of self-confidence. Her rounded chin was set firm beneath a half smile, though she looked past rather than at him.

"What may I do to assist you?" she asked.

Hannah smirked. "Can you make coffee?"

"Of course." Miss Esther set about pouring water into the battered tin coffeepot, spooned in grounds from a bag, and set the pot on the edge of the fire without a second's hesitation.

Zach glanced at Hannah, who stared at Miss Esther wide-eyed.

She looked up from her preparations and smiled. "Why are you so surprised I can make coffee on a fire? I told Mrs. Tolliver of my skills, which she said were why she wants me for the position. She said something about primitive conditions in the mountains. I can assure you, some of the conditions at fishermen's huts . . . where my mother and I . . ." She faltered for the first time. "Why—why are you staring at me?"

Zach didn't have words to express the sense of a dozen butterflies beating their wings around the inside of his ribs.

But Hannah laughed. "You'll do, Miss Esther Cherrett. You'll do right well."

"For a position as a teacher, yes, I am well-educated thanks to my parents—"

"No." Hannah sliced her hand through the air between them. "As a wife for Zach or Griff."