

ONE

Lizzy
1913—Holden's Gap
Just south of Chattanooga

A BODY CAN'T run from what they've seen. They can't unsee what they know to be true. They can't hide from the truth. The eyes is the window to the soul, and I reckon that's true, for when I handed River into the hands of Postmaster Roy, that youngin's green eyes burned into my mind as his little hands grabbed at me.

"Sign here." Mr. Roy handed me a pencil and pointed to a line on his ledger. I took that pencil right slow, and as I signed my name to the page, the bile crawled into my throat.

"Don't send me, Sissy. Nooo!" River's pleas to save him wrenched my heart.

I opened his hand, slipped in a tiny swan I'd folded from a piece of paper, and then closed his fingers tight around it.

"Listen to me, River. You know how Daddy has threatened you. This is the only way I can keep you safe. Outa sight, outa mind."

"But, but . . ." The child snuffed and swiped his nose on his sleeve.

"Ain't no buts. Daddy said he'd kill you, and I can't chance his bein' drunk one night and following through." I gently shook his shoulders, then kissed his cheek. "Trust me. Daddy's gone down to Macon today. It's the only time."

Mr. Roy hiked River up onto his hip and stepped onto the caboose. The train ground and growled as its iron wheels screamed against the rails.

River's arms stretched toward me, and I could see the postage stamps I'd pinned to his shirt flappin' in the wind.

I dropped to the bench and watched the train, steam hissing from under the wheels as it clunked away. I'd done the unspeakable. For twenty-eight cents I'd mailed little River to Knoxville. Had it not been the truth, I might have laughed out loud, but the frightened cries of a nine-year-old were just the truth screaming to be told. The youngin didn't understand, but saving him was exactly what I was doin'. And I had a gut feeling it was gonna be me that had to prove it was Daddy's doings—him that mashed the life out of Momma. With every odd stacked against me, it had to be me. The truth of it had never been harder.

A hundred fifty miles was a long trek through the mountains, and our Holden's Gap was just one of many Podunk towns this train would stop at. We didn't have no horseless carts, what folks called a truck. Most people still used their horses. A neighbor had one of the contraptions, but he spent more time pushing it than having it carry him where he needed to go. I couldn't steal Daddy's horse. It would be wrong, not to mention it would make Daddy suspicious. We had two, but Roxie the mare, old as she was, was the only one Daddy could count on to make the ten-mile trip to the sawmill. The other horse didn't take keen to a saddle, and Daddy never took the time to force the issue. I felt helpless—helpless and poor.

I sat there frozen, like it was deep winter. My joints wouldn't move, and my heart felt like it had exploded in my chest. There was no turnin' back now. The iron horse chugged into the cloudy summer afternoon, and I could have sworn I heard River's cries echoin' through the pass as the train moved out of sight.

I squeezed my eyes tight, gritted my teeth, and tangled my fingers together behind my head, swaying from side to side. "Oh Lord have mercy. Me oh my. My chest. My heart. Oh lawsy. I feel like I have a knife slicin' through my heart." I'd always heard wails as being loud and long, but mine were quiet and swallowed up. No matter the sound, they was still wails, torn between guilt and necessity.

The sun peeked from behind a dark cloud that rumbled, threatened—and I knew River hated thunder. Had I made a mistake? Maybe he couldn't hear the rolling throngs of the heavens inside that train car.

“Lord, close his ears.” I wasn’t a prayin’ person. Never saw no result from it, but Momma was. I figured it couldn’t hurt. I buried my face into my damp hands and sobbed. Tears soaked my cheeks, wetting the dark braid that hung over my shoulder.

What do you do when there ain’t nothing left? I rubbed my fingers over my face, gently squeezing my nose and lips. My front teeth gnawed at my upper lip. *Oh Lordy, what have I done?* I looked up at the low-hanging cloud and prayed again. *Forgive me.* Maybe He’d have mercy on me, knowin’ my heart was in the right spot. Momma would have wanted me on that train with River. She’d have wanted us both safe, but twenty-eight cents left me short seventy cents for a ticket. I slapped the drawstring bag that held three pennies against the bench. “Ain’t answered me yet, and that train is leavin’. What’s a matter? Cat got your tongue?” I growled at the good Lord.

