

# *Destiny's Whirlwind*

by Catherine Ulrich Brakefield

## Chapter Bonus

Kentucky, February 28, 1882

Ice and snow pelted the glass, as the wind whipped through the Kentucky hills with a vengeance. Maggie Gatlan McConnell pressed her nose to the window pane of their home on the Shushan estate and gently stroked her protruding stomach.

She hadn't told Ben her labor pains had started. She didn't want to worry him, but he would need to help in the delivery. Doc Baker couldn't get to Shushan in this storm, nor her favored mid-wife. Perhaps their sharecropper family, Charlie and his wife, Naomi, could offer Ben and her assistance.

Her husband's heavy steps pounded the stairway, halting in the spacious entranceway. "Maggie, where are you lass?"

"In the parlor." She chuckled, his retort customary.

"I feel like a hunter stalking its quarry in this twelve-room estate."

Seeing her, his eyes smiled before his lips. "I prefer our wee little cabin we first occupied than this massive home; you were easier to find."

Square of shoulder, lean and muscular, his voice low and gentle. "The children are all tucked in their beds and asleep." He wrapped his arms around her middle and gently brought her closer to him. She laid her head on his broad chest and felt his solidity and security surround her. Age had not warped his stature, nor his resolve. "My love."

"Maggie," he turned her and gently swept his lips across hers. "After this wee babe is born, I will take you this summer to New York to see Johann Strauss. I hear he has written more lovely waltzes. Would you like that?"

She felt pain shoot down her back that made her legs feel like jelly.

"Maggie, my love, what is it?"

"Your child wants to see you."

"So soon?" He looked deeply into her eyes. "But I thought we had—"

"More time. I know, I thought for sure a week...but this babe is in a powerful hurry to meet this storm with one of her own."

He cradled her in his arms, and they gazed out the large window framed by red velvet drapes that graced the east side of their stately room. Both lost in their own thoughts. Both thinking the same thoughts.

"You were too fragile to be working alongside me in the fields, and you a wealthy southern belle from one the oldest families in Tennessee. 'Tis ashamed I am for not waiting to bring you here until—"

"I was put proper into the very soil my father took such pride in." Maggie turned, wagging her finger in front of his nose. "My father and I were close to starving. And it was you who brought me and my father from the pinnacles of despair into hope of a new future."

"Ah, my lass, war is a terrible thing, to be sure, what with a bleeding land creeping with carpet baggers and scalawags, like locust they were, eating away the very life of decent folks."

# *Destiny's Whirlwind*

by Catherine Ulrich Brakefield

"Trust in our Lord and Savior brought us safely through, Benjamin, do not forget that." Like the dawning light of a new day, the rays of rebirth slowly filtered through the south after the War Between the States. Renewed hope generated a new life.

"True, my bonny lass, there is a bright promise to be had for our children here at Shushan." Ben released his earth-shattering smile.

Together, they gazed out the window. The snow squall weakened, the hills rose and dipped like foamy hot milk. Ben stroked her midsection. She placed her hand over his. In the distance, the four tiny headstones of their babes dotted the hillside cradled with maples and walnut trees. Their first child, a boy, had come too early. He had a head of dark hair like his pa; then the wee girl, a toe head, barely five months when Maggie lost her, the third, another boy. Then she had lost a little girl to whooping cough just past her second year.

With the first one she blamed herself for toiling so hard alongside Ben. It was a hard life, with no let up to all the work. Ben had warned her to stay in the cabin. But she couldn't just sit by and watch her husband toil.

What had he planned to do in getting his fields ready for planting when his faithful horse up and died from colic one night? Pull the plow through the dirt without a body behind the plow handles to guide it?

"Maggie, my lass, you always were a worker—and a fighter to boot. Aye you never quit...on this land that the evil one purposed to tear into." He gazed into her eyes and his look was like a window into his soul. "Or on me, the man who didn't consider himself worthy to be wiping your boots...ah, all those lonely years of brooding over what didn't matter." He crushed her to him. "Nothing but a memory, it is. The love I once thought impossible, now a part of my soul...still, I blame myself for you losing our first three children."

"What of the fourth?" she buried her head into his broad shoulder. "No, my love, we must place it upon our Lord's shoulders. He has the strength to bear the burden." Maggie fought against the lump in her throat and stroked away a stubborn tear. Lonely childless years followed. Then God had heard her prayers and opened her womb. "Think instead of the three we do have, our hearty Chester, our beautiful Myra and little Bell."

"They have their mother's beauty and charm to be sure."

Maggie laughed. "And Chester has his father's good looks and strength. Have I mentioned that even at his young age of eight, he managed to protect Myra when her temper and tongue had gotten the better of her and that cracker boy nearly threw her in the lake? Then when one of the neighbor boys wanted to take Bell's little doll at church last Sunday, it was Chester that wrenched it out of the boy's grasp."

"Ha-ha, he did, did he? That's my boy." He pressed her to him, his head caressing hers. The door rattled with the power of the wind as ice and snow pelted the windows and doors. Maggie shivered, in spite of the warmth issuing from the large stone fireplace.

A contraction, small at first, then like a vice that started in her stomach, went clear through to her back and then down to her toes.

