

A Dream Come True

By Carrie Daws

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*Commit your works to the Lord [submit and trust them to Him],
And your plans will succeed [if you respond to His will and guidance].*

Proverbs 16:3, Amplified Bible

Chapter 1

Through hard work, perseverance, and a faith in God, you can live your dreams.

Ben Carson

Emma Foster breathed deeply, feeling the weight of her plan. As she took Exit 9 off the Adirondack Northway into Clifton Park, New York, she stretched her neck and shoulders as well as she could while driving her small, twelve-year old Honda. She had to close this deal or come up with another plan to bring fresh cash into her daddy's logging business.

She'd warned him several times over the last four years since she graduated from college that having so much of his business dependent on Hayse Furniture wasn't smart. But he was old school and still relied on the value of a handshake. Unfortunately, when the heirs took over running the furniture business, they'd shut down less profitable segments, including the manufacturing plant in Massachusetts that Foster Logging depended upon. They had honored him with a nice letter, thanking her dad for the quality lumber Foster had shipped to them over the years to turn into bed frames and dressers. But that didn't solve the resulting cash flow problem.

A warning light dinged on her dashboard, so Emma pulled into a gas station. Putting the car in park, she patted the steering wheel. "Please, start for me again. I promise I'll take you home soon and let you sit until summer."

She chewed her lip as she filled the tank. Although April had been slightly warmer than normal, her car preferred temperatures over sixty-five degrees, a problem which had confounded two mechanics so far. Considering it was only fifty-eight and she was over an hour from everyone she knew, the odds didn't look good. Thankfully, her hotel was within view.

Snapping the gas tank cover closed on her car, Emma got back into the front seat as a truck pulled in on the other side of the pump. Whispering a prayer that God would show her mercy, she turned the key. As she feared, nothing happened. Tucking her long, brown hair behind her ear, she squeezed her eyes shut. "God, please. Do what only You can do and make this car start." She turned the key, but was met with only silence from her rebellious engine.

Sighing, she leaned her head forward on the hand grasping the top of the steering wheel. When the car had started at home, she'd triumphantly looked at her daddy,

convinced this was God's sign that the trip would be blessed with great success. "You'll see," she had told him, prancing about like she exerted some mystical control in the universe. "I'm coming home with a contract to provide lumber to Creative Toys for their dollhouses." Now she might have to call him to come rescue her.

A knock on her window startled her out of the melancholy pit she was digging herself. "I'm sorry," she said, opening her door and stepping out without looking directly at the stranger. "I don't mean to be in your way."

"You're not," said a deep voice. "It just looked like you might need some help."

Emma looked up, instantly caught in grey eyes looking back at her. Time stopped as her memory shot back twenty years to the dark haired boy who'd gallantly rescued her from a terrorist. Okay, so maybe it was just a common grass spider, and maybe she'd been the one to pummel through its web. But she'd screamed like the girl she was, and her knight in shining armor had been the eight-year old son of Phillip Wilson, the man who had been interested in purchasing her dad's lumber to make dollhouses. The man she hoped to have a meeting with tomorrow.



The woman looked lost. A memory tickled the back of his brain when she first stepped out. Her hair, the color of his grandmother's fresh gingerbread cookies, reminded him of someone, but the memory stubbornly refused to come forward.

He touched her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Her eyes looked toward his, yet she didn't seem to be seeing him. He rubbed the top of her arm. "Do you need a jump or something?"

She shook her head, golden brown eyes sharpening even as she avoided his gaze. "I'm sorry. This car—" She motioned to it helplessly. "It only likes the summer."

"Summer?" Daniel didn't know a lot about cars, but he did like puzzles and this sounded interesting. Besides, if it would keep the woman talking to him, her story was worth listening to.

"Mechanics can't figure it out." She pushed her fingers through the top of her hair, her hand resting on top of her head, holding the gorgeous locks back. "Above sixty-five degrees, she as reliable as a new car. Under sixty-five . . ."

"Have you had the starter looked at?"

"Yes. And the battery. And some relay something or other—main relay? Maybe? I don't know." She sighed, obviously frustrated with her errant vehicle. "Anyway, I'm sure it's going to refuse to start for a while. I'll just push it . . ."

She had a habit of not finishing her sentences. As she looked around the parking lot, Daniel offered his assistance. "Let me help. You can steer while I push."

"I was hoping for a patch of sunlight. Sometimes, if the sun is warm enough, I can trick it into starting."