From my skirt pocket I pulled a handkerchief. The one Momma had embroidered with blue thread. That handkerchief was my reminder of Momma being close. Or as close as a body could be when they were dead. I took it everywhere. Just like I took River almost everywhere I went. Except for that one day. That day was burned as deep in my mind as the child’s clear green eyes burned today. The handkerchief had the words Momma had stitched from the Good Book. *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

She used to tell me these were words to live by. “Lizzy Haney, you hold on to these words. It don’t matter what you do—you always be truthful. Even when it hurts. And you always make an effort to help the afflicted. ’Cause that truth . . . it’ll eventually set you free.”

“Yes, Momma,” I’d say. Even though I hardly paid her much mind. Momma was constantly mumbling words from the Good Book. Things I didn’t always understand, but she sure did, and if anything, Momma had drilled that Scripture into my head.

Always be truthful. Her words rang through my mind like a ripple on a quiet lake. Thing was, I wasn’t sure, sittin’ on this train bench, that being truthful would be the best thing for me. Daddy wasn’t gonna understand why I put postage on River and mailed him to Momma’s best friend, Tilda, in Knoxville. Despite the fact he hated River, he wasn’t

gonna understand. The child was his son. I still couldn't believe I did it. But it was the only way I could get him away safely. Besides, when I come up with the idea, it sounded good.

I tried to convince myself I'd done the best thing. The right thing. But there wasn't no pleasing my conscience.

Postmaster Roy didn't have a problem shipping River the 150 miles to Knoxville since he was making the trip himself to pick up mail. "As long as the boy has his own sandwich, can use the hole on his own, and weighs less than fifty pounds, I see no problem shipping him to Knoxville. We've done it before. It's safe."

"He can use the hole. He plenty old enough. And I feel pretty sure he weighs less than a fifty-pound bag of taters. Boy's always been scrawny. Besides, he's nine." My hands shook as he took River from my arms.

"You stand still so I can get a good weight." Mr. Roy set River on the giant scale. The man pushed and pulled the weights, cockin' his head first to one side, then the other. He squinted at the numbers on the scale. "Yep, he'll pass. A bit thin for a nine-year-old."

Sure enough, River was forty-nine pounds. He'd always been small for his age. Even when he was toddling, he'd looked small—too small. But it was how he come into this world.

"That'll be twenty-eight cents. You got that much money?" Postmaster Roy asked.

I laid two dimes and eight pennies down on the counter. "Yes, sir. I iron every Wednesday afternoon for the Richardsons to earn my keep."

He took my money, slid seven four-cent stamps across the counter, and winked. "Train leaves at twelve noon sharp. Say your goodbyes and don't be late, or your postage won't be no good."

I'd taken four hook pins from Momma's sewing box before we'd left home, punched two of them through a brown card, then pasted the stamps tight and pinned them to the back of River's shirt. "There, little man. And here's a letter for Miss Tilda. You leave that in your pocket till you get to her house." I slipped the letter into his britches pocket and patted his chest. I used the other two hook pins to latch a piece of paper with Miss Tilda's address to his shirt. I took in a deep breath and pulled the youngin tight into my arms. "River, this is best. Try and understand.

I'll be to Knoxville real soon. Then me and you, we'll start a new life together. I promise." He'd blinked away a tear, and there they were again. Those deep-green eyes of River. The eyes that could bore a hole through your soul.

I dreaded going home. Dreaded the beatin' I was gonna get. But it was those words from the Good Book, the ones Momma stitched into my handkerchief, that haunted me most. There was an irony about my predicament and these words. I saw no way to be truthful—not and live to tell about it.

I dabbed the corner of my eyes with the kerchief, then kissed the words Momma had left in the fabric. *The truth shall make you free.* I was countin' on that. I'd have to count on that.

The thought of sendin' River to Miss Tilda scared me to death, but her and Momma were best friends. When Miss Tilda would come to visit, she'd bring me candy on a stick. Something she called a sucker. And oh, how Tilda made over River them couple of times she'd visited. She thought the child was the berries.

"His name is perfect, Ada. It's like the good Lord took them eyes and concocted a glassy green color, then added a drop of His own tears to make 'em glisten. They're as clear as the midday sky, Ada. Clear as the reflections of the river," she'd say.

