Building For Forever (by Deborah)

Series: Adam: The Early Years (6 of 6)

Summary: After four years at Harvard’s Lawrence Scientific School, Adam Cartwright is returning to the Ponderosa with a gift for his family.

Rating: T  WC  53,200

Adam: The Early Years Series:

The World was all Before Them
A Real Nice Lady
A Gentleman and a Scholar – Part 1
A Gentleman and a Scholar – Part 2
Veritas
Building on Forever

Story Notes:

First, I must thank my friend and beta reader, Lis. I’ve said it before but it bears repeating: her skills as an editor are invaluable to me as is her support and encouragement. Next I want to thank Englishgirl. This story owes its existence to her; if she hadn’t kept requesting it, I probably wouldn’t have written it. I must also thank Gabriel-Landon and Fan d’Adam for their help with some of the Spanish phrases used by the Cartwrights’ vaqueros. Finally, I want to acknowledge that nearly all the characters in this story—the Cartwrights, Hop Sing, the McKarens, the Johnsons, the Edwards, the Reagans, Ross and Delphine—are not my creations and I intend no copyright infringement by making use of them.
Note: I want to remind everyone that when I write my prequels, I try to achieve a compromise between American history and “Bonanza” history by moving events forward six years, which means Adam was born in 1836 rather than 1830. This story begins in the summer of 1858 with Adam’s return from Harvard. Virginia City does not exist yet but there are some settlements in what was then known as Western Utah: Genoa (formerly Mormon Station) and the brand-new Carson City (formerly Eagle Station). I also work on the premise that Adam designed and built the ranch house after he returned from college so when the story begins, the Cartwrights are living in the cabin Ben and Adam built when they first settled on the Ponderosa. Finally, while doing research for an earlier prequel, I found a very interesting web site about cowboys in northern Nevada that states cowboys in that region used some slightly different terms than cowboys in other parts of the West. The one that I want to point out here is caviata, which is their term for the pool of saddle horses and is known elsewhere as remuda.

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Therefore, when we build, let us think that we build for ever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labor and wrought substance of them, “See! this our fathers did for us.”

John Ruskin The Seven Lamps of Architecture

Building on Forever

Chapter 1
Ben Cartwright scanned the horizon with his spyglass, searching for a sign of the clipper ship bringing his first-born home. Adam had been in Cambridge, Massachusetts four years, studying at Harvard’s Lawrence Scientific School. During those four years, his letters to his father and younger brothers had made it clear how much he enjoyed college life. They were full of descriptions of trips to the Corner Bookstore to check out the new arrivals, rowing on the Charles River with his friends or in races with his crew, writing and acting in plays with other members of the Hasty Pudding, and attending balls and cotillions where he could dance and flirt with pretty young girls. With each passing year, Ben worried more that he would lose his oldest son. Cambridge and Boston had so much to offer a young man; how could an isolated cattle ranch in western Utah compete?

Ben smiled as he remembered the evening he’d read Adam’s last letter from Cambridge.

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. . . Aaron and Elsie are getting married one week after graduation. The wedding will be held in Shelburne Falls and Aaron has asked me to be a groomsman. His brother David will be his best man and I’m honored that he also wanted me to stand with him. Elsie’s older sister will be her matron of honor and Aaron’s little sister Docia will be a bridesmaid. Elsie’s sister and brother-in-law are the only members of her family attending the wedding. Her parents are angry that she’s marrying a farmer so they refuse to attend. Thomas, Rob and Fred are all traveling to Shelburne Falls to attend the wedding and show their support for Aaron and Elsie.

Once the wedding is over, I’ll return to Boston to say goodbye to Grandfather and book passage on the next ship for San
Francisco. I’m looking forward to seeing all of you more than I can say.

Affectionately yours,
Adam

“I wish Adam was comin’ straight home,” Ben’s middle son said wistfully when Ben finished reading the letter aloud after supper. Hoss and his older brother had been inseparable for the first eleven years of Hoss’s life and when Adam went away—first to San Francisco to study with a tutor and then to Cambridge—Hoss had missed him dreadfully.

“So do I, Hoss, but Adam and Aaron are very close friends; it’s only natural Adam would want to witness such an important event in his friend’s life. And chances are they won’t see each other again,” Ben said gently.

“I would’ve liked to meet Aaron,” Hoss said then, smiling slightly. “I jest don’t see why Elsie’s family don’t want her to marry a farmer, but I’m glad Aaron’s friends are gonna be there at the weddin’.”

“Elsie’s family is high society, and they think they are better than farmers or ranchers,” Ben explained, his tone making it clear that he didn’t agree. “I think Elsie is a very special young lady since she has the strength of character to marry the man she loves even if it means she’ll be living a life very different from the one she knew in Boston.”

For a moment, Ben’s thoughts turned to the three very special women who had briefly graced his life. Liz had been willing to leave her father and her comfortable life in Boston to follow his dream. Inger had already been uprooted once to follow her
father’s dream of a new life in a new land, but she did not hesitate to uproot herself again to travel west with her husband. Marie had left behind the convenience of life in a large city—in her case, New Orleans—to settle on a remote ranch and take on the responsibility of raising her two stepsons.

Ben’s youngest son Joseph, known affectionately as Little Joe, was uncharacteristically quiet as his pa and brother discussed Adam’s letter. Little Joe enjoyed listening to his pa read Adam’s letters aloud. The descriptions of a life so different from his own were entertaining, but as far as Little Joe was concerned, it was the same as when Pa read stories about Jack the Giant Killer or Aladdin and his magic lamp. Adam was no more real to Little Joe than they were.

Now the brother who seemed like a character in a story intended to come live on the Ponderosa, and Little Joe could see how happy the news made his pa and brother. Even their cook, Hop Sing, was clearly delighted by the news. Little Joe felt left out since he couldn’t share their joy. He wished he could remember Adam. He stared at the daguerreotype of Adam and his grandfather that Adam had sent the first year he was away and Pa had placed on the mantle. Both men were dressed in dark frock coats, starched white collars and neckties; Little Joe didn’t remember ever seeing men dressed so formally, and it made Adam seem more alien. Little Joe gazed intently at Adam’s features, willing himself to remember doing things with his oldest brother, but his mind yielded no memories.

That night the eight-year-old managed to keep awake until his older brother climbed the ladder to the loft where they slept.

“Hoss,” he whispered, not wanting Pa to overhear.

“Yer supposed to be asleep,” Hoss whispered back.
“I needed to talk to ya,” Little Joe said, and Hoss recognized the urgency in his little brother’s tone. He changed quickly into his nightshirt and then got into bed beside his little brother. He was surprised by Little Joe’s question.

“Do you remember Adam?”

“Course I do,” Hoss replied, forgetting to speak softly, so Little Joe put a finger to his lips as a warning.

“I can’t. I tried and tried, but I can’t remember him at all,” the little boy said sadly. “What’s he like?”

“He’s smart,” Hoss said without hesitation.

“I figured that,” Little Joe said impatiently.

“Well, he loves to read,” Hoss said slowly, trying to decide the best way to describe his older brother to his younger. “When we was growin’ up, as soon as Adam finished his chores, he’d stick his nose in a book.” Little Joe frowned slightly, finding it difficult to comprehend anyone spending his spare time reading books. “And he liked our lessons, ’specially arithmetic,” Hoss continued.

“Yer joshin’ me,” Little Joe said, poking Hoss with his elbow.

“No, I ain’t,” Hoss said firmly. “Adam could figure arithmetic problems in his head faster than I could usin’ my slate. And he didn’t make no mistakes neither.”

“Didn’t he like to do anything fun?” Little Joe asked then. This brother sounded awfully dull.

“Sure he did,” Hoss said. “He liked to go fishin’. He’s the one taught me how. And he taught me to skip stones, and helped me teach you.”
“He did?” Little Joe said. He sure wished he could remember that.

“That’s right,” Hoss said very emphatically. “He sings real good too and plays the guitar. Ma taught him the guitar,” Hoss added, sounding wistful at the memory. “Adam’s pretty serious,” he said then, “but when he thinks somethin’ is really funny, he just throws back his head and laughs.”

At that moment they heard their pa call up, “Boys, stop talking and get to sleep.”

There was silence from the loft so Ben headed back to the lean-to that served as his bedroom. As he lay in the dark he told himself, Little Joe will remember Adam once he spends time with him. Besides, they’ll be making new memories, and that’s what’s really important.

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“Pa, do ya see Adam’s boat?” Little Joe asked, bringing Ben’s thoughts back to the present. He and Hoss and Little Joe had traveled from the Ponderosa over the Sierra Nevada, and had arrived in San Francisco late yesterday. They were staying with Dave and Opal Townsend. Dave was now Ben’s banker, but Ben had first met the Townsends when they all traveled west by wagon train from Independence, Missouri.

“Ship,” Ben corrected his youngest automatically. “No, I don’t see—” He stopped and smiled broadly. “I do see some sails on the horizon, and they just may be Adam’s ship.” He smiled at his boys. “The ship won’t dock for some time. Why don’t we look for a place to get some lunch?”

It had been several hours since they’d eaten breakfast with the Townsends so both boys agreed readily. When the three
Cartwrights returned to the wharf, they didn’t have long to wait before the clipper ship’s passengers began to disembark. Ben and Hoss scanned them carefully, but it was Ben who first spotted the tall, dark-haired young man dressed informally in a corduroy jacket, checked shirt and canvas work pants.

“Adam!” he shouted, running toward the young man, and he saw his first-born’s big, dimpled grin—the one he remembered so well.

Little Joe started to run after his pa, but Hoss put his big hand on the boy’s shoulder. Little Joe glared up at his older brother but Hoss said softly, “Give ‘em a minute alone.” Little Joe shrugged and quit trying to wriggle away.

“Adam. Son,” Ben said, hugging his first-born and blinking back tears. “Let me look at you,” he said then, stepping back but keeping his hands on his son’s shoulders. They were broader now, Ben noted. The gangly boy of seventeen had been replaced by a young man of twenty-one with broad shoulders and chest that tapered to a slim waist.

“It’s so good to see you, Pa,” Adam said then, his hazel eyes suspiciously bright. “You haven’t changed.”

“You have. Four years ago I said goodbye to a boy, but now I welcome home a young man,” Ben said with a big smile. “A young man who graduated third in his class at Harvard. I am so proud of you, Adam.” Ben gave his son’s shoulders an affectionate squeeze. He grinned broadly as he added, “You’ll find your brothers have also changed quite a lot while you’ve been gone.” He turned and saw his younger sons and waved them over.

“Howdy, Adam,” Hoss said, grinning broadly as he enveloped his older brother in a bear hug.

“You have grown, Younger Brother,” Adam said with a smile, as he
looked up at Hoss for the first time in his life. The stocky twelve-year-old he remembered had been replaced with a tall, burly youth of sixteen, but the bright blue eyes and friendly smile hadn’t changed.

“Last time I measured him, he was six feet and two inches,” Ben said proudly. “Two inches taller than his father.”

“And one inch taller than his older brother,” Adam remarked with the crooked grin Hoss remembered.

“He’s still growing,” Ben added, smiling affectionately at his middle boy while Adam playfully punched his brother in the arm.

Little Joe stared up at Adam. He looked older than he did in the daguerreotype, but not as stern. Little Joe could see he and Adam had one thing in common—curly hair. Adam’s curls weren’t dark blond like his though. Adam’s curls were so dark they were almost black. Little Joe noted that Adam’s eyes weren’t blue like Hoss’s, green like his own or dark brown like Pa’s; Adam’s eyes were more of a golden brown. Little Joe remembered overhearing Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Edwards talking once. Mrs. Edwards said it was hard to believe Hoss and Little Joe were brothers since they didn’t look anything alike, and Mrs. Johnson said they were only half brothers. Little Joe worried that meant he and Hoss weren’t really brothers, so that night he’d asked his Pa what a half brother was. Pa explained that he and Hoss and Adam were all his sons but they were half brothers because they had different mothers.

Now, Little Joe saw Adam smiling down at him. “I think Little Joe has grown the most though,” Adam commented, and his dimples deepened. “It’s good to see you again, Little Joe.”

“Yeah, good to see ya,” Little Joe said politely, holding out his hand.
Adam raised one eyebrow, but solemnly shook his little brother’s hand as their father sighed softly and Hoss looked puzzled. Adam said to his father, “I need to arrange to have my trunk and books delivered to the Townsends.”

Ben nodded, saying, “We’ll come with you and then I thought we’d go for a walk so we could talk.”

As they walked along Washington Street, Adam said, “Oh, before I forget, Grandfather wanted me to extend his best wishes to all of you.” He reached into one of the flapped pockets on the side of his jacket and pulled out a folded piece of paper sealed with wax, then handed it to his father.

“I hope the Captain is in good health,” Ben said as he accepted the paper, recognizing Captain Stoddard’s handwriting.

“He’s in good health for a man of eighty-one,” Adam said quietly. “Polly and Biddy look after him as well as his house, so he’s in good hands.”

“I wrote and thanked him fer the spurs he got me fer my birthday,” Hoss said. “They’re beauties.”

“He’ll be glad to know you like them,” Adam said, smiling warmly at his brother.

“We brought Beauty and your tack with us,” Ben said then. “We’re going to buy some supplies so I also drove the wagon and mules and left them at a livery.” He smiled just a little as he added, “I know you haven’t done much riding, Adam, so we can take turns driving the wagon on the way home.” His smile broadened at the relief on Adam’s face.

“Say, Adam,” Hoss said then, “we got a surprise fer ya. Pa bought a McCormick reaper.”
“Flint Johnson has one and it’s made an enormous difference in the amount of time and men needed to harvest his hay and oats. It’s expensive, but I determined it would more than pay for itself,” Ben commented, and never noticed Adam’s sardonic expression. He’d totally forgotten that not long before Adam had sailed to Boston he’d recommended his father buy a reaper.

“Did we tell ya that that when we did the brandin’ this spring, we counted 950 head?” Hoss asked, grinning at his brother.

Adam whistled at the figure. “I see the Ponderosa has prospered while I’ve been away.”

“Yeah, it sure has. We bought another bull from Don Alejandro to improve our stock and hired three more vaqueros,” Hoss said proudly. “And Pa made Will Reagan foreman.” The sign outside one of the shops they were passing caught his eye, and he stopped. “Hey Pa, this is the place that sells the chocolate bars. Do ya mind if I stopped and got me one? Shoot, I’ll buy everyone a chocolate bar.” His blue eyes looked pleadingly at his pa, reminding Ben of when he was Little Joe’s age.

“Would you like a chocolate bar, Adam?” Ben asked, and his sons saw the twinkle in his brown eyes.

“Sure,” Adam drawled.

“And what about you, Little Joe?” Ben then asked his youngest.

Little Joe didn’t remember eating a chocolate bar years before so he glanced over at Hoss questioningly.

“They’re real good, Little Joe. Ain’t they, Adam? Pa?” Hoss asked.

“I think you’ll like the chocolate bar,” Ben said, smiling down at Little Joe. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a
quarter. “Here,” he said, handing the coin to Hoss, “buy each of us a chocolate bar. My treat.”

“Thanks, Pa,” Hoss said with an enormous grin.

