



Julie Wright

INTERVIEW BY **KATHERINE MORRIS** | PHOTOS BY **TIFFANY TERTIPES**

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Julie Wright is the author of To Catch a Falling Star, Loved Like That, My Not-So-Fairy-Tale Life and Eyes Like Mine.

How did you get started writing?

In seventh grade, my teacher, Mrs. Brown, asked us to keep little “writing journals.” One day she asked me to stay after class. I was terrified. I thought I’d done something wrong and was now in huge trouble. I spent the whole class worrying over what I could have done to earn the punishment of staying after. I trudged to the front of the classroom and said, “You wanted to see me?” She pulled out my writing journal and told me I was a beautiful writer and that I had talent. No one had ever told me I had talent, of any kind, in my entire life. It was a big moment for me.

Later, in tenth grade, another teacher told me I wasn’t much of anything special. He told me I’d never be a writer. I started writing my first book out of spite toward him. That book went on to be published and won the best fiction award with my first publisher.

So I guess you could say I got started because of others: one who told me I could and another who told me I couldn’t. It’s a good lesson to beware who you listen to.

How long did it take you to write your first book, and what was it like getting it published?

I wrote the first sixty pages of my book when I was fifteen, then I got lost in the story and didn’t know where to go next, so I fiddled with it for several more years. Fiddling isn’t the same thing as writing and it took a long time to finish the novel. During that time, I had to grow up and get some real life experience. I was twenty-four when I finished it. Wow, that sounds horrible! Nine years? I’m sure glad it hasn’t taken that long for any of the others! Getting published wasn’t as easy as I’d thought. I received three rejection letters that sent me to the depths of despair, and then a fourth letter saying yes. That

It's amazing what you can do a little at a time if you're consistently doing it every day.

first publication was a great stepping stone for me — I don't think I could have moved forward as a writer and improved in that area of my life without that first taste of validation. I never would have been able to handle the vastness of the national market without it.

Your young adult novel *My Not-So-Fairy-Tale Life* deals with a young woman's decision about whether or not to give her child up for adoption. How did you get the idea for that story and what was it like researching and writing it?

My Not-So-Fairy-Tale Life is actually a spin-off from that first book I wrote when I was fifteen. One of the characters in the book was horrible. My aunt called me one day and said, "You made Suzie so bad. You really made me hate her. It would really show some real skill as a writer if you could write a book about her and make me love her." The idea fascinated me and I began Suzie's story.

Writing Suzie's story and doing research to make it as realistic as possible was heartbreaking. So many women find themselves in situations similar to Suzie's, and they feel so entirely alone. I wanted to show them they weren't alone — that there is a world of people waiting and wanting to help. There were many times where my husband would come into the room to find me sobbing over my manuscript. He'd ask what was wrong and I'd blubber about just how sad the story was, and how it just broke my heart. He'd then, with a look of absolute confusion, say, "You do know you're making this up, right? You do know she isn't real and that all these sad things aren't really happening and that because you're making them up, you can take them out if you think they're too sad."

He still makes fun of me over that. But I couldn't have changed

the story. Being the author doesn't mean I'm in control of the things my characters do. I also cried a lot while writing *Eyes Like Mine*. Cried and laughed. What fun is any story if you can't do a little of both?

What kind of feedback have you gotten from readers on *My Not-So-Fairy-Tale Life* as well as your other novels?

My Not-So-Fairy-Tale Life and *Eyes Like Mine* have received the best feedback, and they deserve it the most, so it's fair. Both books tap into raw emotion and humanity at its best and worst. I am always amazed by the e-mails from people who walk away from these books feeling like I've written their own personal stories. *Eyes Like Mine* is a little more exciting for me because the fan e-mails all profess a desire to learn more about ancestry and to work on genealogy. I love genealogy and it's exciting to be able to share that love while entertaining and connecting with the reader at the same time.

You're currently working on a fantasy series and a science fiction series for young adults. How has this experience been different from previous projects?

I love reading science fiction and fantasy. Because of that, it's only natural that I gravitated toward writing it as well. Writing fantasy and science fiction isn't really all that different, but it allows a creative flexibility that writing contemporary fiction doesn't have. In contemporary fiction, I am bound by the rules of the world we live in. In fantasy or science fiction, I am bound by the rules of the worlds the characters live in, but I get to make up the rules of those worlds. It is awesome to build societies with histories and legends. The book I'm working on now has such a rich heritage and backstory that I'll very likely have to write that

into its own book. These genres allow me to tap into myths, legends, and mysteries that fascinate me, and allow me all the wonder of exploring the possibilities of “what if . . . ?”