Momma would smile and nod. It was when Daddy came home that the hackles on Miss Tilda's neck stood. She'd never utter a word to Daddy. Her silence spoke loud enough. Miss Tilda had a gift, the same gift I think River had, to read a person better than the person could read themselves. She sensed something was wrong with Daddy, and I remember her nudging Momma, trying to get her to take me and River and come to Knoxville.

"Ada, the man drinks too much. It ain't safe. Come back to Knoxville with me. I got plenty of room for you, Lizzy, and the baby." There was something different about Tilda that visit. Something odd, uncomfortable, strange. I felt like something happened betwixt her and Daddy by the way Tilda cringed when Daddy passed by. A person could tell she didn't trust him.

"Don't be silly. Elbert wouldn't hurt a fly." Momma hugged Tilda and

sent her on her way back to Knoxville. I realized that was the last time Tilda come to visit.

Daddy was a drunk, but neither me nor Momma wanted to believe there really was a bad bone in him. Nobody wants to believe a person is bad. Still, I knew. Momma knew. Tilda knew. There are times when the body doesn't want to see the truth that stares them in the face. We shut our eyes to it, look over what is obvious 'cause the pain is too much. But River . . . River flinched at Daddy's touch from the day he was a baby in arms. He'd stare at Daddy with them piercing green eyes. It was like he could peer into Daddy's soul, and that gave Daddy a start. It was like River knew too.

All that together should have been enough. It wasn't though. The secret I was carryin' was about more than I could manage. The words from the Good Book, the ones Momma added to my handkerchief, ate away at my heart. *The truth shall make you free*. I couldn't see any freedom ahead of me, and no path for the truth that could cut through the muck was anything short of painful. Nothing seemed easy, and though I wasn't big on all of Momma's beliefs, I held to this chunk of words as my only hope.

All I could be sure of was puttin' twenty-eight cents of postage on my baby brother and mailing him to Miss Tilda. It might not be the smartest thing to do, but without a doubt it was the right thing.

The truth shall make you free. The truth shall make you free. I kept repeatin' the words, tryin' to convince myself it was true. All the while, the memory of River's eyes scorched my soul.

TWO

ONCE THE RAIN fell, it was hard to tell if the water that slipped off my nose and onto my lap was tears or sprinkles of rain. “Lord have mercy.” I snuffed, and a sob squeaked out of me like a hungry mouse with a bite of cheese. Once that sob let itself out, it was followed by a passel I couldn’t hold back.

The rain grew harder, but I couldn’t move from the bench. I sat there at the rails, hoping the train would stop and back its way toward the station. That was silly though. Trains don’t back up once they start. I crossed my feet at the ankles and sat plastered tight to the wooden seat. *Come back, train. Come back.*

“Lizzy, that you?”

The voice from behind me held a familiar ring. I shrugged.

“It is you. What you doin’ settin’ in the rain?”

“Ain’t your business,” I said, right snide-like. My eyes caught a glimpse of a young redheaded man. I shook my head and sighed. Alton Mosley. Figured. The boy was a year or two older than me and three times the pain in the rear. Agnus Rose, my best friend, always said Alton was sweet on me, but the boy’s voice sent chills up my spine. It was like Miss Martin’s chalk screeching when she’d write our spellin’ words on the slate board.

“Lizzy, you alright? Here, take my jacket and cover your head. You’ll catch your death of a cold in this here rain.” His voice now smooth and deep. Alton laid his coat across my shoulders, then inched next to me on the bench. His backside scooted me a few inches over to make room.

“I don’t need your coat. You need it, but I’m obliged at the kindness. I gotta get home.” I tilted one shoulder downward, and Alton’s coat dropped onto the bench.

“Yep. I understand. I was just tryin’ to be nice. Help a lady in despair.”

“Distress.”

“Huh?”

“Distress, Alton. It’s a lady in distress.” I stepped onto the long wooden train platform.

“Oh yeah. Right.” He let out a laugh. “Reckon you’d be right. I can walk you to the fork in the road.”

I felt my skin crawl. “Ain’t necessary, Alton.”

“I know. But let me. I want to.”

I glanced to one side, staring at the ground, then nodded toward the dirt road. “Don’t tarry. I got to get home and fix Daddy’s supper.”

Alton stood and straightened his too-short trousers to try and cover his white socks. He took one step and caught his toe on the leg of the bench, sending his long, thin body stumbling and falling onto the train platform.