As soon as his younger brothers disappeared inside Mrs. Ghirardelli & Co., Adam turned to Ben and said, “I wanted to ask you about Ross and Mr. Marquette.” He’d been worried about his childhood friend ever since the previous autumn when his pa had written about the tragedy that had befallen the Marquette family. Ross’s sister, who was a month or two younger than Hoss, had been bitten by her dog, which turned out to have rabies. Mrs. Marquette nursed her daughter, watching her suffer terrible headaches, hallucinations and convulsions, knowing that she was doomed. The night of her daughter’s funeral, Mrs. Marquette went out to the barn and hung herself. Ross and his father found her body the next morning.

Ben’s happy visage darkened at Adam’s words. “Ross seems to be handling his grief,” Ben said, choosing his words carefully. “He joins us on Sundays and in the afternoon he’ll come with the rest of us to bowl with the miners at Sun Mountain. I believe a few times Todd and Carl even persuaded him to join them at the grand balls the miners hold on Saturdays.” Ben sighed as he added, “But Dan Marquette has become a recluse. He never leaves their cabin. Ross is running the ranch with Pedro’s help. He’s obviously not comfortable talking about his pa so Andy and I stopped asking.” Ben looked quickly in the direction of the shop to make sure the boys were still inside before adding, “Your brothers were very upset by Betsy’s death. I, uh, didn’t tell Little Joe how Mrs. Marquette died. I didn’t think he was old enough to understand how she could have been driven to take her own life. Hoss and I talked about it. You know how sensitive he is and he grieved for her as much as he did for Betsy.”
Just then they saw Hoss and Little Joe in the doorway of the candy store so their somber expressions changed to cheerful ones.

“This chocolate bar is dee-licious,” Hoss said as he chewed his first bite, causing his pa to roll his eyes in exasperation. He despaired of ever teaching Hoss not to talk with food in his mouth.

“Yeah, it sure is!” Little Joe added, nodding his head for emphasis.

Looking about him at the buildings and people as they turned down Kearny Street, Hoss asked his older brother curiously, “Say, Adam, is Boston as big as San Francisco?”

Adam smiled just a little as he replied, “I’m not sure how many square miles either city is, but I’d guess Boston has at least twice as many people.”

“Twice as many,” Hoss repeated, his eyes widening, while Little Joe looked at Adam skeptically.

“Remember I wrote you last year about visiting New York City with my friends?” Adam said then, and his brothers nodded. “Well, I think New York City has more than twice as many people as Boston.”

“Yer joshin’ us!” Little Joe exclaimed.

“No, he’s not, boys,” Ben said firmly. “New York is the biggest city in the United States.”

“Well, I don’t ever wanna go to New York City or Boston,” Hoss said emphatically. “San Francisco is plenty big enough fer me. And there ain’t no city can compare with the Ponderosa.”
“You’re right, Hoss,” Adam said, placing an arm around his brother’s shoulders and smiling at him.

By the time the four Cartwrights arrived at the Townsends’ home in the exclusive neighborhood of South Park, Adam knew all about the three new vaqueros his pa had hired and the new families that had settled in the area, as well as the fact many of the miners in Gold Canyon had given up their dream of striking it rich and left the area. Ben and Hoss did all the talking. Little Joe was quiet unless he was asked a question, but Ben and Hoss had so much to tell Adam that the others didn’t really notice his silence.

As they stopped in front of the four story townhouse with its bright blue front door, Adam smiled. Before sailing to Boston, he’d spent several months living with the Townsends so he could study with their son’s tutor, and his memories of that time were happy ones—his singing lessons, Mrs. Townsend teaching him to waltz before his first ball, and the surprise birthday party the Townsends gave him. It was during his stay that he’d had his first opportunity to spend time with females his own age, and he remembered them very well: the flirtatious Cooper sisters, pretty little Kitty Miller who loved to discuss her favorite novels with him, and Sally Stevens who was a talented pianist and introduced him to the sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven.

Adam had also made a good friend during that time. He and Charles Seaton came from very different backgrounds but they shared a love of music and literature. They had opposing views on the abolition of slavery and States’ Rights and had many lively debates, but never let the issues drive a wedge between them. The two had remained in touch while Adam was at Harvard and Charles at the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

Adam was startled when the Townsends’ maid answered the door.
He’d been expecting the pretty brunette who’d been the maid when he’d stayed there.

“Good evening, Mr. Cartwright,” the new maid said. “Mrs. Townsend asked me to tell you that dinner is at seven and everyone will gather in the music room first. Oh, and I was told to tell your son Adam that his baggage arrived and was taken to his old room.”

“Thank you,” Ben replied with a smile and the maid curtseyed before holding the door open for them.

As Adam walked down the hallway and up the elegantly curving staircase with his father and younger brothers, he had a new appreciation of the townhouse’s design gained from the two summers he’d worked at an architectural firm in Boston.

When the Cartwrights reached their bedrooms on the top floor, Adam entered his but Ben paused to give instructions to his youngest son.

“Little Joe, you’ll need to put on a clean shirt,” he directed.

“Why?” Little Joe asked, his expression puzzled.

“Because dinner here in the city is more formal than it is at home,” Ben replied. “And comb your hair. Then wait and the four of us will go down together.”

“Seems a lot of foolishness havin’ to put on a clean shirt just to eat supper,” Little Joe grumbled to Hoss.

“Yer right, but I remember when we visited the Townsends before Adam went away to school, we put on clean shirts to eat dinner,” Hoss said patiently. “It’s just bein’ polite.” As he put on his only clean shirt, he was embarrassed to see the cuffs didn’t reach his wrists and he could feel the fabric strain across his
back and chest. He hoped no one would notice.

He and Little Joe finished changing first and waited in the hallway for the rest of the family to emerge from their rooms. Adam was the first to appear and to Little Joe he looked like the daguerreotype come to life, but as soon as Hoss saw him, he began to laugh. Little Joe immediately began to laugh as well.

“Dadburnit, Adam, if you’d been wearin’ such fancy duds when you got off the boat this afternoon, I’d never have recognized ya,” Hoss got out between guffaws. Adam grinned and then began to chuckle too. Just then their pa stepped out of the room next to Adam’s attired in a frock coat, silk waistcoat, and necktie just like his oldest son. Little Joe’s green eyes opened very wide and seeing his astonishment, his two older brothers laughed harder, Adam throwing his head back exactly as Hoss had described.

Opal Townsend was waiting for them in the music room. This room, papered in pale green with a floral design, tall narrow windows overlooking the tiny garden in the backyard and Mrs. Townsend’s Broadwood piano in one corner, had been Adam’s favorite during his stay. Opal smiled warmly at Adam as she patted the space beside her on the green brocade settee. The other Cartwrights sat down on the adjoining settee.

“It’s wonderful to see you again, Adam,” Opal said sincerely. “Mr. Atherton, David and Mr. Townsend will be here shortly. We’re all so proud of you for graduating third in your class, especially Mr. Atherton.”

“If it hadn’t been for his tutoring, I never could have passed the entrance examination so I am greatly in his debt,” Adam said earnestly.

“Nonsense, Mr. Cartwright,” said the tutor’s voice from the
doorway, and he smiled at his former pupil. “My tutoring would have been in vain if you hadn’t studied so diligently.”

Adam felt his cheeks grow warm as he said quietly, “You are too generous, Mr. Atherton.”

“So did you have to study all the time at Harvard?” David asked as he and Mr. Atherton sat down on side chairs. David had grown so much that Adam only recognized the fifteen-year-old by his freckles.

“Not all the time,” Adam replied, his lips turning up in a little smile. “I had time to play town ball, tennis and billiards. In my junior and senior years I rowed. I even found time to see some plays and attend some balls.” He grinned at the relief on David’s face.

Opal smiled slightly as she said, “David is going to attend Yale and he’s been worried that he’ll have to spend all his time with his nose buried in a book.”

“College isn’t like that,” Adam assured David. “You do have to study and attend lectures and recitations, but that doesn’t take all day.”

“What are recitations?” David asked.

“They’re where a group of students and a professor discuss the assigned texts. I used to dread being called on to stand up and discuss what I’d been assigned to read, and all my friends hated it as well. Now I realize that it helped me to think on my feet and to be more confident speaking in public.”

“Speaking of your friends,” Opal inserted smoothly, “how was the wedding?”

“The ceremony was nice,” Adam replied, smiling fondly as he
thought of Aaron and Elsie.

“What did the bride wear?” Opal asked eagerly. Seeing Adam’s blank look, she said with a trace of impatience, “Can’t you describe her dress?” He still looked at her blankly so she said, “Men! What color was it? Surely you remember that.”

“It was blue,” Adam said quickly. “I was surprised she didn’t wear green since it suits her red hair,” he added.

“Oh no,” Opal said firmly. Then she quoted, “‘Married in blue you will always be true. Married in green ashamed to be seen.’” She said speculatively, “I’d read white is now the fashionable color for brides.”

“I don’t know about that,” Adam said, “but I know Elsie was a very pretty bride. Her sister and brother-in-law loaned Aaron and Elsie their cottage at Martha’s Vineyard for their honeymoon. Of course, they’re back at the Whartons’ farm now.”

Just then, Dave Townsend appeared in the doorway. “Adam Cartwright! It’s good to see you,” he said, smiling as he walked over and joined his wife and Adam. “Looking at you now, it’s hard to picture the little chap we first met at Independence just before we began our journey west.” He smiled a little as he added, “I thought maybe you’d want to ride the stage from Missouri to Genoa.”

“I can imagine just how uncomfortable a trip that must be,” Adam said with a wry grin. “No, until the day comes I can ride the train from Boston to Genoa, I prefer a clipper ship.”

“That day will come and within our lifetimes,” Townsend said enthusiastically.

“I agree,” Adam said. “The East is crisscrossed with railroads now. Cities and towns are also connected by canals like the
Erie and the Pennsylvania and by the Cumberland Road. When I first arrived in Massachusetts, I was amazed by how easy it was to travel from one city to another.”

Dave smiled at Hoss and Little Joe then. “I hope you boys are enjoying your visit to San Francisco.”

“Yessir,” Hoss said, smiling shyly.

“Pa bought us chocolate bars and they was good,” Little Joe added with a happy grin. “And I liked the big boats.”

“Ships, Joseph,” Ben said patiently.

“What’s the difference between a ship and a boat, Mr. Cartwright?” David asked curiously.

“A ship has three or more masts rigged with sails; a boat might have one or two, or it might not have any masts,” Ben replied.

“When I rowed back at Harvard, our boats didn’t have masts,” Adam added, winking at David.

As they were speaking, the maid appeared in the doorway and Opal said with a smile, “We can continue our conversation over dinner.”

When they were seated around the table in the elegant dining room with its marble fireplace and elaborate chandelier, Dave turned to Adam and asked, “So what are people in Massachusetts saying about the Supreme Court’s decision in the Dred Scott case?”

“Most people are angry but not surprised since the majority of justices are from slave states,” Adam replied. “What really enrages most is the ruling that the Missouri Compromise prohibiting slavery north of 36° 30’ was declared
unconstitutional. Charles Seaton wrote me that Southerners are delighted since now they can bring their slaves in any territory, even if the majority in that territory are against slavery. Popular sentiment in the North is just the opposite. Members of the new Republican Party are declaring the Dred Scott decision is no more binding than the opinions of a Southern debating society.”

Hoss listened amazed as his brother easily discussed current events with Mr. Townsend and Mr. Atherton. Hoss had occasionally listened to his pa, Mr. McKaren and Mr. Reagan talk about the spread or abolition of slavery, but not with Adam’s authority. Then the conversation turned to the ‘panic’ the previous year. Hoss had heard Pa and Mr. McKaren discuss it, and he knew his pa had lost some of the money he’d invested, but many others had lost everything.

“I’ve seen firsthand the effects of the ‘panic’ and ‘revulsion’ in Massachusetts: families left destitute because the father lost his job,” Adam said in response to Mr. Townsend’s comment. “Factories are closing because people don’t have the money to buy the goods they produce. According to the newspapers, it’s the same in all the cities back East. I think that Congress should raise tariffs on foreign goods. If foreign goods are more costly, then people will be more likely to buy American goods, and thus create jobs here in our country,” he added earnestly.

“Ah, but high tariffs are a double-edged sword, Adam,” Mr. Townsend said with an intensity that matched Adam’s. “Great Britain or France could raise tariffs on American goods in retaliation. I think a better solution to the poverty in Eastern cities would be giving the men who’ve lost their jobs homesteads from the public domain. With some hard work, families could grow their own food and could sell the surplus at
a profit.”

Ben listened to his first-born debate political and economic issues with a mixture of pride and wonder. The quiet and diffident boy he knew had been transformed to an assured and knowledgeable man who articulated his beliefs with clarity and confidence. Liz, you would be so proud of our boy he thought.

Little Joe found the adults’ discussion boring; however, Pa had stressed he must be on his best behavior so he concentrated on his food and thought about their return to the Ponderosa. He’d wanted to see San Francisco and boats—no, ships, he mentally corrected himself—like the ones Pa sailed when he was young. Now that he’d seen them, he was eager to go home.

After dinner, Opal suggested they return to the music room and sing. They sang many old favorites and everyone was having a wonderful time. Knowing it was growing late and the Cartwrights planned to leave early the next day, Opal said, “Before this evening has to end, I was hoping Adam could sing a song he learned in Boston.”

Adam smiled and asked, “Have you ever heard Kiss Me Quick and Go?” They all shook their heads and he said, “It’s very popular back east. I’ll sing it a capella.”

The other night while I was sparking Sweet Torlina Spray, The more we whispered our love talking, The more we had to say; The old folks and the little folks, We thought were fast in bed,— We heard a footstep on the stairs, And what d’ye think she said? O! kiss me quick and go my honey, Kiss me quick and go! To cheat surprise and prying eyes,
Why kiss me quick and go!

Kiss me quick and go my honey,
Kiss me quick and go;
To cheat surprise and prying eyes,
Why kiss me quick and go!

Soon after that I gave my love
A moonlight promenade,
At last we fetched up to the door,
Just where the old folks stayed;
The clock struck twelve, her heart struck (too)
And peeping over head
We saw a night cap raise the blind,
And what d’ye think she said?
O! kiss me quick and go my honey,
Kiss me quick and go!
To cheat surprise and prying eyes,
Why kiss me quick and go!

Everyone applauded except Little Joe, who didn’t like songs about kissing girls. Hoss always enjoyed hearing his older brother sing, but listening to the lyrics, he felt his cheeks grow warm.

Opal persuaded Adam to sing one more song and when he finished, the Cartwrights thanked their host and hostess for their hospitality, promised to drop by for a visit the next time they came to San Francisco, and then headed for their bedrooms.
Ben decided to read Captain Stoddard’s letter before going to say goodnight to Hoss and Little Joe. Lighting the oil lamp and setting it on the secretary desk, he sat down, broke the wax seal, and unfolded the paper.

June 19, 1858

Benjamin,

Since you are reading this letter, Adam has arrived safely in San Francisco, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the gift of the past four years. I know it was hard for you to be separated from Adam, but it meant a great deal to me to have the opportunity to get to know my grandson. When he first arrived, I looked to see if there was anything of Elizabeth in him. I found her in him, just as I found you, but I soon realized Adam is a person in his own right, not merely a composite of his mother and father. He is now as dear to me as his mother was.

I return him to you and his brothers, whom he has sorely missed during his time here.