Some of your new books are written for the national market. How does writing and publishing in a national market differ from your experiences writing and publishing in the Mormon market?

I made a vow a long time ago, before I even had children, that I would never write anything that I'd be ashamed to have my daughter read. So it isn't like I have to edit myself more for one market than another. I start with a character or idea and follow the path that character or idea leads me, whether I'm writing in or outside my own culture. So as far as writing goes, nothing's really different — publishing, however, has been different. In the national market, it's important to have an agent. In the local market, an agent would not be of much use. I am genuinely grateful for my agent and all she does to help my national career. She has been invaluable in guiding me through the national market and helping me to understand how things work.

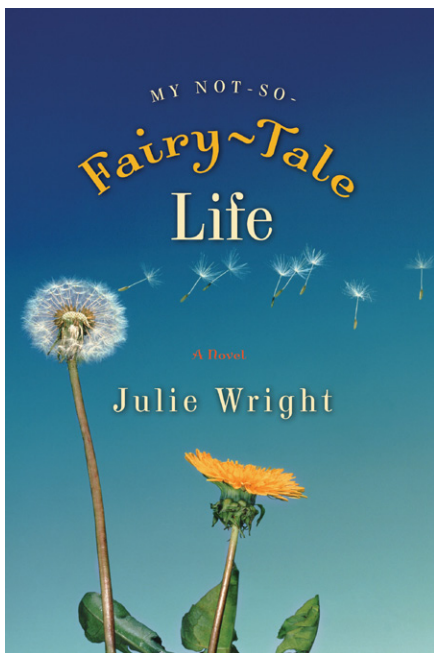
How has being involved with LDStorymakers influenced you as a writer?

LDStorymakers has been my own personal writing Shangri-La. They are cheaper than paying a therapist and more effective, too. They influence me in every way for the better. I've made some of my very closest friends through writing and LDStorymakers. These are the people who cheer me on when I succeed, mourn with me when I fail, and offer to help hide bodies for me when I'm angry. They are the first to learn when I have news of any kind — be it good or bad. We trade manuscript edits. They save me from embarrassing myself in print and offer me insights into writing, publishing, and marketing books. I don't think I would be who I am today without them. I can never repay them for all they are.

How do you balance your work, church, and family responsibilities with your writing?

James Christensen has a painting called the “Balancing Act.” Sometimes I think of that painting when I feel like I'm juggling too much and laugh at the appropriateness of such a painting — hoping I don't accidentally drop a teacup full of piano practices, or a plate of Boy Scouts. When I'm at book signings, I always have at least one person confess his or her desire to someday write a book “when I find the time.” I have found that people *make* time for whatever is important to them — whatever that may be. Writing is my important





JULIE WRIGHT

thing. I am happier when I'm moving forward with a book. I'm a better wife, mother, church member, neighbor, friend, and worker when I'm writing. Writing is important enough to make time for in my life.

Even if I only progress a little bit each day, even if I can only write one sentence, that's a sentence more than I had the day before. I can always find at least fifteen minutes a day — fifteen minutes of writing a little at a time.

It's amazing what you can do a little at a time if you're consistently doing it every day. I can write a whole page in my fifteen minutes a day. By the end of the year I have at least 300 pages — that's a whole book!

What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

Don't give up. That doesn't mean it's easy. Giving up is easy; not giving up is hard. Some days you might have to make the decision to not give up several times.

Write one book, work on getting it published, and then while you're waiting for responses from publishing houses, get busy and write another book.

Jessica Day George is one of my favorite authors and dearest friends. She has a stack of rejection letters. Obviously, those publishers and agents were insane, because everything she writes is amazing. She is a great author.

Lots of great authors get rejected before they are discovered. The gatekeepers of agents and slush pile readers are human, after all. They have bad days and different tastes.

A rejection really isn't personal. It *feels* personal, but it isn't. Of course it hurts. Cry yourself to sleep if you have to, eat your favorite comfort food, and get over yourself so you can get back to what's important — the writing.