I shook my head and stuck out my hand. “Here. Let me help you before you bloody your nose trying to get up.”

He took my hand and jumped to his feet. I tried to jerk my hand away, but Alton hung on for dear life. “Much obliged.” He pulled my hand toward his lips.

“Don’t do it unless you want me to bloody your lip and your nose.” I yanked my hand away and wiped it on my skirt. I eyed Alton, and though I’d not paid him much mind in school, he’d passed that boyish look and turned manly. That didn’t help his clumsiness, and I was in no mood to explore his kindness.

We started down the dirt road, now the beginnings of a red-clay mud. “Walk in the grass. I ain’t got but this one pair of shoes. I don’t relish the thought of spending an hour scraping off red-clay mud.” I bumped my shoulder against his and moved him into the grass.

“What you doin’ at the train station?” Alton shoved his hands deep into his trouser pockets. “Ain’t a place I thought I’d find you.”

Not a word left my mouth. I wasn’t sure if it was because I was still heartbroken or if it was shame. Who in their right mind mailed their little brother?

“Cat got your tongue?”

I had to give Alton credit. He was doin’ his best to start a conversation. I just didn’t have it in me to reply.

“I understand if you don’t want to talk. I know girls sometimes get a little bashful. Though you wasn’t too bashful tellin’ me you’d bloody my nose. I’m just tryin’ to be gentlemanly. You know, help out a friend. Do what’s right.”

“Will you stop babbling? I was at the station because I . . . I . . . I had business there.”

“I know. It’s none of my beeswax, right?” He kicked a rock a few feet in front of us. It splashed in the soggy grass.

“Look, Alton . . .”

“I know, Lizzy. You don’t like me. I understand. Like I said, I’m just tryin’ to be gentlemanly. I turned eighteen yesterday. Momma said it was time I bucked up and come into my manhood. Guess I ain’t doin’ so good at that, now am I.” His blue eyes focused on the ground at my feet.

I sighed. Alton wasn’t a bad person. I just wasn’t fancy on him, and despite his being nervous, he was being kind. I sure wasn’t beholden to his concern. “I’m sorry. It’s just been a hard day. And you’ve been nothing but gentlemanly. Got your fancy trousers on and all. See, I noticed.”

Alton lifted his gaze from the road to me. “Mighty kind of you to notice. Thanks.”

I nodded. “I just mailed a box to Knoxville.”

He stopped square at the edge of a puddle and rubbed his nubby chin with his finger. “Mailin’ a box don’t rate a person cryin’. Seems to me there’s more to that box than you’re lettin’ on.”

I was tired of lies. Tired of hiding things that should be spoken, and though I wasn’t keen on trusting just anyone, I’d known Alton long enough to see that he’d keep my secret to himself. I hated being forced to shy from the truth. I ain’t no liar, and being honest means something to me. I stared into Alton’s eyes, and for an instant I saw someone I could tell the truth to and feel safe.

“I ain’t a liar, Alton. And I don’t trust many folks, but I think you’re different. So truth is, I mailed my brother to Knoxville.”

“You what? I coulda swore you said you mailed River to Knoxville.” He went to laughing. “Stop messin’ with me. You make me laugh.”

“I ain’t messin’ with you. It cost me twenty-eight cents.”

“You’re serious?” Alton’s hands came out of his pockets and shot up toward the sky. His voice raised a notch. “You mailed a nine-year-old boy to Knoxville?”

I took him by the shoulder and twisted him toward me. “Keep your voice down! I don’t need all of Holden’s Gap knowing my business. But yes, I mailed my brother. It ain’t what you think. The postmaster was going to Knoxville, and he’s got River with him.”

“That’s supposed to make mailin’ a youngin alright?” Alton went to pacin’.

“Look, I don’t expect you to understand why I did what I did. I had to do it to protect him. Momma has a friend in Knoxville who will pick River up at the station when the train arrives. I done wired her a note. Besides, the United States Post Office says it perfectly fine to mail a youngin as long as arrangements was made at both ends.”

Alton stood a head above me, and I felt him staring down at me. His judgment felt harder than the rain that pelted me in the face.

“Protect him? Lizzy, why does River need protectin’ that you felt like you needed to send him away?” Alton lifted my chin with two fingers. “I know I ain’t your first choice, but for Pete’s sake, talk to me.”