Sincerely,
Abel Morgan Stoddard

Ben smiled as he refolded the letter and placed it at the bottom of his carpetbag. I always felt guilty taking him away from you, Captain, and the fact he could spend time with you was one of the chief reasons I agreed he could go to school back east.

Ben found Little Joe in his nightshirt, waiting for him, and Hoss had gone ahead and gotten ready for bed as well. Sitting beside Little Joe, Ben asked, “Have you said your prayers, Joseph?” Little Joe nodded and Ben smiled at him. “It’s been
quite a day, seeing your brother again after all this time.”

“Sure is good to have him back,” Hoss said with a huge grin.

“It sure is,” Ben agreed, and his grin was just as big. “Now, right after breakfast Little Joe and I will go to the livery stable and bring back the wagon, mules and Beauty. Hoss, you help Adam bring his trunk and crates downstairs and out back. We’ll get them loaded on the wagon and be on our way home.” He ruffled Little Joe’s hair and then said, “Goodnight, boys. Don’t stay up talking because we want to get an early start in the morning.”

As soon as their pa left, Hoss turned to his little brother and asked, “You remember Adam now, don’t ya?”

Little Joe shook his head and said, “Nope. But you’re right: He does sing real good.” He wrinkled his nose as he added, “Don’t know why he wanted to sing about kissin’ a girl.”

“You’ll know when yer bigger,” Hoss said with a smug grin, and Little Joe scowled at him because he hated being told he was too little to understand things. Hoss just ignored the scowl and leaning over, he blew out the lamp on his bedside table and said, “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” Little Joe said, lying down beside him. This mattress was more comfortable than the one at home and he was asleep almost immediately.

When Ben left his younger sons’ room, he walked across the hall and knocked softly on Adam’s door. “Come in,” he heard Adam say and opened the door.

Adam was sitting at his secretary desk, writing in a leather-bound book. He had removed his coat and tie and unbuttoned his collar, but he was still dressed.
“We’re going to make an early start, Adam, so you should be getting to bed,” Ben said.

“I plan to as soon as I finish,” Adam said, and Ben frowned slightly. Adam didn’t notice and added, “I’ve been writing in my journal every night since I sailed for San Francisco. And I want to write short letters to Grandfather and Aaron so the Townsends can mail them for me.” He finally noticed his pa’s frown and said, “Don’t worry, Pa. I brought some postage stamps with me from Boston.”

For heaven’s sake, Ben Cartwright, Adam has been putting himself to bed for the past four years, Ben scolded himself. Still, he couldn’t stop himself from adding, “Well, don’t stay up too late.”

“I won’t. Goodnight, Pa,” Adam said, turning back to his writing.

“Goodnight, Adam,” Ben said, shutting the door gently behind him.

All four Cartwrights were up at first light. Opal had warned her cook to prepare an early breakfast so when the Cartwrights entered the dining room, the maid was bringing their food. They ate quickly and then Ben and Little Joe set out for the livery stable.

“Dadburnit, Adam, you sure gotta a lot of books,” Hoss commented as he carried down his fourth crate.

“I guess I do,” Adam agreed, smiling sheepishly as he set down the crate he was carrying. “Most are my textbooks, and I have some other books on architecture, mathematics and engineering. I also bought myself the complete works of Shakespeare, and Grandfather gave me my mother’s books.”
Hoss smiled at that. “I remember Pa sayin’ ya got yer love of books from yer ma.” He sighed as he added, “It ain’t gonna be much fun carryin’ all these crates up the ladder to the loft.”

“I thought I might build a bookcase,” Adam said. “During the winter when we’re snowed in. I figured I’d just leave the books in the crates downstairs until then.”

Hoss nodded and then the two of them headed back upstairs for the last two crates. They didn’t have to wait long before Ben drove the wagon in the area where deliveries were made to the Townsends. Hoss and Adam both saw his eyebrows shoot up as he surveyed the trunk and ten wooden crates.

“I didn’t realize you’d brought so many books,” Ben commented while Little Joe whistled before exclaiming, “I didn’t know there was that many books in the whole world!”

Adam grinned just a little as he said, “I follow Erasmus’s advice: ‘When I get a little money, I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.’”

Ben shook his head, his expression bemused. “I’m not sure where we’ll put all these, but we’ll manage.”

Just then, Adam noticed the chestnut mare with three white socks and a white blaze tied behind the wagon. “Beauty,” he said, smiling as he walked toward the mare. “I expect you don’t remember me, girl, but I remembered you like sugar lumps.” He reached into the pockets of his pants and then held out his open hand with a couple of lumps of sugar on his palm. The mare whickered softly and then delicately ate the sugar.

As Adam stroked Beauty’s nose, Ben said, “There’s one more thing you’ll need before we head home.” He opened the carpetbag that contained his, Hoss and Little Joe’s clothing and searched for
an object buried at the bottom. After a minute he held up Adam’s gunbelt, holster and Colt pocket revolver.

Adam accepted the items from his pa, and slowly slid the revolver from the holster, admiring the shiny silver plating he remembered.

“I cleaned it fer ya,” Hoss said and Adam said, “Thanks.” Then he put the gun back in the holster and buckled the gunbelt around his hips, adjusting it so it hung lower on the right before tying down the holster.

“Guess I’ll have to get used to the weight of a gun at my hip all over again,” he commented, grinning wryly.

“Don’t they use guns in Boston and Cambridge?” Little Joe asked curiously.

“Most of my friends like to hunt, and they use shotguns or rifles,” Adam replied, “but, no, in Boston men don’t wear revolvers like this.”

“Let’s get the wagon loaded so we can be on our way,” Ben inserted then.

It didn’t take long to load the crates and trunk into the wagon, and then the three brothers mounted up. Little Joe watched how Adam swung into the saddle and decided that while last night this brother may have dressed like someone who’d spent his life in a city, he did know how to ride. The brothers followed the wagon with Adam riding on Hoss’s right and Little Joe on his left.

“Say, is this Chub?” Adam asked, gazing admiringly at the big dark bay gelding with a white blaze and three white socks Hoss was riding. While he’d been away, Pa had bred Beauty to the Marquettes’ bay Quarter Horse stallion, and Adam had promised
Hoss the resulting foal if he wanted him.

“Sure is,” Hoss said proudly. “He’s a beauty, ain’t he? Just like his dam,” he added as Adam chuckled.

Then Adam looked over at Little Joe, who was riding a small dun mustang that Adam judged wasn’t much more than thirteen hands high. “Buttermilk is a real beauty, too,” Adam commented, smiling warmly at Little Joe.

“He sure is,” Little Joe said emphatically. “And he’s the smartest horse on the Ponderosa. Ain’t ya, boy?” he asked, reaching down and patting the gelding’s neck.

“When we git back to the Ponderosa, ya need to take a look at Beauty’s latest foal, Adam,” Hoss said then. “We bred her to the Marquettes’ stallion again and she had another colt. This one is chestnut.”

“He’s got a blaze like Beauty’s and four white socks,” Little Joe added. “I wanted to name him Blaze, but Pa said you’d pick a name when you came home.”

“Pa ‘n’ me thought you’d want him for your string in a couple of years,” Hoss said with a grin.

After the four Cartwrights had traveled about an hour, Adam rode up alongside the wagon.

“Ready to change places, son?” Ben asked, trying unsuccessfully to suppress his grin.

“If you don’t mind,” Adam replied, smiling ruefully.

“If not at all,” Ben said with a chuckle. Pulling back on the reins, he said, “Whoa mules.”

“How come we’re stoppin’?” Little Joe called.
“Adam and I are going to trade places,” Ben replied as he applied the wagon’s brake. He jumped down while Adam swung out of the saddle. As Little Joe noted how stiffly his oldest brother moved, he decided his brother wasn’t much of a rider after all. Adam saw his youngest brother’s disdain and it stung, but then he shrugged it off.

Hoss asked, “Mind if I ride with ya, Adam?”

“Glad of the company,” Adam answered with a big dimpled smile, so Hoss dismounted and tied Chub behind the wagon while Ben mounted Beauty. (He’d left his buckskin gelding back at the Ponderosa since he’d planned on driving the wagon most of their journey.)

Once Adam and Hoss were both sitting on the driver’s seat, Adam slapped the reins and called, “Giddap mules.”

As the wagon lurched forward, Little Joe turned to his pa with a puzzled expression. “How come Hoss wanted to ride with Adam instead of with us?”

“Oh, I imagine Hoss wanted a chance to spend some time alone with Adam,” Ben replied.

“How come?” Little Joe asked, looking even more puzzled.

Ben smiled at his youngest before answering. “Hoss is your big brother and you like doing things together, right?”

“Sure do,” Little Joe answered, nodding his head for emphasis.

“Well, Adam is Hoss’s big brother, and when Hoss was your age, he and Adam did things together just like you and Hoss do now. If Hoss went away for a long time and then came back, wouldn’t you want to spend time with him?
“Yeah, I guess so,” Little Joe said slowly.

Ben saw the child was troubled and thought he knew the cause. “Hoss’ll still want to spend time with you. In fact, now you have two older brothers to take you fishing or play catch with you.” He saw his youngest wasn’t convinced so he smiled reassuringly before adding, “I know you probably don’t remember, but the three of you used to do lots of things together.”

“That’s what Hoss said,” Little Joe commented thoughtfully. “I guess me ‘n’ Adam just need to get reacquainted.”

“That’s right,” Ben said, smiling affectionately at his youngest.

The two older Cartwright brothers rode along in companionable silence at first. Adam sensed Hoss wanted to talk with him about something, and he was content to wait until Hoss was ready.

After a bit, Hoss sighed gustily and then he spoke. “When ya sang that song last night—the one about kissin’—it got me thinkin’.” Adam turned his head and glanced at his brother. “When was the first time ya kissed a girl?” Hoss asked slowly, not quite able to look his older brother in the eye.

“The first time was when I was staying with the Townsends. I was curious and wanted to know what it was like, so as an experiment, I asked one of the girls I knew if I could kiss her,” Adam replied.

“You just asked her, and she let you kiss her?” Hoss said wonderingly.

“I was lucky she didn’t slap me,” Adam responded with a wink. “That’s what lots of girls would have done, but I think she was just as curious as I was.” Then his voice grew quieter as he
added, “At least, that’s what I thought at the time.” Now he was the one who couldn’t meet his brother’s gaze. “She told me later that she— She said she liked me as more than just a friend.”

“She loved ya,” Hoss said gently.

“I guess,” Adam said, tugging on an earlobe. “I was so ignorant that I missed all the signs that she cared for me. I know I hurt her, and I feel bad about that,” he added.

Adam’s thoughts shifted then to Julia Quincy. He had misread her as well, thinking she loved him enough to leave her life in Boston, but she hadn’t. Then he’d become involved with Thomas’s sister, but that affair had ended abruptly. Afterward, he’d buried himself in his studies and taken up rowing as a way of channeling his physical energy. His involvement with the fair sex had been limited to lighthearted flirting at balls and cotillions.

In contrast to his ill-fated relationships, Aaron and Elsie’s romance had blossomed and flourished. As pleased as Adam was for his friends, he couldn’t help envying their happiness. Adam wondered if there was a chance he would find his true-love now that he’d returned home. He smiled sardonically as he remembered his pa writing him all the settlers joked that if they gathered everyone from Eagle Valley, Carson Valley and Washoe Valley, they’d have enough for three sets in a dance. No, not much chance for romance in Western Utah.

“Hey Adam!” Hoss said loudly, chortling as he saw his brother’s sheepish expression. “Caught ya woolgathering, didn’t I?”

“Yeah. Sorry. What were you saying?”

“I asked if Ross had written you about Delphine,” Hoss replied.
When Adam shook his head, Hoss added, “Her family settled here in the spring. There’s a boy about my age and another around thirteen and three girls. Two of ‘em are jest little girls, but Delphine must be seventeen or eighteen. I think Ross is kinda sweet on her but most of the fellers are tryin’ to court her cuz she’s pretty.”

“And because there aren’t many girls to court, pretty or not,” Adam commented mockingly.

“Yer right about that,” Hoss said with a sigh. He grinned as he added, “I heard Carl Reagan tried to steal a kiss and she slapped him so hard his teeth rattled.” Hoss’s grin grew broader as he remarked, “I guess you was lucky that time, older brother,” and then he and Adam both chuckled.

Adam switched places with Ben late in the afternoon and finished that day’s trek on Beauty. Ben had decided the family would avoid towns until they reached Sacramento so once they picked a good spot to set up camp, he gave his oldest and youngest the task of gathering wood for their campfire while he and Hoss cared for the horses and mules. Little Joe was disappointed not to be working with Hoss. He reluctantly trailed after his oldest brother and watched as Adam began gathering wood, whistling softly as he worked.

“I expect this is the first time you ever camped out,” Little Joe remarked condescendingly and was surprised to see his oldest brother’s lips turn up in a crooked little grin.

“Nope,” Adam replied, his hazel eyes twinkling, “I’ve camped out plenty of times.”

“In Boston?” Little Joe said incredulously.

“No, with Pa,” Adam replied, and Little Joe saw his brother’s grin grew broader and his dimples deeper. “When I was a little
boy, littler than you, Pa and I used to camp out all the time as we traveled west.” Adam smiled down at his kid brother. “I think we have enough wood so let’s get the fire started.”

Little Joe helped stack the wood the way his pa had taught him, noting his brother clearly knew what he was doing. He was still surprised when Adam pulled a flint and steel from a pocket and expertly lit the fire. As Ben and Hoss joined them, Adam said with grin, “I haven’t lost my touch.” Hoss grinned back at him and punched his arm.

“Adam says that he camped out when he was even littler than me,” Little Joe stated, his tone a mixture of skepticism and accusation.

“Only because we were traveling,” Ben said. He still felt guilty for the years his first-born had had no home of his own, just the old farm wagon.

“How long did ya travel?” Little Joe asked then.

“Well, Adam wasn’t three yet when we left Boston and he was between six and seven when we built our cabin on the Ponderosa,” Ben answered, and saw his youngest son’s eyes open very wide as he stared at his oldest brother.

“You camped out for three years?” Little Joe asked in amazement.

“In the winters, I’d find work in a town and we’d stay in a boardinghouse,” Ben replied. He smiled at his middle boy, adding, “When I married Hoss’s mother, we lived in her house one winter before we headed west.”

“Did you camp out with ‘em, Hoss?” Little Joe asked then.

“Shucks, Little Joe, I was just a baby then so I don’t remember nothin’ about it,” Hoss replied. “I know I’m mighty hungry so I
hope we’re gonna start supper soon.”

“I’ll start the beans,” Ben said with a grin. “Adam, you remember how to stir up johnnycakes?”

“Sure do. Just show me where you’ve packed the cornmeal and salt,” Adam replied with a wink.

As the four Cartwrights gathered around their campfire, eating off tin plates, Adam remarked, “Been a long time since I’ve eaten beans and johnnycake around a campfire.”

“Don’t compare to Hop Sing’s roast pork ‘n’ sweet taters,” Hoss said with a big grin.

“I’ve missed his pot roast with potatoes, carrots and onions,” Adam said then.

“My favorite is his chicken pot pie,” Ben said, smiling at his sons.

“I like Hop Sing’s Joe Froggers,” Little Joe inserted, and the other three grinned at his picking Hop Sing’s molasses cookies as his favorite food.

“His Joe Froggers are mighty good,” Hoss agreed, “but I’d rather have his gooseberry pie.”