How do you see your work as a writer helping to build the kingdom?

I think we each have gifts that we bring to the table of humanity that can lift each other up. I can't cook, sew, paint, sing, or do anything else like that. I can't provide those things for myself, but am glad to be able to enjoy them when others use their talents. Writing is something I can bring to the table and share with everyone else. If we all bring out our talents and lay them on the table for everyone to share and partake in, we all walk away full.

As a young woman, some of my first real connections to the gospel were through books other authors wrote about LDS characters. Through those novels, I was able to find my own place. I am grateful to those authors for helping me on my journey to gaining a testimony. I hope, if even in some small part, that I can provide that same experience for someone else.

Other than writing "until they pry the pen from my cold, dead fingers," do you have any other goals or dreams as a writer that you would like to see fulfilled before you die?

It used to be the goal to be published. Once I got there, I found I'd made lots of friends in the writing world whom I wanted to be with — doing whatever they were doing. Some of my very best friends are authors, and I can no longer imagine a life without them. I write to have the excuse to be where they are, to not be left behind as they move forward in their careers.

Oh yeah, and I still want to win the Whitney and the Newbery . . . and I want to be on the New York Times Bestseller List.

So, dreams are definitely still out there. I think everyone needs to continue growing in dreams, otherwise where is the adventure of progression? ■

Eyes Like Mine

AN EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL BY **JULIE WRIGHT**

1852

Constance bolted upright. “What was that?”

Another crack of thunder pealed through the night as lightning flickered brief illumination to the darkness of the wagon.

“Just a storm, love.” In the snatch of light, she saw William pull a suspender strap over his shoulder.

“Where are you going?”

“I heard the horses. They must’ve broken their tethers.”

Constance leaned back on her elbows. “Do you need help finding them?”

“No. You sleep. I’ll be back soon.” His kiss missed its mark on her forehead and caught part of her eyebrow. She smiled out at the darkness and laid her head back down, grateful for more sleep.

The wagon shuddered as more thunder cracked through the sky, and the baby whimpered. William stretched his hand into the basket beside their bedding and whispered soothingly to the infant. He hummed a lullaby until she stopped fussing. Constance liked to hear him sing and was disappointed he only hummed

the tune. His English brogue charmed her, far more than the clipped, perfect English she’d been raised to speak. Her father would have called William’s speech, “the peasant’s language.” If he hadn’t already exiled her for her choice in religion, her father would have exiled her for her choice of husband.

Constance caught his strong shape silhouetted against the flash of lightning as he opened the flap of the wagon. “Keep my place warm for me, love.”

She smiled again, thinking the words, *I will*, before drifting back to sleep.

* * *

Constance awoke with a start in the dim early morning light; her heart raced. While she struggled to understand why she woke with such fear, Eliza cried from her basket. Constance picked up the wailing child and settled in to nurse the infant.

And then she realized how cold it felt beside her. Her hand probed the blankets. The quilts were empty. “Where’s your father?” she said to Eliza.

Memories rushed her mind. She had been

exhausted. There had been lightening, thundering . . . horses . . .

The horses. William had not returned from searching after the horses!

She rubbed at her temple. He could have been struck by lightening, or thrown off one of the horses. Or perhaps Indians attacked him.

She was on her knees and settling Eliza back into her basket so she could go searching. She slipped her feet into her shoes, and crawled out of the wagon. Her eyes picked through the morning shadows of wagons and others in the wagon company as they busied themselves with morning chores.

He wasn't there.

One of their horses, a paint mare, grazed in the field just beyond her own wagon. She walked quickly to the horse, and picked up the frayed leather reins. The horse switched her tail, continuing to graze, unconcerned with Constance's presence.

Constance gripped the thin leather straps. "William!" she shrieked to the morning as it closed in around her.

* * *

Constance drew a deep chilling breath. Two days. He'd been missing for two days.

The night smelled clean with the fresh rain. "William!" The cold air burned her throat — now raw from yelling — and made her teeth ache. "William!" she called again. The wind whispering over the field grass was the only answer. Her chest constricted against the sob she'd been holding.

Searching alongside others from their company, they'd removed themselves far from the camp. But the hills and river beds revealed no clues as to where her husband could be.