I moved his hand from my face and turned toward the road to the farm. “I need to get home.”

“Oh no you don’t. You ain’t goin’ another step until you tell me what in Mother Mayberry is goin’ on.” He snagged my coattail, and I smacked his hand loose. “If River needs protectin’, then my best guess is you do too.”

I hopped over the puddle and marched along the road, leaving Alton behind. I couldn’t bring myself to tell him. It was no secret Daddy loved his hooch. He was a daily visitor to the town tavern. Most of his earnings from the sawmill was spent on the booze and the gambling that went on at Rooster Red’s.

Daddy didn’t usually make it home until after dark, so I could get River washed and in bed before Daddy stumbled through the door. Some nights he’d be sappy and whining about Momma dying. “Your momma

left us. I can't live without her." But I knew the truth. I knew he could live without Momma, and I knew why and how he managed—his liquor.

Still, I dreaded the sun going down and knowing what was coming. Would he be crying like a baby over Momma, or would he be biting nails? I could live with his crying, but when he come home angry . . . that was when things would get bad.

Tears welled as I took the left fork in the road. I could hear Alton hollering at me.

"Lizzy Haney, stop. Wait on me."

I threw him a backward wave and kept walking. Alton didn't need to know about Daddy's habits. It was enough that most of the townspeople knew he was a drunk. They didn't need to know no more.

Behind me come the splash, slosh, splash of big feet. "Dad nab it, Lizzy. I know I ain't your favorite person, but like it or not, I plan to find out what is goin' on. And if you don't stop and tell me, then I'm goin' ahead of you to tell your daddy that you mailed a child to Knoxville."

I stopped dead in my tracks. "You wouldn't dare."

Alton straightened his shoulders and jutted his chest. "You willin' to try me? Now what in the Sam Hill is goin' on? Did your daddy hurt River? Did he hurt you? 'Cause I can get my pa on him like white on rice, and I will if I need to. He's the sheriff, you know."

"No. No! Please, no."

"Then tell me what's goin' on."

"Daddy hates River. He hates River because he says the child can see into his soul. It ain't a real reason, but it's enough that Daddy threatens to tie rocks to the boy's waist and throw him in the river. He blames River for everything. Don't matter what it is. Truth is that whatever mess we're in is really Daddy's fault. I can't sleep at night for worrying that if I close my eyes, he will come home drunk and follow through. You happy now?" I beat my fists against his chest. "Are you happy, Alton?"

Alton stood silent. He took my wrists and held them away from his chest. The man never spoke a word. Instead he just stood there holding my wrists, looking down at me. The rain eased, and the sun slipped from behind the dark clouds to brighten the day, even if only for a short spell.

"Say something!" My voice cracked, and the wails of a brokenhearted

girl poured out. "Just say something. It seemed wrong to mail River, but it was my only option. Please don't judge me, Alton. And please don't tell Daddy. He'll go after River. I need to protect my brother. Please."

I knew Alton could tell his father, Sheriff Mosley, and he would take off after Daddy in a split second. Sheriff Mosley was a good man. He was hard at times, but there wasn't a youngin around who didn't know that if they was in trouble, he'd be the first to help. I remember hiding behind the big elm tree by the school and watchin' Sheriff Mosley kneel and wrap his arms around Alton in a tight hug. Truth was, I envied Alton.

But then what? How was I to prove my accusations? There was no bruises. No slaps. Not a mark to show that Daddy was anything other than a drunk, a lush, and a loser. I might not be the brightest thing in the world, but I knew that much. Even in his drunken stupors, Daddy was smart enough to keep his antics at home hidden.

"Alright, I won't say a word. But I'm watchin', and if I think for one minute you are in danger, me and Pa will be on your doorstep."

That's when I saw something different in Alton. Something I'd never noticed. He wasn't the goofy redheaded kid who followed me around like a puppy after a piece of bacon. He was a man now, and one who understood when a friend was in trouble.

"Thanks." I wiped my nose on my wet sleeve.

He dropped my hands to my waist and pulled me into his chest. His hug was gentle and sweet. "Don't cry. I'll walk you to the edge of your yard and be sure you get in the house. Then tomorrow we'll check on River's getting to Knoxville. Try to get some sleep tonight. I know it'll be hard, with worryin' and all, but try."