“I like his Joe Froggers and his gooseberry pie, but it’s his raspberry cobbler that I’ve been looking forward to,” Adam said fervently.

“I’m afraid it will be too late for raspberry cobbler when we get home, son, but Hop Sing put up lots of raspberry jam for you,” Ben said to Adam, whose disappointment was obvious.

“Maybe he’ll make gingersnaps. I like them better than Joe Froggers,” Adam said then.
“If you ask, I’m sure he will,” Ben said with a warm smile.

That night as Adam lay in his bedroll, he breathed in the clean air, unpolluted by the smoke from Boston’s thousands of fireplaces and stoves. All around he heard the chirping of tree crickets and the chirping mixed with the sound of Hoss snoring beside him. Far off in the distance, he made out the howls of a pack of wolves. He looked up at the clear night sky, dotted with stars, remembering the nights when he was small and Pa had shown him the North Star and told him how sailors used it to navigate. At Harvard he’d taken a class in astronomy and gazed at the heavens through the observatory’s telescope, but somehow the stars seem to shine more brightly tonight.

Adam’s thoughts turned to the plans for the house he’d designed, which were packed away in his trunk. The house would be a way of thanking his father for allowing him to attend Harvard as well as a demonstration that what he’d studied did have practical applications. He’d have to find the right time to present his plans to his father; he knew this was the busiest time of the year with the hay and oats to harvest and the cattle to round up and drive to market. He’d have to wait until life on the Ponderosa was less hectic, but he was a patient man. He smiled as he thought of his father’s reaction and let the crickets lull him to sleep.

Chapter 2

Adam pulled Beauty up and gazed admiringly at the magnificent vista before him.

“Somethin’ wrong, Adam?” Hoss asked as he drew Chub up beside Beauty while Little Joe also halted.
“No, there’s nothing wrong,” Adam answered, smiling at his brother. “It’s just that after four years, I’d forgotten how beautiful it is.”

“Aren’t there mountains and trees in Massachusetts?” Little Joe asked curiously.

“Oh, they call them mountains, but they don’t begin to compare with the Sierras,” Adam replied. “Massachusetts has plenty of sugar maples, black cherries and white oaks. There are even lots of pine trees, but they aren’t as majestic as ponderosas.” He grinned as he asked Hoss, “Remember how we used to argue about whether ponderosa bark smells like cinnamon or vanilla?”

“Sure do,” Hoss replied with a chuckle.

“It smells like cinnamon,” Little Joe said forcefully.

“I know,” Adam said, winking at his youngest brother, “but I never could get Hoss to agree.” He reached over and lightly punched Hoss’s arm. “Looks like you’re outvoted, buddy.”

“You ‘n’ Little Joe can say ponderosas smell like cinnamon all ya want, but I know they smell like vanilla,” Hoss said with a big grin.

“He’s as stubborn as a Missouri mule, isn’t he?” Adam remarked to Little Joe and Little Joe grinned as he replied, “He sure is!” All three brothers laughed and hearing their laughter as he drove the wagon, Ben smiled.

“Well, boys, I think we should be home before sundown,” Ben stated one morning after they had crossed the Sierras. The four of them were sitting around the campfire, eating their breakfast of johnnycakes and bacon, washed down with black coffee. (Little Joe had begged to try some coffee, but quickly decided he preferred water.)
“Good! I can hardly wait to take a bath,” Adam said fervently.

“You wanna take a bath!” Little Joe exclaimed. This new brother was a puzzle. By the time they’d reached Sacramento, Adam could spend all day riding and Little Joe could see that his oldest brother was a good rider. In fact, he seemed like a regular vaquero—until he opened his mouth. Adam talked fancier than Pa. And now he was saying he actually wanted to take a bath!

“Dadburnit, Adam! I forgot how much ya like takin’ baths,” Hoss said, chuckling.

It was a couple of hours before sundown when the four Cartwrights rode into the clearing comprised of two cabins—the family’s and the one serving as a bunkhouse—plus a barn with a large corral near it, and nearby a fenced-in pasture for the caviata. Adam’s eyes widened as he took in the small cabin with lean-tos added onto each end. “Be it ever so humble,” he muttered under his breath. Just then the barn door opened. José Mendoza, Will and Carl Reagan hurried out while Diego Vasquez, who’d been preparing supper for the hands, came out of the bunkhouse.

“Hola Adán, ¡Bienvenido a casa!” José called as he hurried over, a warm smile softening his normally stern expression.

Diego, who like José had worked for Ben ever since he’d begun raising cattle when Adam and Hoss were just boys, held out his hand to Adam saying, “¡Estoy feliz de verle!”

Adam smiled broadly at his old friends and mentors. “¡Es maravilloso estar en casa!” he exclaimed, shaking their hands. Then he turned to the Reagan father and son. “Mr. Reagan, Carl, it’s good to see you again.”

“Good to have you back,” Will Reagan said, clapping Adam on the back.
“Shucks, Adam, I thought after livin’ back East all this time you’d be wearin’ a coat and one of them shirts with a high collar and a necktie,” Carl said with a snide smile. “But here you are, still lookin’ like a vaquero.”

Adam replied coolly, “Well, Carl, I follow the dictum ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do’.”

Carl’s eyes narrowed and then he said, “Like I said, Adam, you ain’t changed.”

Will Reagan said hurriedly, “We’ll take care of the horses and mules and we’ll unload the wagon for you, Boss.”

“Thanks, Will,” Ben said. “C’mon, boys. Let’s see what Hop Sing’s fixing for our supper.”

“I’m starved,” Hoss said. “Ain’t you starved, Adam?”

“I sure am,” Adam replied with a big grin. “How about you, Little Joe?”

“Yeah, me too,” Little Joe answered before yelling, “We’re home, Hop Sing!”

Hop Sing appeared in the doorway and Little Joe ran ahead of his brothers, shouting, “What’s fer supper, Hop Sing? Me ‘n’ Hoss ‘n’ Adam are starved.”

“Supper surprise,” Hop Sing replied. As Adam and Hoss walked over, the cook bowed respectfully. “Is good to see Number One Son safely returned to his family,” he stated solemnly.

“It’s good to be back,” Adam replied, keeping his tone and expression as grave as the cook’s. His dimple flashed as he added, “I’ve sure missed your cooking, Hop Sing, especially your biscuits. No one in Massachusetts makes biscuits as good as
“I make batch for supper,” the cook said with a beaming smile.

“I was hoping to take a bath,” Adam began but Hop Sing interrupted.

“Bath after supper. I heat plenty water so all Cartwrights take bath.”

Ben was behind his boys and hearing Hop Sing’s suggestion said with a smile, “Yes, we could all use one.”

“Aw, Pa, do I gotta? It ain’t Saturday,” Little Joe whined.

“Yes, you have to take a bath, Joseph,” Ben replied firmly. “You missed a couple of Saturdays while we were traveling.”

“C’mon, Adam,” Hoss said, swatting his brother’s arm. “Let’s help carry in all those crates of yers.”

When Adam stepped into the cabin, it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the dim light. He’d grown accustomed to lamps burning whale oil and the tallow candles lighting the cabin didn’t produce as much illumination. In fact, the cabin’s chief source of light was the fireplace. He looked about him, seeing the red calico curtains Belle-mère had sewn and the rug she’d braided, the plain wooden settee, the washstand by the door with the earthenware pitcher and bowl, the kitchen dresser, rectangular kitchen table, chairs and benches. Most of the furniture was very plain, rather crude even, which wasn’t surprising since except for Mama’s dresser, he and Pa had made the furniture themselves, learning as they went along.

Yes, everything was the same, and yet, somehow different.

Adam was delighted to discover that Hop Sing had prepared all
his favorites for supper: pot roast with potatoes, carrots and onions plus green beans from the garden. The hot biscuits, slathered with fresh butter, were even better than he remembered.

“Hop Sing, I think I’ve died and gone to Heaven,” Adam exclaimed with a big dimpled smile as he reached for one last biscuit.

“Yes, Hop Sing you’ve really outdone yourself,” Ben agreed and the cook’s face shone with pleasure.

“Have special surprise,” Hop Sing said. He stood and walking over to the kitchen dresser, he opened one of the doors at the bottom. With a flourish, he brought out a pound cake.

“Cake! And it ain’t even someone’s birthday!” Little Joe exclaimed.

“We’ll share this with the men,” Ben said. “Adam, you go ahead and start cutting the cake and I’ll be back with the others.”

The three new hands hung back, feeling a little awkward since they didn’t know the oldest Cartwright son. Ben saw this and motioned Adam over.

“Adam, I’d like you to meet our newest vaqueros: Tex Reynolds, Billy Wallace and Frank Smith. Men, this is my oldest son, Adam.”

“I’m pleased to meet you,” Adam said, shaking each man’s hand with a firm grip, and they voiced similar sentiments.

Since the cabin was crowded, the three hands took their cake to the porch and Billy said to the others, “That oldest Cartwright brother sure seems different than I expected.”

“Yeah, I figured he’d be scrawny and pasty-faced from spendin’
all his time studyin’ books,” Tex agreed.

“Oh, Adam’s a smart boy,” said Carl, who’d stood in the doorway eavesdropping. He continued, keeping his voice down. “Yeah, he’s smart and he knows it. He was a pretty good vaquero, but that was a long time ago.”

Just then, Ben stepped out on the porch, followed by Adam. “You all enjoying the cake?” he asked.

“Yessir, Mr. Cartwright,” Tex replied enthusiastically while Billy nodded and Frank added, “It’s mighty fine.”

“Good, glad to hear that,” Ben said, and touching Adam’s shoulder lightly, he went back inside.

“Say, Adam, did ya meet any pretty girls in Boston?” Carl asked then.

“I met plenty,” Adam said with a slow smile. “The problem was that they tended to be as prim and proper as they were pretty.”

All the young men grinned at that and Carl added with a smirk, “I like a challenge.”

“Does that mean there are some pretty girls in these parts now?” Adam asked slyly, remembering the pretty girl Hoss had said slapped Carl for trying to steal a kiss.

Carl looked at Adam suspiciously before replying, “There’s a couple in Genoa and a couple of new families in the valley have pretty daughters. Trouble is their daddies are free with their shotguns.”

They all laughed at that and Billy slapped Carl on the back, saying, “You oughta know.”

So, Carl sees himself as a ladies man. Well, I think he’s going
to find he has some competition, Adam thought, and a corner of his mouth turned up in a tiny grin.

“The miners over on Sun Mountain hold what they call a grand ball every Saturday night. You oughta come with us, Adam,” Carl said then.

“Are there any women to dance with?” Adam asked skeptically.

“A few,” Carl replied.

Tex added, “They ain’t much to look at.”

Winking broadly Carl said, “They’re female though and they’d rather dance with good lookin’ young men like us than a bunch of scruffy old men. Right, boys?”

“I just want to spend time with my family now, but in a couple weeks I’d be happy to come with you,” Adam said.

After the men returned to the bunkhouse, Hop Sing announced, “I heat water for baths.”

Ben said, “Since Adam is so eager to take a bath, we’ll let him go first.” Little Joe grinned since normally he went first. “Hoss, why don’t you get the washtub from the woodshed,” Ben suggested, “and I’ll hang the sheet up in the corner while Adam unpacks his nightshirt.”

As Adam gazed at the wooden washtub before he stripped off his dirty clothes, he thought longingly of the combination washhouse and bathhouse he’d designed for their new home. It would have a full-circuit plumbing system. He hoped to convince Pa to purchase a copper bathtub like the one the Whartons had—a bathtub where a man could lean back and soak. If he couldn’t convince Pa, then he’d buy one himself. He had enough money in his savings.
With a sigh, he stepped into the washtub and then he smeared some of the slimy homemade soap onto a washcloth and quickly scrubbed his body. Next he washed his hair. By the time he finished, he was shivering so he dried himself as quickly as he could. Once he was dry, he pulled the striped cotton nightshirt over his head and walked out from behind the bed sheet.

“I’ll empty the tub,” Hoss offered, knowing the tub was too heavy for Little Joe to manage, while he struggled to hide his grin at the sight of his older brother’s untamed curls.

“Where’s Adam gonna sleep?” Little Joe asked as Hoss carried the tub outside to empty the dirty water.

“In the loft with you and Hoss,” Ben answered, surprised at Little Joe’s question,

“There’s not enough room!” Little Joe exclaimed. “He better go sleep in the bunkhouse.”

Adam could imagine how cramped they would be sleeping in one bed and was about to open his mouth to agree with Little Joe when Ben snapped, “This is your brother’s home, Joseph Francis Cartwright, and this is where he’ll be sleeping.”

“Ain’t no empty bunks in the bunkhouse anyhow,” Hoss said from the doorway.

As Ben took the tub from Hoss and put it behind the sheet, Hoss said softly to Adam, “I reckon it will be a mite snug with all of us sleepin’ in the one bed, but we’ll manage.”

As Little Joe headed behind the sheet, Ben instructed firmly, “Don’t forget to wash your neck and behind your ears, Joseph.”

Adam smiled, remembering when Pa would give him the same orders. Then he asked, “Pa, would it be all right if I rode
over and visited Ross and Todd tomorrow?”

Ben smiled and replied, “They’ll be busy harvesting their hay tomorrow, but they’ll be coming here on Sunday and they’re looking forward to seeing you.” Then he added, “Before I forget, would you rather help Hoss with the haying tomorrow or round up strays?”

“Help Hoss with the haying,” Adam said without hesitation. “I’d like to see how the reaper works.”

“I ain’t never used one before neither,” Hoss said with a grin, “so we’ll both be learnin’ the ropes.”

Little Joe flatly refused to sleep between his older brothers, so Adam and Hoss tossed a coin and Hoss ended up sleeping in the middle of the bed. As Hoss had commented, it was a mite snug. Little Joe was awakened from a sound sleep when he landed on the floor with a thump. Hoss slept right through it but Adam was startled awake and asked, “You all right, Little Joe?”

“Yeah, I’m all right,” the boy answered gruffly so his brother went back to sleep. Later Little Joe woke because he was chilled and discovered the covers had all been pulled off. He decided to offer to sleep in the middle tomorrow night.

The next time Little Joe woke it was because he heard someone moving in the room, which was still pretty dark. Since Hoss was snoring beside him, it must be Adam. He heard the sound of Adam’s flint and steel and after a minute or so, Adam lit the tallow candle on the bedside table. Little Joe closed his eyes almost shut and pretended to be asleep. He saw Adam set the candle on the little shelf where Hoss kept his razor, which was by the shaving mirror over the washstand. Adam poured some water from the pitcher into the bowl and before splashing it on his face, Little Joe heard him mutter, “Wish it was hot.”
Since Adam’s attention was focused on what he was doing, Little Joe opened his eyes wide. He watched Adam place a piece of round soap in the bottom of his shaving mug and then add a little water before swishing his badger bristle shaving brush round and round the mug. Next Adam used the brush to lather his face and neck, humming softly as he moved the brush in a circular motion. When he was satisfied, he set the brush down and got his razor from the shelf and began to strop it, using a leather strap that hung from the washstand. When he finished, he applied more lather before picking up the razor.