The captain of the wagon company, Brother Smoot, appeared more nervous with every passing hour. He kept frowning and looking upward as though he expected the sky to fall on them for continuing the delay.

Constance knew what he wanted to say when he came near enough to speak — though they felt her pain, though they loved her husband like a brother, they had to give up the search for him and continue their trek across the plains to meet the Saints in Zion.

But each time he made his approach, he faltered. His shoulders would slump as if he had battled against the fear in her eyes and lost. Instead, he would offer words of encouragement and hope. And the search continued. The rest of the company had been sympathetic and given her their full support in looking for William. Some of the older girls in the Hatch family

and the Nielson family had taken turns watching Eliza, while Constance joined the men to scour the hills and riverbeds for any sign of William.

Constance drew a cold, ragged breath. Where could he have gone? What ill fate could have befallen him? She thought again of the lightening. If he'd been struck . . .

"No. I will not think on it." She bit into her lips and closed her eyes against the images in her mind.

Brother Smoot interrupted her mutterings with a soft clearing of his throat. "We cannot wait any longer," he said, not meeting her gaze. She tried to stand in front of him, tried to make him look into her eyes, hoping that if he could see her pain one more time, he would change his mind.

His chapped lips pressed into a thin firm line before he went on. "We've delayed so much already. Food rations are low; I fear there won't be enough to last us to the end of our journey. I am so sorry . . . so sorry." His voice cracked at the last. "I wish I could do more for you, Sister." He briefly put his hand on her shoulder, still not looking her in the eyes. He turned and walked away.

Constance felt empty as she followed them back to the wagons and made her way to her own empty wagon. She knelt on her blankets and poured out her heart in prayer. "Lord? What would you have me do?" Her mind felt numb. She had never felt so alone in her life. Even when she had been cast off from her family in England and all of her letters were returned unopened from her mother, she had not felt this alone. Had God abandoned her?

"What direction should I go? What, Lord, do you want of me? I have done everything you've asked. Everything. I've left everything I loved, yet found new love, then *he* is torn from me as well. Still you want more of me!" She shouted the last, and knew the other families in their wagons would hear, but she didn't care. Many nights, others in the company cried over the loss of a child or an elderly parent due to sickness or other misfortune. Would they judge her for giving in to the weakness of her own despair?

Thoughts of her infant daughter filled Constance with grief. Eliza would never know her grandmother or aunt . . . and now, was she to grow not knowing her own father?

"It isn't worth it, Lord." She allowed her thoughts to drift to her own mother and to all the trials she'd overcome to get to this very point. "I don't care what Zion is anymore. It could be more beautiful than Eden and it would not be worth it. I cannot leave him. To go on without him would be wretched enough to blind me to any beauty Zion might hold. I'll not go another step!" The blasphemy tasted bitter on her tongue.

JULIE WRIGHT

eyes
Like Mine

a novel



Constance buried her face in her pillow to muffle the sounds of her crying. And though she never finished her prayer vocally, in her heart she continued pleading for a miracle. With no way of knowing what time it was, she slipped out of her wagon, bundled a blanket around her, and walked. She was not leaving with the company . . . not without her husband.

* * *

2010

“Liz! Sister Peterson’s on the phone!”

Liz rounded the corner and glared at her mom through the banister poles at the top of the stairs. She shook her head violently, trying to get it through her mom’s head that there was *no way* she was talking to Sister Peterson or anyone else from the Young Women’s presidency.

Her mother held the phone to her chest to muffle her words. “*Now, Liz.*”

Liz shook her head again and mouthed the word, “No.”

With a deep breath, Clair King put the phone back to her ear. “I’m sorry, Sister Peterson, Liz refuses to come to the phone right now. You know how teenagers are . . .”

“Mom!” Liz hissed in disbelief.

When her mom hung up, she folded her arms across her chest. “What?”

“Why would you tell her that?”

“What did you think I was going to do? Lie to her for you?”

Liz’s green eyes flashed. “It would have been more tactful.”

“Tactful would be coming to the phone when you get a call.”

“She was going to ask me to sing. I’m not singing in the sacrament program.”

“Why?” Her mother met her glare, but Liz saw that the green eyes were tired and her heart wasn’t in the fight Liz insisted on battling.

“They’re singing the song *Families Can Be Together Forever.*”

“So?”

“So, it’s not true. *You* said I should never lie.”