Daniel looked toward the setting sun. "Well, I don't think that will work tonight." He pointed to the east side of the building behind her. "If we position it over on the back side of the lot, you might have luck in the morning."

She sighed. "Yeah, okay. It'll have to do, I suppose."

"Come on." He tried the smile that worked best with the seven and eight year old soccer girls he coached. He probably shouldn't tell her that. "We'll get it over there, and then I'll tell the manager, Jim, what's going on while you grab what you need. I'll drop you anywhere you need to go."

She hesitated, and Daniel realized how much he was asking her to trust him. She didn't know him any more than he knew her. Although . . . his eyes wandered back to her hair. A small gingerbread colored head flashed through his mind too quickly for him to make any sense of it.

"All right. I just need to go to the hotel down the road, but I would appreciate not having to carry my luggage."

"Your carriage awaits, my lady."

She hesitated, looking almost quizzically at him before settling herself back in her car to steer. As Daniel began to push the car into position, he asked God if He could maybe see His way to putting her in his path again.

Chapter 2

It's insecurity that is always chasing you and standing in the way of your dreams.

Vin Diesel

Emma walked through the front door of Creative Toys, impressed that a building so big could still feel comfortable and casual. The receptionist at the circular desk in the center of the entryway looked professional, but certainly not dressed up. Business casual, she supposed, which made her feel a touch over dressed in the nicest skirt and blouse she owned. It wasn't like loggers needed fancy, well, anything.

"Can I help you?" The woman smiled at Emma.

"Yes, I'd like to see Mr. Wilson, please."

"Do you have an appointment?"

The woman hadn't moved from her spot or given Emma any indication on whether her visit would be welcome.

"No, unfortunately, I don't. I happened to be in town . . ." Emma stretched the truth, squashing her normal tendency to be purely factual. She left the end of the sentence dangling, hoping that if Mr. Wilson had strict policies about his appointment calendar, this woman would help her find a way around them. She didn't have to know that she only lived an hour away or that she didn't call because she wasn't ready for her hopes to close this deal would be pummeled out of existence.

"I'm sorry," the woman began. Emma forced her smile to remain in place. "But everyone is in a staff meeting right now."

Emma swallowed the urge to release a sigh of relief. "Oh, that's okay. I don't mind waiting." A door to her left opened, but Emma forced her mind to focus her best southern charm on the receptionist. Not that she was southern born or bred, but she could still make her North Carolinian grandmother proud. "I don't have a pressing schedule today, so I can make any time today that works for Mr. Wilson's schedule work for me."

"Well then you're in luck!" Daniel leaned against the taller counter that formed a half circle at the receptionist's back. "I happen to have some time in my schedule today."

Emma froze in place. Her friends told her that emotions always showed clearly on her face. She tried to bring it into submission, schooling her eyes and smile into the epitome of a carefree professional rather than the desperate wholesaler she was.

Daniel held his hand out for a shake. "Daniel Wilson."

Emma fumbled her briefcase as she tried to set it down before taking Daniel's hand. "Yes, I know."

"You do?"

Obviously, Daniel had no remembrance of their one chance meeting all those years ago. Why would she think for even a moment he might? She was a romantic sap and needed to pull it together. "Of course. I don't walk into manufacturer's buildings unprepared."

"So, you're a salesman? Or rather, saleswoman?"

"Something like that. I was actually hoping to speak with your father, Mr. Phillip Wilson, today."

"I see. Well, he is in a staff meeting right now and has two other meetings lined up immediately following. In fact—" Daniel turned toward the receptionist, holding out several sheets of paper. "Can you print off the month prior to these and take them up to Dad?"

Emma tried once again to keep the disappointment from showing. She straightened her posture and kept her fingers still on the marble countertop. They hadn't kicked her out. Yet. She still had a chance.

"And you," Daniel turned back toward Emma, "can tell me all about why you are here. If you don't mind walking, that is."

"Walking? Of course not."

"I should mention that it's walking outside." He leaned in like they were conspiring. "I volunteered to walk down to the coffee shop to grab one of my dad's favorite treats to help him get through the next couple of hours." He winked at her. "He's not big on meetings."

"Ah. Yes, well. In that case . . ." She grabbed her briefcase. "Lead the way." She didn't know what kind of authority Daniel had to make the decision, but at the very least he could encourage his dad to consider her offer. Or get her a few minutes of the man's time. This wasn't the sales meeting she had been expecting, but she would make it work.