As Little Joe watched his brother deftly apply the razor, he thought excitedly, *I remember watching Adam shave when I was little. Hoss was asleep just like he is now and I’d sit on the bed and watch Adam. I remember!*

After Adam wiped off any traces of lather, he reached up to the shelf and picked up a brown bottle Little Joe hadn’t seen before. Adam opened the bottle and poured a little of the contents onto his palms and then rubbed it on his cheeks. Little Joe noticed a pleasant fragrance.

“What’d ya put on your face?” he asked and Adam whirled around.

“I didn’t realize you were awake,” Adam said and his little brother smiled.

“I watched ya shave. Like I did when I was little.”

“I remember,” Adam said and the two brothers smiled at the shared memory.

“But what did you put on your face?” Little Joe asked. “It smells good.”

“It’s called Dominica Bay Rum Aftershave,” Adam replied. “Would you like to put some on your face?”
“Yeah!” the eight-year-old replied excitedly.

“You just need a little,” Adam cautioned as he poured a small amount in his brother’s cupped hands. He grinned as the youngster slapped the liquid on his face. As Adam put the lid back on the bottle, he realized he’d need to save his aftershave for special occasions so it would last longer.

Hoss opened his eyes then and sitting up said, “Mornin’.”

Little Joe jumped on the bed, saying happily, “I watched Adam shave just like I did when I was little and he let me use some of his— What’d ya call it, Adam?”

“Bay rum,” Adam replied as he emptied his shaving water into the slop jar.

“Ya both smell real nice,” Hoss said. “I hope you saved me some water to shave with.”

“Sure,” Adam said. Then he grinned and added, “I think we need to bring up another blanket so one of us doesn’t hog all the covers.” His grin grew wider at his youngest brother’s enthusiastic agreement. He opened his bottle of Macassar oil and, pouring a little on his hands, he rubbed it through his hair and then combed it, smoothing his recalcitrant curls.

“What’d ya put on your hair, Adam?” Little Joe asked.

“It’s a hairdressing,” Adam replied.

“What’s it for?” Little Joe asked, his curiosity insatiable.

“To make older brother’s hair not so curly,” Hoss interjected with a chuckle.

“Yeah, your hair is really curly, Adam,” Little Joe giggled. “It’s lots curlier than mine.”
Adam rolled his eyes and then said, “I used to wonder where I got such curly hair since Pa’s hair doesn’t curl at all and my mother’s hair doesn’t look that curly in the daguerreotype. Grandfather told me that my grandmother had curly dark hair just like mine.” He smiled then and said, “We’d better get dressed so we aren’t late.”

He walked over to the corner where he’d put his trunk. As he looked through the clothing he’d brought back from Cambridge, he realized he should have bought another pair of canvas work pants at Levi Strauss & Co. while he was in San Francisco. He selected his oldest pair of trousers, which were made of black twill, and a white cotton shirt and began to put them on. While Hoss shaved, Little Joe put on his clean overalls and a shirt and then started down the ladder saying, “I gotta milk Blossom and feed the chickens.” “Guess I might as well get started on my chores,” Adam said after he put on his boots. “I’m right behind ya,” Hoss said, hastily pulling up his pants and reaching for his boots. The brothers walked into the barn together and Adam saw the reaper beside the empty haymows.

“Here it is, Adam. It came all the way from Chicago, Illinois,” Hoss stated proudly.

“Let’s see,” Adam said as he studied the machine. “Looks like this master wheel carries most of the machine’s weight and supplies the power to the knife that cuts the grain. Ingenious.”

“One of us rides the mule,” Hoss said, “and the other walks along side and rakes the grain from the platform into piles. I figured we could take turns rakin’.”

Adam grinned as he said, “Sounds fair to me. You wanna ride first or rake?”
“I think I wanna rake first,” Hoss said. As the four Cartwrights and Hop Sing gathered around the table to eat breakfast, Little Joe asked, “Pa, can I help Hoss ‘n’ Adam with the haying?” and he smiled hopefully.

“Today I want you to help Hop Sing,” Ben replied, and Little Joe’s disappointment was obvious. Ben smiled at his youngest and added, “Tomorrow you may go with your brothers and trample down the hay in the hay-rack for them.”

“Hurrah!” Little Joe shouted and the men all smiled.

Hoss and Adam worked hard that day and were excited to see they’d done what would’ve taken them two or three days cutting the hay using scythes. Little Joe worked hard helping Hop Sing pull the crop of navy beans and pull up beets, turnips and carrots. He liked helping Hop Sing but he was really looking forward to working with his brothers. Trampling down the hay was fun and he liked the way the freshly cut hay smelled. The next morning after breakfast the three brothers set out. Adam drove the hay-rack to the hayfield while Hoss and Little Joe rode inside. Little Joe whistled when he saw how much his brothers had accomplished the previous day.

“Gosh, you sure cut a lot of hay!” he exclaimed.

“The reaper did the cutting; Hoss and I just raked,” Adam corrected with a wink.

Adam and Hoss began to pitch the sweet-smelling hay into the hay-rack and Little Joe walked back and forth, trampling the hay beneath his bare feet. When the hay-rack could hold no more, Adam joined Little Joe on top of the mound of hay and Hoss drove them to the barn. He and Adam pitched the hay into one of the empty haymows while Little Joe went to help Hop Sing until it was time to head back to the hayfield with the empty hay-rack.
By the time they’d finished their last load of the day, the sun was beginning to set, and when they were three-quarters of the way home, it was growing dark.

“Full moon tonight,” Adam said, lying on his back in the hay. “See the Man-in-Moon?” he asked Little Joe, who was lying beside him.

“Yeah, and I can see the North Star,” Little Joe replied.

“Over there is the Big Dipper,” Adam said, pointing.

“It does look like a dipper!” Little Joe exclaimed.

“And just above the North Star,” Adam continued, “is the Little Dipper. See, it’s an upside down dipper.”

“I see it!” Little Joe said excitedly. “Do you know anymore, Adam?”

“There’s Orion, but he’s harder to spot. He’s supposed to be a warrior who was placed in the sky. Those three bright stars are his belt. Then that really bright star there—it’s called Rigel—is his foot.” Little Joe watched carefully as Adam gestured. “There’s his club and his shield, and that bright star up there is his shoulder. Its name is Betelgeuse.”

“Stars have names like people?” Little Joe asked wonderingly.

“That’s right,” Adam replied.

“Tell me some more names,” Little Joe begged.

Pointing, Adam said, “See that bright, bright star over there? It’s called Sirius. The only star that appears brighter to us is our own sun.”

“The sun is a star?” Little Joe asked doubtfully, and Adam
replied, “Yes. You see, all those stars we see have planets orbiting them just the way we orbit the sun.”

As he listened to his brother talk about the stars, Little Joe thought, *Adam sure knows a lot. He’s the smartest person I know. Except for Pa.*

Adam had forgotten how much plain hard work was necessary to run the Ponderosa. After a day spent in the fields, he was too tired to attempt to write in his journal and he was too tired to care that he was sharing a bed with his younger brothers.

By Sunday the haymows were filled and Adam and Hoss, with Little Joe’s help, had harvested over half the oat crop. Since the Cartwright brothers had been able handle the harvest on their own, all the other vaqueros had been available to round up the Cartwrights’ herd. With the harvest and the roundup nearly finished, the Ponderosa would be able to begin the cattle drive almost a week early.

Every day since their return from San Francisco, Little Joe had begged to be allowed to come on the drive this year. Adam and Hoss would both grin smugly, remembering when they’d been Little Joe’s age and had made the same request. They were both caught by surprise Sunday morning at breakfast.

“Pa, can’t I come on the drive this year? Please,” Little Joe pleaded for what Hoss figured must be at least the one hundredth time.

“Diego has been telling me that he needs a helper so I’ve decided you can come on the drive and be that helper,” Ben announced, wiping the smirks off his two older sons’ faces.

“Hurrah!” Little Joe shouted. “Thanks, Pa!”

Adam snapped his mouth shut before he voiced his opinion of his father’s decision and he kept his eyes glued to his plate lest
his face give him away.

Hop Sing looked at his employer as if he’d gone stark raving mad, but like Adam, he remained silent.

Hoss’s expression was a mixture of astonishment and resentment. Pa hadn’t let him go on a drive until the year before last when he’d turned fourteen, and Adam had also been fourteen when he’d gone on his first. “It ain’t fair,” he muttered as he stabbed a bite of flapjack.

“What did you say?” Ben asked, drawing his eyebrows together in a frown.

“He said he needs some fresh air, and so do I,” Adam said smoothly, kicking Hoss in the shin as a signal to keep quiet. “May we please be excused?”

“After you’ve finished breakfast,” Ben replied, eying both his older sons suspiciously. “Don’t forget we have company coming today so you need to change clothes. By the way, Adam, do you have a necktie Hoss could borrow?”

“Yes, I do,” Adam replied.

“Everyone is sure gonna be surprised me and Buttermilk are goin’ on the drive,” Little Joe crowed while Adam said under his breath, “They certainly will be!”

“Buttermilk’s not going,” Ben said evenly. Seeing Little Joe’s confusion, he explained, “You’ll be riding in the wagon with Diego; you won’t need Buttermilk.” He added in a stern tone, “Diego is going to be your boss, Little Joe. Whatever he tells you to do, I expect you to do it without complaining. If you don’t, I’ll bring you back home myself. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Pa,” Little Joe replied seriously, but then he smiled
joyfully, oblivious of his brothers’ reaction to their father’s decision.

Adam and Hoss ate quickly and then headed outside. Hoss could barely contain himself as Adam grabbed his arm and led him to the corral. “It ain’t right!” he exploded as soon as they were far enough from the cabin to avoid being overheard. “We begged just as hard as Little Joe and Pa never paid any heed to us.”

“I agree,” Adam said. “But Pa sets the rules.” A thought suddenly came to him and he added slowly, “There may be a method in Pa’s madness.”

“Huh?” Hoss said, looking at his brother in bewilderment, and Adam smiled at him.

“Sorry,” Adam said. “It just occurred to me that Pa may have a reason for letting Little Joe come.” Seeing Hoss looked skeptical, Adam asked, “Did you have fun on your first cattle drive?”

For a minute Hoss just stared at Adam, and then he began to chuckle. The brothers were laughing as they headed back to the cabin.

“Stand still,” Adam commanded as he struggled to tie Hoss’s necktie while Little Joe sat on the bed and laughed. He’d watched Adam let Hoss use some of his bay rum and his Macassar oil, and then he’d watched as Adam deftly tied his own necktie. The fun began when Adam attempted to tie Hoss’s.

“Dadburnit, Adam! Yer chokin’ me!” Hoss exclaimed as he tried to squirm away. “Stop laughin’, Little Joe!”

“Yes, why don’t you go downstairs,” Adam suggested, frowning at the giggling boy.

“Cuz I don’t want to,” Little Joe replied, sticking out his
Adam’s eyes narrowed as he stared at his youngest sibling and then he called down, “Pa, do you have something for Little Joe to do? He’s not helping me get Hoss’s necktie tied.”

“Come down, Joseph, and let your brothers finish dressing,” Ben commanded, and sticking out his tongue one final time, Little Joe climbed down the ladder.

A few minutes later Adam and Hoss came down the ladder, dressed in the white linen shirts and dark gray broadcloth trousers that Hop Sing had pressed the night before, and both wore black silk neckties. As soon as Little Joe saw Hoss, he began giggling.

“You look funny, Hoss,” he managed to get out and Hoss blushed furiously.

“Joseph, that will be enough,” Ben scolded. “Hoss, you look very nice. You both do.”

“I’m just glad I only have to wear this tie on Sunday,” Hoss said with a sunny smile as his blush faded. “Adam told me he had to wear one every day in Cambridge.”

“I told him that I got used to it, but I must confess I certainly don’t miss wearing one,” Adam remarked with a little grin.

Just then there was a knock at the door and Ben called, “Come in.”

Adam’s face lit up when he saw Ross in the doorway. The two old friends were soon thumping each other on the back and saying how good it was to see each other.

“Okay if we go for a little walk?” Adam asked Ben.
Ben smiled as he replied, “That’s fine but Andy and Todd will be here soon and they’re anxious to see you, too.”

As the two old friends walked toward the pasture for the Cartwrights’ caviata, Ross said, “You did it; you went back East to school just like you always said you would. That must feel mighty good.”

Adam smiled warmly at his friend. “Yes, it does, but now it feels mighty good to be home.”

“We got some new neighbors while you was gone,” Ross said then. “I expect you’ll meet some of them today. There’s one family, the Talbots, that have a daughter—”

“Delphine?” Adam interrupted with a big grin.

“Hoss told ya about her?” Ross asked and Adam nodded, adding, “He said she’s pretty and all the fellows are trying to court her.”

Ross smiled and added proudly, “But I think she likes me. We’ve gone riding together a few times. First couple of times her little sisters tagged along, but now her parents trust me.”

Just then they heard the sound of horses riding into the yard and recognized the McKarens, so they hurried over.

“Hello, Ross,” Andy and Todd said as they dismounted. Then they both turned to Adam. “It’s good to see you again, Adam. Welcome back,” Andy said, smiling affectionately as he gazed up at the young man and shook his hand. “I’m eager to hear about your time back East.”

“I want to hear about the boat races you were in,” Todd said, shaking his friend’s hand. “They sounded like fun.”
“From the looks of you, all that rowing kept you fit,” Andy said, noting the breadth of Adam’s shoulders and chest.

“It’s even better exercise than chopping wood,” Adam said with a wink as his family came out to greet the McKarens.

Little Joe immediately tried to tell everyone he was going on the drive, but Ben said firmly, “Not now, Little Joe.” When the boy attempted to join the others, Ben put his hand on his youngest’s shoulder and said, “Let Adam have a chance to visit with his friends.”

“Hoss is with ‘em,” Little Joe complained but his pa only said, “Joseph,” and the boy, recognizing his tone, was silent. The scowl on his face made his feelings abundantly clear, however.

“Must be nice having both your brothers home,” Andy said jovially, but Little Joe only shrugged. Then his expression brightened and he asked, “Did you know stars have names, Mr. McKaren?”

“You don’t say,” Andy said with a smile.

“Yup,” Little Joe said, nodding his head for emphasis. “Adam showed me some and told me their names. They was funny names and I can’t remember ‘em. I can find the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper though.”

“Can you now,” Andy said, but just then a wagon drove into the clearing and he and Ben went to greet the new arrivals.

“Hello, glad you could come,” Ben said. Then he called, “Adam, come here please.” As Adam walked over, trailed by Ross, Todd and Hoss, Ben turned to the middle-aged couple and said, “George and Angeline, I’d like you to meet my oldest son, Adam. Adam, this is Mr. and Mrs. Talbot and these are their children: Delphine, Evangeline, Celestine, Matthew and Rueben.”
“So you’re the feller went back East to school,” George Talbot said, shaking Adam’s hand.

“Yes. It’s nice to meet you. All of you,” Adam said, smiling warmly at the Talbots. Delphine certainly is pretty. If Ross wasn’t interested in her . . . But he is, Adam reminded himself.

“Don’t see much use in book learnin’ but it don’t seem to ’ve hurt ya,” George commented.

“No, sir, I don’t think it’s hurt me,” Adam agreed, keeping his tone polite.

“Here come the Edwards,” Andy said then. “Now all we’re missing are the Johnsons.”

“Oh, Flint sent word Billy’s runnin’ a fever so they can’t join us this Sunday,” George said then.