Clair rolled her eyes, and jerked a hand through her short hair. “You’re just being difficult. It is too true.”

“It isn’t for *me*. Not anymore. So forget it. I’m not singing.”

Her mother pressed her palm to her forehead. With her other hand she clutched the emerald necklace hanging at her throat, as though it could offer some magic to quell Liz’s growing resentment. Liz

snorted at that. No necklace could fix their family no matter where it came from. The emerald stone was part of the family inheritance that would be passed to Liz when her mom died. Her mom said it was fitting since Liz had already inherited her mom’s green eyes and dark hair. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Talk about what?”

“Your father.”

“No. He’s a lousy, stupid, cheating son of a —”

“Eliza Josephine King!”

“Gun, Mom. Son of a gun. I’m still not singing.”

“Then you can explain that to Sister Peterson when you get to church today.”

* * *

Liz showered and dressed for church slowly. After the phone call, she wanted to stay home and pretend to be sick. She wouldn’t really have to fake much either. The idea of facing Sister Peterson after her mom said Liz wouldn’t come to the phone made her want to throw up.

When she went downstairs to fix some toast, her mom interrupted any idea of breakfast. “Come here. I want to show you something.” Clair turned and went down the hall, leaving Liz with no choice but to follow. Liz sighed. She was likely going to get chewed out for not respecting her Young Women’s leaders or something like that.

They finally stopped at her dad’s study . . . well, what *used* to be her dad’s study anyway. On the wall behind the door was a huge chart of their family tree on her mother’s side. Clair pointed to the chart.

“I want you to sing in the program. It’s two weeks away, and I don’t expect you to decide whether or not you want to right now. But I wanted to show you why the song is true.”

“Mom — really, don’t. It’s not important.”

“Yes, it is. It’s very important.” Her mom’s hand went to the emerald pendant at her throat. Liz stared at it, and the way her mom touched the gemstone like a lucky rabbit’s foot, and sighed in frustration. One more lecture on how her ancestors rocked the foundation of the world was enough to make her scream.

“It’s important because you have an eternal family. Generations and generations of ancestors are watching and waiting to see what you do with the genetics and history they handed to you.” Her mom waved a hand over the chart. “You have Grandpa Brown who built the Alpine Stake Tabernacle. You have —”

“I know.” Liz interrupted. “And great-way-back-there somewhere, some grandma died on the plains and another one crossed the whole way on foot and we should be strong like them.”

“This isn’t a lecture, Liz.”

“It sounds like one.” Liz looked at her mom’s crestfallen face and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, Mom. I know what you’re trying to say and I get it . . . I do. I just don’t see what any of this has to do with *my* life.” She walked away, hearing her mother sigh behind her.

* * *

Sister Peterson moved aside, revealing the words, *Your Personal Plan*, on the dry erase board.

“When was the last time any of you *really* prayed?” she asked. “When was the last time you knelt and asked Heavenly Father what direction He wanted you to go? When was the last time you took a few minutes to listen after you put a question to Him? When did you last ask him what He wanted from you, rather than tell Him what you wanted?”

Liz shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She couldn’t remember *ever* praying like that. She looked over to the other girls who were nodding. She rolled her eyes. *So different* . . . Liz was glad for the empty chair next to her. She’d sat on the end away from the others on purpose. Since gossip of her father’s scandalous affair, excommunication, and the following divorce raged through the ward, she’d felt like an outsider. It wasn’t so much that anyone treated her different as it was she *felt* different. They had their perfect families. Her family was the object of criticism and hushed discussions on sin. What good was a temple marriage for all eternity when eternity couldn’t make it past two decades?

Before class was over, Sister Peterson challenged them to all kneel down and really pray sometime over the next week. “You owe God a real prayer. Go out and find your own personal Sacred Grove. See if, in the next week, you can discover His plan for you.”

Sister Peterson was right. Liz needed to pray. She needed to find somewhere safe and alone for that. Somewhere without disruptions. She chose the stables where her horse could keep her company without interrupting. She waited until after dinner — after prayers were said and teeth were brushed. Her mom had announced at dinner that she’d be getting a new job. A new job meant that Liz was now entirely in charge of the household. It was too much. She’d lost her father and was now losing her mother too. She sneaked out of the house after everyone had settled into their rooms. She eased the scooter out of the driveway and into the road before she got on and started it up.