Daniel couldn't believe God had answered his prayer from the day before so quickly. Emma seemed reserved and quiet, so he thought after he dropped her off at her hotel that he'd never see her again.

He led the way to the front doors and held one open for her. "Did you get your car started this morning?"

She waved her hand dismissively. "I haven't even tried yet. It was only forty degrees when I left this morning, and I knew she wouldn't even consider turning over."

"She?" Many of his friends referred to their various vehicles in the feminine sense, but to hear a woman do the same thing was intriguing.

"Definitely. Would a male give up the chance to go on an adventure just because it was

chilly outside?"

He saw her point, but grinned at her. "Interesting to hear you say that."

She shrugged. "Somehow I don't see you doing it. I seriously doubt you're much of a homebody."

"Well, I'm not sure that's fair. I don't have much at my house to stay home for."



"No wife or girlfriend, huh?" Emma cringed, keeping her eyes locked in front of them. Why would she dare to ask such a ridiculous question?

"Not even a dog. Although, I've thought about getting one. The girls would love a puppy."

"Girls? You have children?" She ignored the warnings in her consciousness this time. After all, he did open the subject, so any reasonable person would ask for more details.

"Not personally. I coach one of the soccer teams at the rec center. Every Tuesday and Saturday each spring, I have a gaggle of girls hanging on my every word."

Emma rolled her eyes before she realized what she was doing and heard him chuckle beside her.

"Mom does the same thing."

She looked at him, waiting for him to continue his thought.

"Rolls her eyes at me. Often, actually." The thought put a broad grin on his face and Emma focused on not echoing the grin or repeating the eye roll.

"Hey, man! Going in here?"

A man held the door to a coffee shop open and Daniel greeted him. "You know I am. Is Christy feeling good enough to make practice tomorrow?"

"You better believe it. She's counting the hours, and reminds her mother and I regularly of how much she missed by skipping practices Saturday."

Daniel laughed. "Two other girls were out too, so tell her I'll be reviewing the new technique I showed the team."

"Cool, cool. That might appease her a little."

The father waved as he walked away, and Emma preceded Daniel into the coffee shop where two other customers greeted him and the barista asked if he wanted his usual order.

Emma felt amazed and perplexed at the same time. Sure, she was well known around her town of Pittsfield, but it was a quarter the size of Clifton Park. "You seem pretty popular."

Daniel looked about the store with a dozen or so patrons sitting about. "I suppose I come here a bunch. What'll you have?" He turned back to the barista. "One venti for my Dad plus a grande for me. And whatever the lady likes."

"I'm fine, really," said Emma. She wouldn't spend a precious five dollars on a coffee, and she couldn't accept the offer from Daniel. She was here to make a sale, hopefully a large

one, not take advantage of his generosity.

“You sure? They have hot chocolate and tea too.”

The coffee smelled terrific, but she stood her ground. “Thanks, but I’m certain.”

He paid for his order and moved down the counter. “Well, then, if I can’t splurge a couple of dollars on you, perhaps you can tell me what you want from Dad.”

That was a terrible transition and put her in a negative light. Nothing graceful came to mind, and she spent an awkward moment trying to come up with a better approach than simply blurting out her whole story. Although a piece of her desperately wanted to do that, to reveal that he’d been in her dreams for twenty years, to share with him the burdens of her family.

She shook her head slightly and braved her first sales pitch since leaving the safety of the college classroom. “We want to provide Creative Toys with lumber for your dollhouses.”

Chapter 3

All of our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.

Walt Disney

Daniel watched Emma's face contort. He guessed she was chastising herself for her blunt presentation. "Who is 'we'?"

"Foster Logging. We're located in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, only about an hour away from here."

"Yes, I've heard of it. You've supplied Hayse Furniture with lumber for as long as I can remember."

She shifted her stance and something crossed her features that Daniel couldn't quite name. Discomfort? Dismay, perhaps?

"Yes. We supplied their New England manufacturing plant with wood for their bedroom furniture for twenty-seven years."

Daniel's business training immediately caught that she spoke in the past tense, but he wasn't sure if she realized her misstep. He'd heard that several of the Hayse plants were closing down, which meant employees were losing jobs and suppliers were scrambling to replace the income.