After everyone had a chance to greet Tom and Joyce Edwards, they all gathered in the cabin. Angeline, Joyce and Delphine sat on the settee while the men sat on the chairs and benches the Cartwrights used at the dinner table and the three children sat on the floor. Ben read from the Bible and Andy prayed. Adam was startled when his father asked, “Adam, would you lead us in a hymn to close our service?”

“Certainly,” Adam replied. “Does everyone know A Mighty Fortress Is Our God?” and they all nodded. He noted Delphine and Mrs. Edwards had lovely clear sopranos and the oldest Talbot brother and Todd were strong tenors. Since they were doing an excellent job singing the melody, he decided to harmonize on the second and third verses.

“Oh, you have such a lovely voice,” Delphine said when they finished the hymn. “It was so nice when you harmonized.”
“Adam took singin’ lessons,” Hoss said proudly. “Ya can read music, can’t ya, Adam?”

“Yes,” Adam replied, adding, “I like to sing. I sang in the choir at the Park Street Church when I was at Harvard.”

“I like to sing,” Little Joe said then. He was missing Billy Johnson and he certainly wasn’t going to spend time with Evangeline or Celestine, so he decided to hang around his older brothers.

“That’s nice, dear,” Mrs. Talbot said mechanically, and then asked Adam, “After we eat, would you sing something else for us?”

“I’d be happy to,” Adam said with a smile, “if you’ll all sing some songs with me.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” Joyce said. “Right now, we need to get the food on the table so we can eat.”

As the families began to eat the food Angeline, Joyce and Hop Sing had prepared, Delphine, who was sitting between Ross and Adam, asked, “What did you do on Sunday afternoons in Boston, Adam?”

“Oh a beautiful afternoon like this, my friends and I would row up the Charles River to the Spring Hotel. We’d have supper there and then row back to the college,” Adam replied, smiling at the memory. “In the winter, we’d go ice skating or sledding.”

“Guess what I’m going to do,” Little Joe interjected, but his father said sternly, “Joseph, don’t interrupt.”

“Sounds like you didn’t spend all your time with your nose buried in a book,” Tom Edwards commented with a grin.
“No, but I think what I’ll miss the most about Cambridge and Boston is the Corner Bookstore,” Adam said.

Hoss laughed at that and said, “You brought back enough books to open your own bookstore.” He said to the others, “See all those crates along the wall? They’re full of Adam’s books.”

Ross and Todd both whistled as they looked at the crates and Delphine said, “Goodness, you must love to read!”

“I do,” Adam said with one of his crooked smiles. “And I love books.”

“Well, I’m not that interested in books,” Todd said with a grin. “What I’d like to hear about are the boat races you were in.”

Little Joe listened with growing resentment as everyone, including Evangeline and Celestine, served as a rapt audience while Adam talked about his time in Cambridge. When Hop Sing began to serve the sugar cookies Joyce had brought for dessert, Little Joe couldn’t take it any longer. He interrupted Adam in mid-sentence, saying, “Guess what I’m going to do!”

“What you’re going to do is apologize to your brother for your rudeness,” Ben stated firmly, but Little Joe scowled and shook his head. “All right,” Ben said. “Then go up to the loft until you’re willing to apologize.”

Little Joe lay down on the bed and listened as the others finished their cookies and then began to sing. That dumb old Adam! I wish he’d stayed in Cambridge, the boy thought angrily. Then he thought of riding in the hay beside Adam as his brother talked to him about the stars. No, I guess I don’t wish that. But I sure wish everybody’d quit makin’ such a fuss over him just cuz he went away to school.
Once he knew the neighbors had gone, Little Joe came quietly down the ladder. He didn’t see his pa or brothers so he walked outside. He saw them standing by the pasture gate, looking at Beauty’s chestnut colt, so he walked over. As he drew closer, he heard Adam say, “I’m looking forward to training him in a couple of years.”

“Do you know what you’re gonna name him?” Hoss asked.

“I think I’ll name him Sport,” Adam replied, and the colt neighed and tossed his head. “See, he approves,” Adam said with a chuckle.

“Adam,” Little Joe said loudly and all three men turned toward him. “I- I’m sorry I was rude and interrupted you,” he said gruffly, kicking at the grass.

“Apology accepted,” Adam said. Then he winked and said, “Don’t worry, kid. The next time we all get together, no one will want to hear about my time at Harvard; it’ll be old news.”

Little Joe grinned and Adam grinned back at him. Hoss chuckled and added, “Oh, I think Evangeline might. That little gal couldn’t take her eyes off you. I think you got yourself a little sweetheart, older brother.”

“Adam’s got a sweetheart,” Little Joe chanted while Adam rolled his eyes.
That night as they ate supper, Ben announced, “Adam and Hoss, I’ve decided the two of you will ride swing on the drive.”

If he puts me riding swing in place of one of the other vaqueros, that’s going to create lots of resentment, especially among the newer men who don’t know me, Adam thought. What can I do to change his mind?

“I think it would be better if I rode drag,” he suggested, and
the others stared at him in disbelief.

“Have you been eatin’ loco weed?” Hoss asked. “Don’t ya remember what it’s like ridin’ drag?”

“Yeah, I remember,” Adam said, smiling ruefully. “I’m not looking forward to eating everyone else’s dust, but I haven’t been on a cattle drive for five years so I belong in the greenhorn position of riding drag.”

There was silence for a minute and then Hoss said, “Well, if Adam’s gonna ride drag, then so will I.” Adam smiled at his brother, warmed by his loyalty.

Ben smiled at both his older sons, pleased by Hoss’s decision to endure the discomfort of riding drag along with his older brother. “All right. But I think you’ll find your skills coming back to you, Adam, so I’ll tell Will to rotate riding drag and flank. You and Hoss will start off riding drag.”

“All right, boys,” Will Reagan announced as the vaqueros gathered for supper Monday evening, “here are your assignments on the drive: José and I will ride point. Miguel and Carl will ride swing. Tex will be wrangler. The boss has decided to rotate ridin’ flank and ridin’ drag. Frank and Billy’ll start off ridin’ flank and Hoss and Adam ridin’ drag. Every two or three days, you’ll switch.”

“I never thought Mr. Cartwright’d have his boys ridin’ drag,” Tex commented as they ate.

“Adam’s probably only fit fer ridin’ drag, and I expect Hoss’s goin’ along to keep his brother company. Those two seem pretty close,” Frank said. Tex and Billy nodded their agreement.

“No, mi amigo,” José said. “Adán is a fine vaquero.”

“He was,” Carl said, “but that was years ago.”
“He might be a little rusty, but after a few days, it’ll come back to him,” Will said firmly. “That’s why Mr. Cartwright is rotatin’ ridin’ drag and ridin’ flank among his boys, Frank and Billy.”

“Yeah, and that way nobody gets stuck havin’ to ride drag the whole drive,” Tex said. “That’s fair.”

“Yeah, that’s what I like about workin’ on the Ponderosa,” Frank said. “Yer treated fair,” and the others all agreed.

Chapter 3

Little Joe let his fork fall to his plate with a clatter and dropped his napkin. “I’m done,” he announced, jumping to his feet.

“Sit down, Little Joe,” Ben said firmly. “You haven’t eaten more than two bites of your breakfast.”


“You’ll be hungry long before we stop to eat if you don’t finish what’s on your plate,” Ben stated in the same unyielding tone, adding, “Your brothers and I aren’t finished and we’re all leaving together.”

Sighing loudly, Little Joe sat back down, causing his brothers to exchange knowing grins. The boy forced down a few more bites of scrambled egg and bacon, practically twitching with impatience as he watched his pa and brothers clean their plates. Finally, the three of them put down their forks so Little Joe jumped to his feet and raced to the door and the other three chuckled as they walked after him.
“Hey Little Joe! Ya forgot yer bedroll,” Hoss called, but realizing his little brother was out of earshot, he scooped up Little Joe’s bedroll along with his own.

When they walked outside, they saw Tex herding the *caviata* to the meadow where the cattle going on the drive had been rounded up, but there was no sign of Little Joe.

“I bet he’s in the barn saddlin’ up the horses,” Hoss said with a grin and they hurried to see if Hoss was correct.

Little Joe was indeed putting Buck’s bridle on, and it wasn’t long before the four Cartwrights were on their way, Buck carrying Little Joe as well as Ben. They reached the meadow ahead of the *caviata* and found the others ready to move out. Ben wanted to talk with his youngest one more time before he joined Diego.

He put his hand on the boy’s shoulder and said very seriously, “Joseph, you remember that Diego is your boss and you’re to follow his orders without complaining. Understand?”

“Yessir. I understand,” Little Joe replied, squirming with impatience to join Diego at the wagon with its watertight bonnet—the same one his pa and oldest brother had used traveling west from Massachusetts.

“All right then,” Ben said, smiling, “I’ll see you tonight.” His smile grew as he watched his youngest hurry to join Diego.

“Date prisa, muchacho,” Diego said as he helped Little Joe scramble beside him. Then he slapped the reins and the team of mules pulling the wagon set off at a trot, leaving the herd of cattle behind.

“We’re gettin’ ahead of everyone else,” Little Joe said, his surprise obvious.
“Naturalmente,” Diego replied with a grin. “This way we keep ahead of the dust. And we must arrive at the campsite early to cook the food. The beans are soaking in that bucket,” and he nodded toward the back of the wagon where the boy saw a bucket hanging. “We must cook them, prepare the johnnycakes, fry the steaks and fix the coffee. I will show you how to make the coffee and that will be your job at every meal.”

“Okay,” Little Joe said, and Diego grinned more broadly at the boy’s lack of enthusiasm.

“Hop Sing gave me dried apples so for supper tonight I’ll bake an apple pie,” the cook added and Little Joe smiled because he loved apple pie.

As Diego and Little Joe drove off, Will Reagan rode over to the remaining Cartwrights. “Goliath is wearing his bell so we’re ready whenever you give the word, Boss,” he said to Ben after they exchanged greetings.

“Goliath’s still the lead steer, huh?” Adam queried, lifting his eyebrow.

“Yup,” Hoss replied with a grin. “This’ll be his eighth drive.”

Adam’s dimples flashed as he added, “Well, he’s too old and tough to make a decent steak.”

“Let’s get started moving these steers,” Ben said, urging Buck toward the front of the herd. Will followed since he and José were riding point.

Hoss turned to Adam and said with a little grimace, “Best make sure you tie that kerchief real snug, older brother.”

The herd of five hundred steers moved slowly, their hooves churning up thick clouds of dust. Riding behind the herd,
urging them forward and rounding up the occasional stragglers, Adam and Hoss had to eat a sickening amount of dust, even wearing their kerchiefs over their noses and mouths, and their eyes were red-rimmed and watering from the constant irritation.

The herd moved slowly, intending to cover no more than twelve miles a day. Adam had chosen to ride Beauty first, knowing that if his skill at herding cattle was rusty, hers was not. As the day wore on, he found the dust, the noise of the cattle’s hooves and their lowing were giving him an excruciating headache, so he was more than ready to halt when the herd reached that night’s campsite.

As soon as he dismounted, he began trying to beat off some of the dust that coated him, and thereby raising his own dust cloud.

“Whoa there, Adam,” Hoss expostulated as he walked over to join his sibling. “I done ate enough dust today.” He took a swig from his canteen and swished it around his mouth before spitting it out. “Lordy! Hop Sing could plant his vegetable garden in my mouth.”

Adam followed his brother’s example before adding, “And he could plant flowers in mine.”

“Let’s go hobble our horses and see what’s fer supper,” Hoss said then, slapping Adam on the arm and raising a puff of dust.

The brothers were the last to arrive at the camp; the other vaqueros were sitting cross-legged in a semi-circle, holding their tin plates on their laps.

“Thought you boys got lost,” Carl said with a smirk as Adam and Hoss approached the others. Then he added, “Now I ask ya: ya ever seen a sorrier looking’ pair?” Even Ben had to smile while
Frank and Billy began to guffaw loudly.

“I believe you boys forgot that in a couple of days you’ll be the ones ridin’ drag,” Adam said, winking at the two vaqueros.

“Aw, why’d ya have to remind me?” Frank said, and then grinned at Adam.

“I’m starved so I hope you fellers left some grub fer me ’n’ Adam,” Hoss said.

“Listen to him, will ya,” Carl said. “He’s worried about us leavin’ him grub.” Hoss grinned good-naturedly as the men all laughed.

“Howdy, Hoss! Howdy, Adam!” Little Joe yelled from behind a pot, holding a spoon. “Come have some beans.”

“Don’t mind if I do,” Hoss said after first grabbing a johnnycake and placing it on his tin plate. Adam followed his example and they held out their plates to their younger brother before heading over to Diego, who gave them each a fried steak.

“And I baked an apple pie,” Diego said, grinning at Hoss, whose face lit up in anticipation, and Little Joe put the lid back on the pot and went to join his brothers.

“You two sure are dirty,” he giggled and then added, “I helped Diego make the coffee and he told me that’s gonna be my job. You know how?” he asked, and without waiting for a reply he continued. “First ya gotta roast the coffee beans in a skillet—Diego says he’s gonna do that part—then ya put ‘em in the grinder and grind ‘em. Ya add the ground up beans and water to the coffeepot and let ‘em boil. It’s easy!”

“Um, you’re supposed to move the pot off the fire as soon as it boils,” Adam said and Little Joe scowled at him.
“I know how to make coffee,” the boy said belligerently and Adam held his hands up in surrender and concentrated on his supper.

Hoss and Adam were almost finished when Tex called out, “Man at the pot!” and Little Joe asked curiously, “What’s that mean?”

“It means that Miguel has to fill everyone else’s cup with coffee besides his own,” Hoss explained as he and Adam held out their cups to Miguel, who was walking around the circle with the coffeepot.

After the men polished off Diego’s apple pie, they carried their plates, which had been scraped clean, over to the wreck pan and carefully stacked them.

“Little Joe, ven acá,” Diego called, repeating in English, “Come here.” Reluctantly, the boy walked over to join the cook. He was certain Diego had a job for him and he wanted to stay with his brothers and the other vaqueros. Diego handed him a cloth saying, “It’s time to clean up; I will wash and you dry.”

“Do I hafta?” the boy whined.

“No,” Diego said calmly and the boy’s face brightened. “I will tell tu papa that you refused and he will take you home. But it is your choice, muchacho.”

“I’ll dry,” Little Joe said sulkily, holding out his hand for the cloth.

Carl and Billy had the first watch and as the others relaxed around the campfire, Tex asked Adam, “How many drives did ya go on before ya went away to school?”

“Just two,” Adam replied. “I thought I’d remembered what it was like riding drag, but it’s much worse,” he added, grinning ruefully. “What I really remember about my first drive is how
Miguel saved my life.”

“Oh yeah?” Tex asked, and he and Frank glanced curiously at Miguel.

“We’d been on the trail a couple of days and Pa assigned the two of us the job of gathering firewood,” Adam began. “I’d picked up several pieces of wood and then I heard a rattle and saw a rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. I knew there was no way I could draw my gun before the snake bit me and figured my time had come, but before the snake could strike, I heard a gunshot and the snake’s head was shot off. And there was Miguel, putting his revolver back in his holster.” As Tex whistled, Adam smiled warmly at Miguel.

Miguel smiled slightly and said diffidently, “I had forgotten.”

“I never will,” Adam said firmly and Ben added, “Nor will I ever forget what I owe you, Miguel.”