When the scooter came to a stop she took a deep breath, inhaling the familiar scents of the stables where her horse, Sassy, was housed.

She clipped the helmet to the front handlebar and

made her way to Sassy’s stall. She unlocked the gate and went in, rubbing her hand along the horse’s nose. Sassy whickered and swished her black tail, blinking her big dark eyes. Sassy’s big eyes were the reason Liz fell in love with the Arabian horse three years earlier. Her dad was good friends with the breeder; one thing led to another and then Sassy belonged to Liz.

Liz ran her hand along Sassy’s neck for a long time, finally brushing the horse down before settling herself on the hay at the back of the stall. Sassy turned her head to stare at Liz.

“I don’t know what I’m doing here,” Liz said, as though the horse had asked a question. “I don’t know what I’m doing anywhere.” She muttered the last, flicking a handful of straw at the wood slatted walls in frustration.

She thought about Sister Peterson asking her to pray and find out what Heavenly Father wanted her to be and where He wanted her to go. *Find your own personal sacred grove.*

Making the decision to actually pray took some time. She didn’t feel like praying now that she was here, yet felt like she needed to. She was on her knees before making the conscious decision to talk to Heavenly Father. She had her arms folded while still chiding herself for thinking Heavenly Father would really tell her what direction to take. Then she was praying.

Liz poured her heart out to the Lord like never before. She cried and whined, thanking Him for blessings she felt truly thankful for, while yelling at Him for not helping her when she needed it most. Then she asked the question, “What do you want me to do with my life? What is it you really want me to become?” Her heart pounded and her stomach felt all those tingling feelings everyone said happened when people got real answers to prayer. She listened for those real answers she knew without a doubt would come.

She felt exhausted, unaware of the time that passed, only knowing that a lot of time *had* passed since her knees ached and her legs were asleep. Her back popped as she stretched and laid herself back into the straw. She had listened so long waiting for an answer, but the heavens remained silent.

Liz felt betrayed by the silence. Especially when she’d known that He *would* answer. So why didn’t He? She hadn’t just believed He would, she *knew* He would. Did she not kneel long enough? Did she not wait long enough?

She was so disappointed and yet so tired that she was asleep as the first tears slid out from her closed eyes.

* * *

Constance had no way of knowing how far or how long she'd walked. When the light from the stars and moon disappeared behind the dark cover of clouds, she knew another storm was coming. The wind whipped at the stray strands of hair across her face as she continued moving. "William!" She'd waited a good distance from the wagons before she started calling. She had to find him — to bring him back so they could continue to Zion together. So they could live their lives as they planned.

"William!" The first drops of rain pelted her face; lightning flashed in the distance and the thunder followed shortly after. The wind picked up and the thunder rolled along the hillside indicating that this storm would be big. She looked back in the direction she'd come. She'd never beat the brunt of the storm to the shelter of the wagons. In the next flash of lightning she saw a small slope with a rock overhang. She ran to the shelter it would provide.

Constance watched the storm from her new vantage point. The wind whipped through the soaked layers of her dress as she huddled into herself for warmth.

"Lord. Please help me!" she cried out over the thunder.

But the storm only worsened at her plea.

"I will not leave him! This whole journey was a fool's errand, and it was not worth it!"

The thunder shook the ground under her as though trying to bait her into a fight.

"Do you hear me?" she screamed. "I'll not go any farther! It's not worth it! You cannot let Eliza and me be abandoned like this!"

She battled back and forth with the thunder until her voice was entirely spent. She shook her head and whispered, "We'll never survive without him. There's no point to any of this. My daughter needs her father. And I need my husband."

Exhaustion consumed her as a fine white mist swirled around her knees where she knelt. The mist rose to her waist, and then her shoulders until she felt as though she'd been bundled into an embrace. As the warm mist touched her cold cheeks, Constance felt herself falling through the mist as though she'd been flung from a tall mountain. Yet she felt no fear. The embrace held her tight — kept her warm — kept her safe. She furrowed her brow. "A strange dream . . ." she murmured, as she succumbed to the warmth of the mist and the exhaustion in the very marrow of her bones. She slept.