Still, Foster Logging had a reputation for quality and reliability, one that had spurred his father to make an attempt at a partnership twenty years previously. He still talked about the kind Mr. Foster and the deal he'd never been able to strike. Why was his memory niggling at that long ago deal with Foster Logging? He'd heard the story a hundred times, but he felt like God wanted him to remember something specific that refused to come out of hiding.

Daniel cast the thought aside for the moment, refocusing on Emma. "So, why dollhouses?"

"It makes good business sense. For both of us." She grasped her briefcase in front of her with both hands, fidgeting a bit with the handle. "Most simply, you need good lumber delivered on time. We can provide that."

"I'm sure you can, but we already have a contract for our supply. Why should we consider breaking our word to that company? After all, loyalty is a high priority for us, an attribute our suppliers value."

“As we would, if we are honored with it, of course.”



The barista delivered two steaming cups with a wink, and Daniel thanked her. Emma took the brief moment to breathe deeply twice before she followed Daniel back out to the sidewalk.

“Look, I know who your current supplier is. And I know—” Emma was familiar with the issues plaguing her competition at M & B Wood Supplies as the owner, Morgan Anderson, was one of her father’s closest friends.

Morgan was terminally ill and rarely in the office these days, and his son was known to cut corners. Morgan had tried talking to his son, but all the younger Anderson saw was the bottom line. He didn’t care about the company’s reputation on the market or the years of service his father had poured into his business relationships. In fact, it was Morgan who had encouraged Emma to make this trip, spinning a tale of young girls sobbing over their broken dollhouses because his son had sold the Wilson company inadequate wood. She didn’t know how accurate his tale could be, but her bigger concern at the moment was how much she should share with Daniel.

Daniel walked quietly beside her occasionally taking a drink of his hot coffee while Emma’s heart and mind waged a war of ethics. Mr. Anderson wanted her to have this contract. Her daddy needed her to win this contract. But she had to go home and live with what she chose to do in the next few moments.

“I know . . .” Emma cleared her throat and straightened her shoulders. She would not wilt from the weight of doing what she knew was right. “I know M & B has supplied you with wood for many years, and Morgan Anderson is both trustworthy and reliable. I’m merely asking for your father to grant Foster Logging an opportunity to provide you with the same quality.”

Daniel looked at her for a moment, but she couldn’t read his thoughts. She felt like a failure. She had information that could sway the Wilsons in her favor, but she wouldn’t use it. She couldn’t allow her words to destroy Morgan’s reputation. She would allow his son that dishonor.

They reached the front door of Creative Toys, and Emma prepared to say goodbye. She no longer saw a point in pursuing a meeting with Phillip Wilson.

“Thank you for allowing me to take a few moments of your time.” It was as gracious as she could be without apologizing for wasting his time. She’d had no business coming here.

“Won’t you come up to my office and leave your contact information?”

“You really want it?” Emma regretted her lack of composure. “I’m sorry—that didn’t come out right. Or well. Or—” She bit her lip as Daniel grinned at her, offering a quick prayer that God would provide her a little of Granny’s smooth way with words. Please. Now.

“While your information is correct and we do have a long history with M & B, I’d appreciate the opportunity to look more into your offer.”

“Oh—” Emma was stunned into silence. Words wouldn’t form, like her brain had gone to sleep without her permission. He wasn’t dismissing her entirely? “Of course.”



Daniel led the way to his father’s office on the second floor without telling Emma his destination. She clearly hadn’t expected him to consider her offer, but she also clearly knew more about the situation at M & B than she was sharing with him. While he was curious, he also respected her integrity. He opened an office door and motioned her inside. He almost ran into her back when she abruptly stopped two steps past the threshold.

“Mr. Wilson.”

His father looked up in surprise at her greeting. Why did Daniel find such pleasure in keeping her slightly off-kilter? Was it because he hoped she’d blurt out more than she intended? Or because he enjoyed watching the emotions dance in fascinating patterns across her entire body? Her eyes, mouth, hand gestures, and shoulder posture were all very revealing.

“Dad, this is Emma Foster.” He saw a question sparkle to life in his father’s expression, and he nodded his head at her.

“Miss Foster. I’m pleased to see you again.”

“Yes, sir . . .” She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. “I wasn’t sure you would remember meeting me.”

The sun coming through his father’s office window spotlighted Emma’s hair. A young head with the same gingerbread coloring invaded his thoughts, but the face remained just out of sight.

Daniel handed his father’s coffee to him, struggling to move the image to the back of his mind until he had more time to think about it. “Emma has a proposal for us, for Foster Lumber to supply wood for our dollhouses.”