Ben caught her, then bent down and kissed her. "My bonny Maggie, it is time I get you put to bed proper like."

# *Destiny's Whirlwind*

by Catherine Ulrich Brakefield

Another contraction followed. It doubled her over. She panted. Ben picked her up.

“Oh, no Ben, I am much too big for—”

“Maggie, my love, you will never be too large. Cradling her body in his arms he carried her past the needlepoint pillows and overstuffed chairs, past the study on the opposite side of the walnut spindled stairway arching toward the second floor. Up the carpeted steps, he bore her past the five bedrooms to their impressive quarters that comprised the west wing of the house.

Ben kicked open the double doors and carried her through their sitting room. A fire burned brightly in the stone fireplace. Maggie chuckled, in spite of the sudden contraction that took her breath away for an agonizing moment. “Those pretty rocks you hauled here... from the fields, always bring a smile to my face remembering.”

Rocks couldn't stop her Ben, nor the hate of her countrymen, nor the gully washing rains or unbearable heat. He wanted to quit many times—but the belief in his dream had kept him working. Shushan was a throbbing tribute of Ben's hard work.

Every bedroom was graced with a stone fireplace, theirs being the largest. Ben said he'd been happy in a shack, as long as she was beside him. No, he didn't care about things; Shushan was more than a thing, a plot of land, a piece of earth...

Their neighbors didn't understand. They said Shushan was a strange name, especially for a farm. “Are you Jewish or Irish? Make up your mind.”

Maggie didn't understand it fully herself. For her Ben, the name comprised his hope for a torn nation, a retort to his bitter countrymen's hate. His estate had become his solemn prayer to God Almighty Himself that Ben would not give in nor give up.

He often quoted scripture. “‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue.’ Was not the earth formed by God's word? Did not John 1:14 say, ‘And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.’”

Ben was determined to make his words match his work even in this war-ravaged, weeping, and aching land.

“There, my love, now you rest.” He kissed her gently on her forehead, then solidly on her lips, as a bond. He knelt and prayed. A prayer entwined into one flesh.

He stared deeply into her eyes. “God has told me this bonny child will live, yea; she will be our Esther, when Shushan falls into clutches of evil men, she will bring her safely through. There will more children. He'll be gracing us with a hardy brood, Maggie my love.”

He covered her with her wedding quilt. Then before he reached the door, he turned and said, “I'll bed down the livestock and get Charlie, Naomi, and their daughter to help us bring this wee child into her destiny.”

Right now, all she cared about was getting this baby out and that it was healthy. “It's a lot to be placing on a babe, husband. And you are remembering that Katie is nearly blind. Charlie won't allow her near a stove.”

Well, Charlie's wife was a good midwife, once, before she took ill. I have a feeling that she and Katie will be a help to ye.”

# *Destiny's Whirlwind*

by Catherine Ulrich Brakefield

###

Ben pondered what he felt the Holy Spirit had whispered to his heart. The icy fingers of the wind whipped about his body sending his exposed flesh burning like he was being poked with needles.

He rushed to finish feeding the livestock. His Maggie was lovely, her loveliness took his breath away—picturesque, graceful as a young filly, she exemplified everything of a virtuous woman. “‘Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.’ Give her the fruit of her hands Lord and make the delivery of this wee babe come easy this time, not like the last.”

He entered the kitchen to the sounds of water bubbling on the stove, and Charlie bringing in kindling. Katie was folding the cloths Maggie had prepared for diapers. He nodded to Katie and Charlie, hung up his coat and hat, then took the steps two at a time to his and Maggie’s bedroom.

Maggie was in the painful stages of delivery, when what could take an hour might drag on into five hours. Bravely she obeyed Naomi but turned pleading eyes toward him. Their fingers entwined, they worked silently to get this new life into the world.

“Here is the water.” Charlie poured it into the basin. The babe was cleaned and wrapped in its swaddling cloth and handed to Maggie.

“No matter how many times I see you deliver, I still marvel at this moment when I hear a wee babe take that first cry, and I count all her finger and toes to make sure she came in one piece.”

“Indeed,” Charlie’s wife said. “That baby’s a scrapper to be sure.”

The babe didn’t need a second invitation for dinner. Her little pink hands wrapped Maggie’s swollen breast. She smiled. “She’s perfect and so, so healthy.”

“What will you name her?” Naomi asked. “My, just look at that hair.”

“Collina May.” Ben said.

“Collina? I’ve heard of Colleen and Cora, but that name is different sounding.”

Ben knelt and stroked the black hair of his new daughter. “Different she will be.”

“Different, indeed. That’s for certain with a name like that.” Naomi chuckled. “Well, I’ll be leaving you to yourselves, and I’ll return in a little while.” The door softly closed behind her.

Ben picked up his Bible. He kissed Maggie and then bent his head, holding Maggie’s hand in his, the other hand, he laid upon the babe. “‘The LORD bless thee and keep thee: The LORD make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.’

“Lord, I believe in thee, in thy holiness; nay, I will not question if I heard from thee. Your truth will be evident in the years that lie ahead of this wee child. Grant her wisdom, discernment, and most of all faith to perform the duties set before her feet. Amen.”