* * *

Constance awoke with a moan. Her muscles, stiff and sore from sleeping on the ground, burned as she tried to stretch. She blinked her eyes against the morning light shining down on her through thick wood slats —

She sat upright. Wood slats? There should be no wood slats. There should be rock — stone. She'd gone to sleep under the rocky overhang. Her body trembled as she took in her surroundings. The endless fields and rolling hills were gone. The rocky protection from the night previous had vanished.

In their place stood buildings. Many buildings. She scrambled to her feet and stood under a small lean-to at the edge of a green field. Structures crowded in on all sides of the field. Constance squeezed her eyes shut and snapped them open again, but everything remained the same — unfamiliar . . . terrifying.

Constance wrung her hands, unable to stamp down the panic rising up inside her, not caring that William would mock her hysteria. "This is wrong. This is all terribly wrong!" Her chest constricted in fear as she turned in a quick circle, trying to get her bearing — to latch onto anything that would be familiar to her.

"Oh!" she gasped and covered her mouth with her hand. "I've been abducted. Carried away in the night." She uttered an oath that would have made her mother blush and instantly regretted being so loose with her tongue. She'd likely been carried off by savages. Obscenities would not help such a situation. She had to get away — to get back to the wagons. To get back to her daughter.

The thought of her daughter moved her to action. Her shaking legs carried her forward, though she did not know what direction she should go. She broke into a run.

* * *

2010

Liz awoke with a start. The pale morning light shone through the cracks of the wooden slats in the gate of Sassy's stall. "Oh no!" She groaned, running a hand through her dark hair to clear out the straw. "Mom is going to kill me!" She jumped up and locked the stable, then dashed for the scooter.

As she turned the corner of the Little Barn, she ran smack into someone. A jolt of pain traveled through her spine as they both landed on the ground from the force of Liz's momentum. She rolled a bit to her side with a whimper. "I am so sorry! I —" Liz looked at the girl and blinked.

The girl looked to be her same age, and could have

been Liz's sister. They had the same dark brown hair and a similar sprinkle of freckles lightly over their noses. But it was the eyes — green like emeralds — that surprised Liz the most. The only other person she knew with eyes like hers was her mom. Those eyes were so startling that it took Liz a few moments to realize the girl wore a dirty pioneer dress and looked positively terrified.

Liz stood and reached a hand out to help her up. "I'm sorry," she began again. "I didn't know you were there. Are you okay?" Maybe they were filming a movie. Liz couldn't think of any other reason the girl would be dressed like she was.

The deep English accent trembled. "Something has gone wrong!" She brushed at her skirts in agitation and smoothed her dark unkempt hair back away from her face. "Where am I? There were no structures where I slept. It was a cove in the rock . . ." She stared at Liz, her eyes wide with fear. "Am I your prisoner? Did you bring me to this place while I slept?"

Liz backed up a few steps, holding her hands up in protest. "Whoa there. I didn't bring anyone anywhere. And though this little conversation is . . . well, weird. I gotta go. My mom's gonna kill me for taking off last night. And so, you know, good luck with your movie." Liz hurried past the girl.

"Wait!" She called. "You cannot leave me here alone! What if whoever did take me returns? Please!"

Liz couldn't say why she stopped and turned

around. It seemed insane. Did this girl really think she was kidnapped? And yet, who knew? Maybe some predator was lurking in one of the stables. The thought quickened Liz's pulse.

"You were kidnapped?"

"I've no idea what happened, I assure you. The storm commenced not too long after I left the camp. I sheltered under a rock overhang. But when I awoke, I was in that bit of field . . ." The girl frantically cast her eyes around, as though trying to get a grip on her location. "Over there?" She seemed uncertain. Her voice cracked and her eyes shone with tears. "And these buildings and structures were here and nothing at all looks familiar to me. Please, help me."

After a moment's consideration, Liz decided she should at least call the police. Liz's mom had likely already done that very thing to search for *her*. If there was a kidnapper running around . . .

"Who are you?" The girl demanded. Her eyes were wide with fear.

"Liz King, no relation to Stephen, though you're creeping me out enough, I feel like I'm in one of his books. Who are *you*?" Liz had worked over her fear enough to decide it was time to bolt. Girl or no girl, kidnapper or no, she was leaving.

"Constance Miles Brown."

She said it without preamble or any trumpets, but Liz felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise. "No way." She breathed. ■