Although Daniel was sure that Emma could only see a staunch professional before her, he noticed the straight back leaning forward that showcased his dad’s interest and the bouncing leg that broadcasted his excitement. Still, his voice and words remained closely guarded, not giving Emma any hint at how disposed they were to develop a working relationship.

“Interesting. Have we asked for bids from suppliers other than M & B?”

Now it was Daniel’s turn to guard his words. He knew something was up with the elder Mr. Anderson as he’d been unavailable to receive Daniel’s phone calls for weeks. And the son who was assuming control of the business wasn’t nearly as picky with his wood shipments as Daniel would like. Daniel’s father was aware of all of this, and they had discussed the possibility of reaching out to Foster once again. But they had hesitated, not

wanting to walk away from M & B without giving them an opportunity to correct the recent substandard orders.

“No, we haven’t.”

Emma hadn’t spoken since she’d bumbled to a quick stop right inside the office door, but Daniel could see the uncertainty in her eyes. Had her father invested too much of his business into supplying Hayse Furniture? Could she be more desperate than he realized? Yet, she still didn’t use the information she had about M & B to her advantage. This woman intrigued him.

“Your timing might be fortuitous, Miss Foster.”

“It might?” Emma responded weakly.

Phillip nodded. “Recently, Daniel and I discussed expanding our dollhouse market, designing a segment of castles complete with fighting positions on the turrets.”

“Oh, yes! And a drawbridge, and a training ground for the knight’s and their horses, and of course that means you’ll need stables for the horses. If you’re going to have fighting positions on the turrets, you should think about making some working catapults—boys would love that. And maybe a lookout terrace of some sort so a fair maiden can watch the knights at work. After all, every knight needs a fair maiden.”

She stopped talking as quickly as she had started. The excitement that had fueled her outburst now seemed to embarrass her. Daniel couldn’t guess which of his smiles his girl’s would say he sported at the moment, but the woman before him enchanted him. He couldn’t take his eyes off of her. “Yes, he certainly does.”

“He does what?” Emma said breathlessly.

“Need a fair maiden.”

The room was quiet for a moment. Finally, Phillip cleared his throat. “Miss Foster, I believe my son and I need to talk more about this, but I have another meeting that I’m already late for.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.”

Phillip waved off her apology. Standing, he moved around his desk and took her hand in both of his. “Nonsense, my dear girl. This was quite delightful.” He looked back at his son, then at Emma again. “Yes, quite.”

He moved toward the door. “Be sure to leave your contact number with my son before you leave. I’m certain we’ll be in touch soon.”

Chapter 4

I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

Thomas Jefferson

One very long week passed in tortuous slowness. Seven days ago Emma had checked out of her hotel room, miraculously started her obstinate vehicle, and returned home to her father with news of hope. One hundred sixty-eight agonizing hours later, hope waned and Emma scrambled for another idea.

She'd already checked with three other furniture manufacturers, all happy with their current lumber suppliers. As she sat at her small desk inside a back room of the logging office, she scrolled through a website search for companies that used wood. Maybe she should try custom homebuilders in Albany who needed quality wood for home office libraries and high-end kitchens.

She heard the front door open. Knowing her dad had headed home for an early lunch, she turned in her chair so she could look through the doorway and see who had stopped by. Her brown eyes locked on Daniel's grey ones, and her mind went completely blank.

"You're Emma Foster."

She nodded. "Yes." My goodness he looked good. Emma couldn't take her eyes from his face. His bright eyes, the slight curve to his mouth like he knew something but wasn't willing to reveal it.

"Yes." He took two steps closer to her. "But that's not what I called you."

She swallowed, barely able to breathe.

"I called you Gingerbread."

Emma gasped with the full realization that he remembered. A girl growing up in a man's world, knights willing to acquiesce to her girlish whims had always surrounded her. But Daniel was the one who had captured her imagination, challenged her to be more than the silly girl who let others take care of her. Not that he'd known that, of course. After all, they'd only spent an hour together when she was five. Why would he think anything of it?

She nodded. Words wouldn't come. Sentences wouldn't form.

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

"I, uh—" How could she tell him all that was in her heart? Well, that was a dumb thought. Why would he possibly want to know how much she'd thought about him over the

years? That would scare him off, and surely that was not why he was here anyway. She fought for some semblance of control.