Miguel was a little embarrassed and to cover it, he said, “It’s too bad you didn’t bring your guitar, Adam. We could have had some music.”

“We could sing without the guitar; I’d be happy to start us off,” Adam said then, looking at the other faces around the campfire.

“Sure, I’d like to sing,” Tex said. “Everyone know Lily of the West?”

Little Joe listened longingly to the men singing as he dried. As soon as he finished, he hurried over to the campfire and sat down beside his pa. Ben smiled warmly at his youngest and put his arm around the boy’s shoulders. Little Joe was happy to be included with the vaqueros but he was very disappointed when the group around the campfire broke up after only more song and the
men got out their bedrolls. Feeling grumpy, he got his bedroll from Hoss and put it between his brothers.

“I’m not sleepy,” he grumbled softly so their pa wouldn’t overhear.

“Well, I’m tired and Hoss and I have the last watch so we want to sleep now,” Adam stated in a firm but quiet tone.

“That’s right,” Hoss added, lying on his back, using his saddle for a pillow, and Adam quickly followed suit.

Scowling, Little Joe followed their example. He lay in the dark and looked up in the sky for the stars Adam had pointed out to him. Soon he could hear the sound of Hoss snoring beside him. It seemed only a few minutes later a hand was shaking him awake. He opened bleary eyes to discover it was still dark and Diego’s voice said in his ear, “¡Despiértate, muchacho! Wake up!”

“It’s still dark,” the boy replied, trying to burrow back under his blanket.

Diego shook him more firmly and said softly, “We must get up now to have breakfast ready at sunup.”

Reluctantly, the boy sat up. He saw his brothers and their bedrolls were both gone and realized they must be on their watch. Sleepily he put up his bedroll and stumbled after the cook.

Adam and Hoss were the first to arrive for breakfast.

“That bacon sure smells good,” Adam said as he grabbed a couple of Diego’s sourdough biscuits from the Dutch oven.

“It sure does,” Hoss agreed.
Once he and Adam filled their plates, they held out their cups to Little Joe, who was manning the coffeepot. Hoss took a sip and promptly spit it out while Adam coughed and grimaced as he swallowed his mouthful.

“Dadburnit!” Hoss complained, “that’s the worst coffee I ever tasted!”

“I told you that you needed to take the pot off the fire once it started to boil!” Adam scolded his youngest brother.

Diego frowned at his helper before saying, “As did I. There’s no time to make more. Try adding sugar.”

“I’m sorry,” Little Joe said, his voice reflecting his misery while his posture was hunched, and he scuffed one boot in the dirt.

“It’s not so bad with the sugar. Is it, Adam?” Hoss asked after adding a couple of lumps and using his fork to stir. He felt sorry for his little brother and wanted to reassure him.

“The sugar helps,” Adam agreed, giving his youngest brother a crooked smile. “And I’m certain Little Joe won’t let the coffee boil again.”

“I sure won’t!” the boy said fervently and both brothers grinned at him.

The third day of the drive Adam and Hoss switched places with Frank and Billy. They both were delighted not to be eating everyone’s dust, although Adam noted the change was more a matter of degree. About mid-afternoon he began to notice ominous black clouds rolling in. He knew that signaled a thunderstorm was headed their way, which meant there was a real danger the herd would stampede.

As the sky grew darker, the temperature dropped, and the
cattle’s lowing increased in volume. The vaqueros all knew one good flash of lightning and roar of thunder could set them off. Soon the men could see bolts of lightning arc across the sky but the length of time between the lightning and the thunder told them the storm was still in the distance.

Ben, who’d been scouting ahead, came riding up to Will and José, his clothes soaked clean through by the heavy rain.

“Hailstorm up ahead,” he called. “Let’s stop here and see if we can wait out the storm. It may break up before it reaches us.”

The vaqueros patrolled the herd, alert for any sign of a stampede. The intervals between the flashes of lightning and the thunder grew shorter and shorter and then men and steers began to be pelted by cold raindrops. The wind began to pick up and Adam felt his hair stand on end and almost simultaneously there was an earsplitting roar of thunder and a lightning bolt struck so close he felt singed by the heat. His horse reared up in terror and as he worked to regain control, the cattle began to stampede.

The vaqueros rode hard, attempting to head off the stampede, lashed by the wind and rain, then pounded by hailstones. Hoss and Adam saw Miguel’s horse stumble and go down. They shouted and waved their hats as they rode hell-for-leather, managing to turn the stampede away from Miguel.

In spite of the men’s best efforts, the herd covered several miles before they were able to regain control. It was dark by the time they reached the campsite but Diego and Little Joe had beef stew, biscuits and hot coffee ready for the bone-weary vaqueros. Miguel walked up to Adam and Hoss after they dismounted his expression somber.

“I owe you my life, mis amigos,” he said earnestly as he placed
a hand on their shoulders.

“Aw, you’d ’ve done the same fer us, Miguel,” Hoss said, embarrassment making his sunburned face redder.

“True, but if you had not acted so quickly, I would have been trampled.”

“We’re just glad we were able to turn back those steers,” Adam said quietly, his expression as grave Miguel’s. Then one corner of his mouth turned up slightly and he added, “I guess you and I are even now.”

“Si, mi amigo, we are even,” Miguel said, returning Adam’s grin. “We should reach Placerville by noon,” Ben announced at breakfast several days later. They’d been lucky and there’d been no more stampedes and they’d found enough grass and water for the cattle. He expected a good price for the Ponderosa’s herd.

“First thing I’m gonna do after I get paid is go over to the Old Crow and get me a nice cold beer,” Tex announced as the vaqueros carried their plates over to the wreck pan.

“That sounds mighty good to me,” Frank said with an enormous lazy grin.

“Yeah, me too,” Hoss added.

“When I get to the saloon, I’m lookin’ for a pretty gal who’ll let me buy her a drink,” Carl drawled. “What about you, Adam?”

“A pretty girl and a cold beer both sound inviting,” Adam replied with a dimpled smile, “but I have something else to take care of first so I’ll meet you fellows at the Old Crow.”

As Hoss and Adam saddled their horses, Hoss asked in a worried
tone, “What about Little Joe? He sure can’t go to the Old Crow.”

“I imagine Pa has plans for Little Joe,” Adam replied. “I don’t think he’d expect us to nursemaid him. After all, he’s the one who decided to bring him on the drive.”

“And if his plan was to stop Little Joe from pesterin’ him to come next year, I think it worked,” Hoss said with a laugh.

“Yeah, he sure doesn’t like getting up before dawn to make breakfast,” Adam said, chuckling.

“Or havin’ to wash and dry the dishes,” Hoss added.

“And any of the other chores Diego gave him,” Adam said. “Pretty smart of Pa.” The two brothers were laughing as they mounted their horses.

Once the vaqueros had been paid, most headed for the Old Crow or Exchange saloons.

“I wanna go with Hoss and Adam,” Little Joe announced as he stood by Ben and watched the men set off down the dusty street while his brothers waited for their wages.

“No, you and I are going to register at the Cary House Hotel and then we’re going to explore the town,” Ben said to his youngest, smiling down at him.

“But I wanna go with Hoss and Adam. Please, Pa,” Little Joe begged, looking at his pa pleadingly with his big green eyes.

“Sorry, but little boys don’t belong in saloons,” Adam said with a wink, and then reached over and tipped Little Joe’s hat over his eyes. Little Joe scowled up at his brother.

“Yeah, Adam’s right, Little Joe. ’Sides, you wouldn’t have no
fun,” Hoss said.

“Your brothers are both right,” Ben said. “I promise you’ll have a better time exploring Placerville with me than you would tagging after Adam and Hoss.”

“Okay,” Little Joe said, but he didn’t sound convinced.

“Actually, I’ll walk to the hotel with you,” Adam said then.

“That’s not necessary,” Ben said. “I’m reserving a room for you and Hoss.”

“Thanks,” Adam said and Hoss added, “Yeah, thanks, Pa. I’ll see you at the Old Crow, Adam.” Then he hurried after the other vaqueros.

Adam explained, “I need some information and I think the hotel can provide it. I’ll catch up with the others.”

“Suit yourself,” Ben said with a shrug. As they walked along, Ben and Adam leading Buck and Beauty, Ben commented, “The hotel we’re going to stay at is new. Two years ago Placerville had a terrible fire and many of the buildings were burned, including the hotel where we used to stay. Dave Townsend told me the new hotel here, the Cary House Hotel, is one of the finest around. It’s made of brick so it won’t burn easily.”

It wasn’t long before they came to a handsome three-story brick building with a balcony on the second floor. All three Cartwrights were impressed, Adam in particular. The lobby with its grand staircase was even more imposing. The front desk clerk looked disdainfully at the Cartwrights in their dusty trail clothes. Ben ignored the contemptuous glance and said, “I’d like to reserve two rooms for tonight.”

The clerk named the price, obviously thinking that would scare
Ben off. His eyebrows arched in surprise when Ben pulled out a handful of half eagles.

“That should cover it,” Ben said with a sardonic smile.

“Yes, indeed,” the clerk said, all traces of condescension wiped off his face. “I have two rooms that open onto the balcony if you’d like those?”

Ben looked down at Little Joe’s hopeful expression and told the clerk, “That will be fine,” and picked up the pen to sign the register.

“I’ll sign for our room,” Adam said, “and I’ll take our key.”

“Let’s go see our room,” Little Joe begged his pa. Adam watched the two of them head up the staircase and turned to the clerk.

“Could you tell me where there’s a bathhouse?”

“Yes, but we have a bathroom with hot and cold running water on every floor for our guests’ convenience,” the clerk replied.

“Splendid!” Adam said and then hurried to retrieve his saddlebags, which contained his change of clothes and shaving paraphernalia.

He stopped at his room first, noting it was neat and clean although not as elegant as the lobby, which had been finished with expensive mahogany and cherry. He gathered up what he needed and set off in search of the bathroom. It was empty so he locked the door and draped his clean clothing over the cane back chair in one corner. He filled the copper bathtub with hot water and then lay back and let the water ease his sore muscles. Once the water began to grow tepid, he washed quickly, using the bar of hard soap provided by the hotel, and then dried off. Wrapping the towel around his waist, he brushed his clean
hair until his curls were tamed and then he shaved off the beard he’d begun on the trail.

“That feels much better,” he said aloud as he rubbed his fingers across his smooth cheeks.

He dressed hurriedly in a pair of brown gabardine trousers and a shirt of unbleached muslin, happy to be out of his filthy red flannel shirt and waist overalls. He whistled jauntily as he walked to the Old Crow. He paused just outside the swinging doors and peered inside, giving his eyes a minute to adjust to the dim, smoky interior. He spotted Hoss sitting at a table with Tex, Frank and Billy, sipping their beers. Then he saw Carl sitting at a table with a petite, dark-haired woman. Grinning, he pushed the doors open and strode inside.

“Hey Adam!” Hoss called.

“Lookee, Adam done got hisself all prettied up,” Tex said loudly, causing the other patrons and saloon girls to turn and look at Adam.

“Aw, Adam jest likes to be clean,” Hoss said quickly, but the others all snickered.

Adam merely smiled at Tex and walked over to the bar and ordered a beer. While he waited for his beer, he checked out the saloon girls. The one sitting with Carl was definitely the youngest and the prettiest in his opinion. A buxom, brassy blonde approached and asked with a sultry smile, “Buy me a drink, Sugar?”

“Maybe later,” Adam lied. “Right now I want to join a friend.” The blonde flounced off in search of another customer.

As Adam approached Carl’s table, he noted the girl gazed at him demurely beneath her lashes. Then she looked up at him and
smiled invitingly. He thought she’d be much prettier if she washed off the powder and rouge, but she had enormous brown eyes in a triangular face and full pouty lips that begged to be kissed. She was also slim and dainty, which he preferred to voluptuous. “Mind if I join you, Carl?” he asked, flashing a dimpled smile at the saloon girl.

Before Carl could open his mouth to refuse, the girl said quickly, “Please do,” gesturing at the empty seat to her left.

Adam grinned broadly as he sat down and placed his hat on the table. “Aren’t you going to introduce me to the young lady, Carl?” he asked.

Carl scowled at Adam and said grudgingly, “Helen, this is Adam.”

Adam continued to smile and look into Helen’s soft doe eyes. “Your name suits you,” he said softly. Then he quoted:

Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.

“My, you talk pretty,” she said. She might have blushed, but it was hard to tell under the powder and rouge.

“Pretty enough to be rewarded with a kiss?” he asked. She smiled and leaned over to give him one quick kiss. When she pulled away, Adam couldn’t help a tiny smirk at Carl’s angry glower.

“Do you know any more of that pretty talk?” Helen asked eagerly.

“Sure I do,” Adam drawled. “Here’s another I like:”

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

“That’s pretty, but it’s sad,” Helen said quietly.

“Yeah, who wants to hear a poem about dyin’?” Carl asked scornfully. Then reaching to put an arm around Helen’s shoulders and draw her close, he added, “Me, I’d rather talk about lovin’.” He tried to steal a kiss, but the girl turned her face away.

“I know poems about love,” Adam said, gazing into her eyes. She seemed mesmerized and shrugged off Carl’s arm and leaned toward Adam. Not breaking their eye contact, he began to recite:

Drink to me only with thine eyes
And I will pledge with mine
Or leave a kiss within the cup
And I’ll not ask for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine
But might I of Jove’s nectar sip
I would not change for thine.

“That’s beautiful,” she breathed. He leaned over to capture her mouth in a kiss and she didn’t resist. When they broke apart, she moved closer and said breathlessly, “Tell me more, Adam. I like to hear you say those pretty poems.”

“Will ya look at that!” Frank exclaimed, pointing at the table where Adam, Carl and Helen were sitting. “Ol’ Carl wasn’t gittin’ nowhere with that little gal, and she can’t take her eyes off yer brother.”

“Guess it was pretty smart of Adam to git all cleaned up,” Billy commented speculatively.
Just then Adam got his third kiss and Carl stood up angrily and walked away. As he stalked past the table where Hoss and the others sat, Tex commented snidely, “Looks like yer not the ladies’ favorite no more.”

Carl glared wrathfully at the other man and for a minute Hoss thought a fight might break out, but then Carl shrugged and said with a sneer, “I’m goin’ over to the Exchange where there’s real women who appreciate real men—not ones that spout off poetry!” He ignored the guffaws behind his back as he exited the saloon.

**Chapter 4**

“It sure is good to be back home,” Hoss said as he, Adam and Ben rode into the clearing containing their cabin, the bunkhouse and the barn. They’d ridden ahead of Diego and Little Joe traveling in the wagon and the other vaqueros, who were herding the returning Goliath and the rest of the herd to the winter pasture.

“You are so right,” Adam agreed, grinning at his brother. “Tonight I can sleep in my own bed. Uh, I mean our own bed,” he corrected himself and shook his head slightly.

As Ben dismounted, Hoss leaned over and said quietly to Adam, “I gotta admit that it was nice at the hotel only sharin’ a bed with one brother.”

“It sure was,” Adam said with a wink before he dismounted. As they walked into the barn, he said, “What I liked best about the Cary House was the bathroom.”

“You would!” Hoss chuckled and Adam playfully punched his stomach.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t enjoy soaking in the hot water,” Adam teased.
“It was relaxin’,” Hoss admitted with a grin. “I could kinda understand how come ya like takin’ baths so much.”