Alton turned me loose and walked me the mile to my house. I felt his watchful eye on me as I opened the screen door and lit the lantern, then disappeared into the kitchen.

After making supper, I set out a bowl and ladled a couple of spoons of stew into it, then laid two biscuits next to the bowl. Walking through the house, I closed the door to River's room just like I did every night. Daddy wouldn't look in. He never did. Then I closed the door to my room, pushed the bed against it, and blew out the lantern. Tomorrow would come soon enough.

THREE

Alton

I TRIED WALKING home, but my mind wouldn't let me wander too far from Lizzy's homestead. I didn't feel right leavin' her like this. It wasn't like her to be so vulnerable, so I figured I'd hunker down amongst the trees and keep an eye out till morning—despite the misting rain. Despite the nip in the air. I knew all Lizzy saw was the scared, skinny redheaded boy she knew in school, but I'd grown up a lot. Getting as tall as Daddy helped me. I wouldn't ever outgrow the red hair, so I let Momma keep it sheared tight to my head.

Still, over the last two summers, I'd come to learn things. Spendin' time on the mountain with my Cherokee friends, especially Meko, brought me something I never expected. Wisdom. Skills. Smarts necessary to see things clearly. I guess that new instinct kicked in when I saw Lizzy sittin' on the train deck. I could tell something was up.

Lizzy always kept to herself, never sharing things about her family. As long as I could remember, she'd smile, but you could still see sadness under the smile. Somethin' there burdened her, and it wasn't somethin' she had control over. Even though it took some tuggin' to get her to open up, I felt honored that she'd inched out of her shell enough to tell me. I've always liked her, and this—whatever it was—made me want to protect her.

She never paid me much mind—well, some. I was the small, lanky boy with red hair, the younger of the boys at school, not to mention my daddy was the sheriff. It seemed I was just asking for teasin'. When others picked at me, Lizzy never did. She was more the one who'd pull me behind her

and tell me to hush up. "Walk straight, Alton. You walk hunkered over. You're just invitin' people to pick on you. Stand up straight. Tall. People admire a body that walks tall." Lizzy was good to me, even if I was lowest in the peckin' order.

I reckon those was good words, though it took me some time to learn them. But when I made friends with Meko, things changed.

"Must learn to hunt quietly," he'd say. "Step with tender feet. Know the ways of the mountain. Listen to her whisper."

Them summers with the Cherokee was good. Pa was the sheriff, and he wanted the townspeople to be acceptin' of the Cherokee. Lettin' me spend time with them proved to the townspeople that the Cherokee was good, honest people. It wasn't every day a man let his youngin spend time with what those others labeled as savages. As much as I loved my family at home, I grew to love my Cherokee family as well.

Momma was a godly woman, though sickly, yet her faith never waned. It was her who drilled the Good Book into my head. I supposed between her and the Cherokee, I learned to walk upright as a man.

Pa was . . . well, he was Pa. I admired him. Wanted to be like him. When he walked into a room, he commanded respect, and it wasn't just respect behind the star on his chest. He carried an honesty about him. A truthfulness that though he was a hard man, he was fair. I trusted him. We butted heads like two old billy goats from time to time, but I never doubted my daddy loved me. I figured, like Lizzy, he just wanted me to stand tall.

This Lizzy Haney was an odd one. Anger followed her, though I couldn't fault her. There was more to it than I could put my finger on. I knew she needed help, and it had to be me that stepped up. I owed her for all she did for me. I cared for her, and right now I wasn't sure Lizzy thought anyone cared. Even when we was kids, she walked around with an arm out, never lettin' anyone get right close. She was kind to me though. Maybe this was a time I could repay her kindness. I could be that person that stands between her and a drunken daddy. Now that I knew some of the problem, I planned to step up. I ain't a kid no more. I'm grown, and though young, I'm still a man. I liked this Lizzy Haney, despite her being troubled. Her heart was good.

Puttin' postage on her little brother and mailing him to Knoxville caught

me between thinkin' she was foolish and desperate. Like I'd heard it said before—desperate times. The thought that Lizzy needed someone to help her sort things through wouldn't leave me. It nagged at me like an old woman. Whether it was a gut feelin' or the good Lord tapping on my shoulder, I made my mind up to stick close. This girl, this young woman, needed someone who'd learned to walk tall. I was gonna take a stand and be by her side whether she liked it or not.