She cleared her throat and stood. She stepped forward and leaned on the doorframe on her office, crossing her arms in front of her and trying to appear nonchalant. "It was a long time ago."



Panic, pure and simple. Her eyes had widened in surprise when he'd said his childhood nickname for her. Now, her stance was tight and her posture closed. He was certain that Emma was hiding her deeper feelings.

"You know, I suppose that's true." He took another step toward her. "But I don't think it's that simple."

Her eyes widened again. "You don't?"

He shook his head slowly. He was going to have to lay it all for her, take a risk that what he thought he saw in her was what she already knew but would not acknowledge to him. He took another step forward. Two more steps and he'd be able to reach out and touch her.

"Twenty years ago, Gingerbread, you captured me."

"I did?"

Another step forward. Another nod of his head. "That day, I thought I was just rescuing the fair maiden from an evil dragon. I thought I could save the day and ride out on my next quest."

She was listening, the expression in her eyes giving him the courage to continue this ridiculously romantic monologue.

"But even after I'd left her kingdom far behind, I found myself wondering if she needed my protection. I wondered if she'd want my protection."

Her nod was almost imperceptible. "Yes."

She was completely under his spell, and Daniel couldn't help his grin. Another step forward. "Yeah?"

Whether it was the smirk or that final step, he wasn't sure, but Emma blinked and started to turn away from him. He reached out and grabbed her trembling hand.

"Wh—what are you doing?"

"Seeing if the fair maiden is willing to discuss an alliance."



"An alliance?" Tears sprang to her eyes, and Emma knew she had to put a stop to this. Daniel was toying with her emotions over some stupid lumber. Maybe her Dad was right and she wasn't cut out for this industry after all.

Daniel stood before her, holding her hand and smiling. She needed to speak up. She

pulled her hand from his and walked to sit on the edge of her desk, as far away from him as she could get in the cramped space. “Daniel, please. If you want to discuss lumber for your castle project, we don’t need to muddy it with silliness.”

He crossed his arms, effectively blocking the doorway. “I’m not here to discuss the lumber contract.”

“You’re not?” Her heart plummeted with the weight of failure before her mind tried to dissect the conversation they were having. But Daniel’s presence in her office and his talk of an alliance slowly penetrated.

“Wait. Then why are you here? You could have just called. Or not. I suppose. You could have left me hanging. Lots of people do. You could have sent an email saying you didn’t want our lumber. I don’t understand. Why the trip here? And what did you mean—”

Emma broke off when she looked up and caught the smirk on his face.

“Do you always ramble in fragmented sentences when you’re caught by surprise?”

Emma cringed at how well he read her. She sighed. “Yes. My younger brother used to tease me mercilessly about it, but I could never stop.”

“It’s adorable.”

She rolled her eyes at the compliment.

“And my mother is going to love having you around.”

She took a deep, calming breath. “I don’t understand why you are here.”

He closed the distance between them again, laying his hands on her shoulders. “First, to put your mind at ease, my father is currently at your parent’s house discussing lumber.”

“He is?”

“He’s wanted to work with Foster logging for twenty years. We only waited this long to approach you because we first had to figure out what was going on over at M & B.”

“You did?”

“We know all about Mr. Anderson’s illness, and his son’s cutbacks. Morgan all but told us to cancel his contract and hire your father.”

“He did?”

Daniel chuckled. She was certain he was laughing at her. “What? Oh—” She sighed. “I’m really not a very good conversationalist.”

“I think you’re better than you think you are. When you’re not flustered, that is.”

She wanted to roll her eyes again, but knowing that would bring forth some other cryptic comment about his mother she decided to ask a question instead. “So if our dads are talking lumber, why are you here with me?”

“Because, all that silliness I was spouting . . .”

She waited, not sure whether she should squelch the hope building inside of her heart. Not even sure how she would deal with it if this wasn’t building to where she hoped it was.

“I meant it, Gingerbread. Every word.”

Tears sprang to her eyes, and her heart felt like it would burst. “You thought about me after you left?”

He nodded. "Often. And I'd like the chance to get to know you better."

"You would?"

Daniel laughed and wiped a tear from her cheek. "Got any plans this summer?"

She reached up to take hold of his hand. "Well, I don't know. I think I'm going to be pretty busy filling this new order of lumber for a toy manufacturer to make castles for little boys."

He pulled her up into his arms. "First, I think, that will require a lot of time helping said manufacturer design these castles so he knows exactly the types and cuts of lumber he will need."