“I must admit I was glad to have the use of the bathroom,” Ben commented then. He chuckled as he added, “As far as your younger brother is concerned, a bath is a bath and he hates them.”

The three cared for their mounts and then headed for the cabin.

“Think Hop Sing would mind heating me some water for a bath and a shave?” Adam asked. “Supper won’t be for another three hours.”

“There ya go, wantin’ another bath,” Hoss laughed.

“Actually, I’d like for you and Little Joe to have one as well,” Adam said, grinning at his brother, and Ben chuckled.

“We all need a bath and everyone except Little Joe needs a shave,” he said, smiling broadly.

“I’m home!” Little Joe called as he ran through the cabin’s open door. He squinted as his eyes made the adjustment from the bright sunshine outside to the cabin’s dim interior. He saw his brothers sitting at one end of the table playing a game of checkers while his pa sat at the other working on his ledgers.

His brothers looked up from their game and smiled a greeting while his pa said, “I’m glad to see you, Little Joe. Hop Sing has hot water heating for your bath.”

“Aw Pa, do I gotta,” Little Joe complained and Ben replied firmly, “Yes, you have to take a bath. Now hurry and get it over with before supper.”

After Ben blessed the food and they began to eat, he said, “Enjoy yourselves tonight, boys, because you won’t have much
sparing time for the next couple of weeks. Adam and Hoss, I want you to concentrate on replenishing the woodshed so we have enough to last through the winter. I’ll butcher a couple of pigs and a steer and take care of smoking and salting the meat. Little Joe will help Hop Sing with the sausage and lard and making candles.”

They all nodded and then Hoss asked, “Play another game of checkers, Adam?”

“I wanna play,” Little Joe inserted quickly. Hoss seemed to want play checkers with Adam all the time and Little Joe was feeling left out.

“I’ll play the winner,” Adam said with one of his crooked grins. “I want to write in my journal first.”

“I’ll play the winner of the second game,” Ben offered and his sons smiled at him.

As Hop Sing began to clear the table, Adam asked his brothers, “Do you mind setting up the checkerboard in the middle of the table so I can write at this end?”

“We don’t mind,” Hoss said and Little Joe shrugged. Adam hurried up to the loft and returned a few minutes later with a leather-bound book, a steel nib pen and an inkwell. While Hoss set up the checkerboard, Little Joe watched with interest as his oldest brother unscrewed the lid of the inkwell, dipped in his pen and began to write. Little Joe had never used a pen to write with, only pencils. The only other person he’d seen write with a pen was Pa. He walked over to get a closer look.

“What’re ya writin’ about?” he asked curiously.

Adam straightened up, managing to block his brother’s view of what he’d written. “How much dust I had to eat on the drive and
how loud Hoss and Diego snored. Oh, and the pretty girl in Placerville who let me steal a kiss.”

“Ya got more than one,” Hoss commented, grinning at his older brother while Little Joe made a gagging sound.

Adam couldn’t help grinning, knowing that Little Joe’s attitude would change radically in a few years. He glanced toward the end of the table and saw his pa looking at him with one eyebrow raised, and feeling bold, he winked. Pa wouldn’t approve of his kissing Helen but he’d enjoyed it, and he’d enjoyed making Carl jealous.

Little Joe started to rejoin Hoss, and Adam realized that he was letting an opportunity to grow closer to Little Joe slip through his fingers. He quickly closed the journal and put the lid on the inkwell before standing up.

“Wait, Little Joe,” he said and the boy turned toward him. “I have something up in the loft that’s more interesting than my journal. Would you like to see it?”

The boy’s expression was skeptical, but he shrugged and said, “Okay,” and followed his brother up the ladder. When Hoss started to go after them, Ben put a hand on his arm and shook his head.

“Let them spend some time together,” he said quietly and Hoss nodded to show he understood.

Up in the loft, Adam quickly walked over to the corner where he’d stored his trunk and opened it. As he moved his clothes out of the way, he said to Little Joe, “While I was at college, I designed a house for us, one where each of us would have his own bedroom and his own bed.” Pulling out a roll of papers from the bottom of the trunk and flourishing them, he said, “Here are
the designs. I’ll spread them on the bed so you can see.”

Adam unrolled the papers carefully and pointed to the top sheet, which was a watercolor presentation drawing. “This shows you what the house will look like when it’s finished.”

“Gosh, it’s big!” Little Joe exclaimed. “Where’s my room?”

“Your bedroom is at the back. You can see it better in the floor plan.” He pulled a sheet from the bottom of the pile and placed it on top of the drawing. “Here’s the floor plan for the second floor.” He pointed, saying, “This is your room, right next to Pa’s.”

Little Joe’s face lit up and he shouted, “Pa! Hoss! Come see the pictures of Adam’s house!”

Ben called up, “Why don’t you bring them down here?”

Adam rolled up the plans and then the brothers went down the ladder. Hoss cleared off the checkerboard and Ben moved his ledger to make room for the plans.

“Show ‘em the pictures, Adam,” Little Joe commanded.

Adam unrolled the plans, spreading them on the table, and as he did so he said, “I was telling Little Joe that while I was at Harvard I designed a house for us. I think we’ve outgrown this cabin.”

Hoss whistled as he looked at the watercolor drawing Adam had made of the finished house while Ben gazed at it intently.

“I used what’s known as timber frame architecture,” Adam explained. “It’s been around for hundreds of years and it seemed perfect for us.”

Little Joe was too excited to wait for his brother to discuss
the design of their new house. He pulled out the floor plan for the second floor and pointed to one of the rooms marked bedroom. “Look Pa! Adam said that room could be mine. And this big one next to it is yours.”

“I, uh, planned for this one at the front to be mine,” Adam said, pointing to the floor plan.

“What about me?” Hoss asked. “Where’s my room?”

“There are five bedrooms upstairs,” Adam said. “You can have the one right across the hall from mine or this one next to Little Joe’s room.”

Hoss studied the floor plan and then said, “The room by Little Joe’s looks smaller. Is it?” Adam nodded and Hoss said, “I’ll take the room across from yours. It looks nice and big.”

Little Joe pointed to an area on the floor plan and asked, “What’s this room here, Adam?”

“That’s not a room,” Adam answered. Seeing three puzzled expressions, he explained, “You see, this area will be open to the great room on the first floor. The great room will have what we call a cathedral ceiling that goes up to the roof.” Then he looked over at where Hop Sing was drying dishes and said, “I’ve designed a new house for us, Hop Sing, and I wanted to show you your bedroom and your kitchen.”

As Hop Sing joined the others around the table, Adam spread out the floor plan for the first floor. “See this wing,” he said gesturing. “It has a nice big room for you and next to it will be a combination washhouse and bathhouse. Both rooms have their own doors leading outside. The washhouse and the kitchen, which is in this smaller wing, will have full circuit plumbing and that means there will be pipes to supply clean water and pipes
to carry away the dirty water.”

“You mean like the bathroom at the hotel?” Hoss asked.

Adam smiled a little and replied, “That’s right.” He saw his younger brothers looking at him skeptically and said firmly, “Full circuit plumbing has been used since ancient times; it won’t be that difficult to install.”

“Dadburnit, Adam, you sure learned a lot at college,” Hoss said admiringly.

“I’d better have, considering the money Pa spent on my education,” Adam responded with a chuckle.

“Hop Sing very thankful for water pipes,” the cook said, smiling happily,

Ben hadn’t said anything yet, just carefully studied the plans spread across the table. Now he smiled at his first-born, and placing a hand on his son’s shoulder, he said, “I can see you have real talent, son, and I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks, Pa,” Adam said quietly. Ben saw the happiness in his son’s hazel eyes, and gave his shoulder a quick squeeze before dropping his hand.

“Let’s start buildin’ tomorrow!” Little Joe demanded enthusiastically.

“Oh, we have lots of things to do before we’re ready to begin building the house,” Adam said, the corners of his mouth turning up in a tiny grin at his brother’s eagerness.

“What things?” his little brother asked impatiently.

“We have to cut and mill the lumber we’ll need. I’ll have to meet with whomever is in charge at the sawmill, so I can let him
know how many board feet of rough-sawn timbers and boards we’ll need and how many of dressed boards,” Adam answered. “And I need to find out if our sawmill can cut the shingles for the roof or if we’ll need to buy them in Placerville.” He smiled at Little Joe before adding, “We have to decide where to build our new house and then we have to prepare the site by removing any trees and rocks. All that has to be done before we can start building the house.” Little Joe’s disappointment showed clearly on his expressive face.

“Any work on the house will have to wait until the butchering is done and your brothers have finished chopping this winter’s firewood,” Ben stated firmly. Then he smiled at his sons, saying, “We can all be thinking about where we should build our new home.”

“Yes, I’m hoping we can finish the site preparation before winter sets in so as soon as the spring thaw we can begin constructing the foundation,” Adam said. “Oh, and we should try and build two cabins near the site for the workmen.”

“Workmen?” Ben repeated. “Adam, I thought the four of us would build the house just as we built this cabin.”

“Pa, building a house like this isn’t like building a cabin,” Adam explained. “We’ll need men with experience in carpentry, masonry, plumbing and plastering.” He saw his father frown slightly but before he could think of any additional arguments to convince his father, Hoss spoke up.

“Adam’s right, Pa. I can build a cabin or a barn, but I wouldn’t know how to build a grand house like this one here,” and he pointed at the drawing of the completed house. “If it’s gonna look the way Adam planned, then we gotta hire men who know how to build a house like this. I expect we could find some in Placerville, maybe see where they hired the men who built that
hotel.”

“That’s a great idea, Hoss,” Adam said, smiling warmly at his brother before gazing warily at their father.

Ben was quiet for a minute but then he smiled at his boys and said, “All right, Adam, you designed the house so you’ll be in charge of its construction.”

“I wanna help build our house,” Little Joe insisted, and Adam smiled down at him.

“There’s one way you can help and you won’t need to wait. We’re going to need lots and lots of wooden pegs.”

“How come?” Little Joe asked curiously.

Adam saw the same curiosity on the other faces so he said, “I’ll show you.” He turned over one of the floor plans and asked Little Joe to get him a pencil. “You see, Little Joe, a timber frame house has tall posts that make up the walls and support the roof,” he said as he quickly sketched them. “The posts connect with beams, rafters and braces that form the roof and support the walls,” he continued, adding to his drawing as the others watched. “We’ll use the pegs to lock the places where the posts, beams, rafters and braces are joined together,” and he pointed to places on his rough sketch. “They’re joined by a method called mortise and tenon; the pegs make sure they stay joined.” He smiled at his youngest brother. “If I show you how, do you think you can whittle a hundred or more pegs?”

“Sure I can,” the boy said confidently. “Show me how right now.”

“I thought me ‘n’ you was gonna play a game of checkers,” Hoss protested.
“Why don’t you start on the pegs tomorrow,” Ben suggested, smiling fondly at his youngest, and the boy nodded. That night as the brothers got ready for bed, Little Joe said to Adam, “I’m sure glad you decided we needed a new house. I can’t wait until I can sleep in my own bed, by myself.” He grinned up at his big brothers.

“Yeah, and I’ll have a bedroom where I can stand up without bumpin’ my head,” Hoss declared while his brothers chuckled, and Adam added, “Ditto.”

“Do you have any ideas about where we should build?” Adam asked as they got into bed.

“Nah, but I’ll give it some thought,” Hoss promised and Little Joe chimed in with, “Me, too.”

The next morning as the Cartwrights and Hop Sing sat down to breakfast, Ben said, “I asked Carl to ride over to Genoa. While we were in Placerville, Little Joe and I stopped by the postmaster’s office. He told us he’d given Snowshoe Thompson a couple of letters for the Ponderosa so they should be waiting for us in Genoa.”

“I hope I have a letter from Aaron,” Adam said as he spread raspberry jam on a biscuit.

“Pa, can I help Hoss ‘n’ Adam?” Little Joe begged, but Ben shook his head.

“Your brothers don’t need your help, but Hop Sing does,” he replied kindly.

"'Sides, you know you like grindin’ the sausage," Hoss interjected, grinning at his little brother.

“And I’ll give you your first lesson in carving the pegs tonight. Okay?” Adam asked with a smile.
“Sure!” Little Joe replied enthusiastically.
When Adam returned home with Hoss that evening, he was tired, stiff and sore. His spirits lifted when he discovered Carl had brought him two letters: one from Aaron and one from Thomas Collingsworth. As they ate supper, Adam turned to Little Joe and said very seriously, “I need to ask a favor, Little Joe.”

“You want a favor from me?” the boy said in surprise.

“That’s right,” Adam replied. “I know I said that I’d teach you how to whittle pegs tonight, but I really want to read my letters. Would you mind if I waited until after I read them to show you?”

“I’ll play a game of checkers with ya while Adam’s readin’,” Hoss added quickly.

Little Joe really wanted to learn how to carve the pegs, but as he looked at the faces around the table, he could see they all thought he should let Adam read his letters first. It’s not fair! He said he’d show me and he can read his dumb ol’ letters some other time. Then he saw the hopeful look in Adam’s eyes and realized how badly Adam wanted to hear from his friends.

“Okay, you can show me after you finish readin’,” Little Joe forced himself to say. He was immediately rewarded by his brother’s big dimpled smile. Seeing Adam’s happiness, made Little Joe feel happy too, and then Pa reached over and tousled his curls and Little Joe could see Pa was proud of him. Little Joe felt good all over as he basked in his family’s approval.

As soon as Hop Sing cleared away the supper dishes and while his brothers set up the checkerboard, Adam moved one of their tallow candles nearer and opened Aaron’s letter.

July 11, 1858
Dear Adam,

Elsie and I returned from Martha’s Vineyard a few days ago but I’ve been too busy with the haying to write until today, Sunday being a day of rest.

Adam, being married to Elsie is even more wonderful than I had imagined. She is trying so hard to be a good wife and my mother is very impressed with her willingness to learn all the things a farmer’s wife needs to know. When I told her that I felt guilty taking her away from the life she was born to, she laughed and told me not to be a goose. She said she enjoys learning to cook and bake and how to churn butter and put up jams and jellies. I did get her to admit that she’s not fond of scrubbing floors or doing the washing, but she assured me it’s not so bad since they share the work.

I guess it’s a little crowded with six of us living in the farmhouse but David is a good sport about moving to the attic. In a year or so I will probably build a house for us, but right now Elsie couldn’t manage a house on her own. Fortunately, she and Docia have become good friends; I imagine it hasn’t been easy for Docia growing up with no sisters so she’s happy to have one now.

I sure wish I could persuade my father to buy a McCormick reaper. It’s not that I mind cutting the hay with scythes; it’s the inefficiency that galls me. When I told my father that we could cut the hay in half the time using a reaper, he just looked at me and said, “What would you do with the extra time, son? ‘Idle hands are the devil’s tools.’” I don’t think I’m ever going to persuade him, but I’ll keep on trying.

I look forward to receiving a letter from you and learning how
you’re adjusting to life back on the ranch. Oh, and I want to know how your family reacted to the house you designed.

Sincerely,
Aaron

P.S. Elsie says to say hello and that she’s also looking forward to hearing what your family thinks about your house.

Adam smiled as he put the pages back in the envelope and set it to one side before picking up Thomas’s letter. He glanced at his brothers and saw Little Joe yawn, obviously struggling to keep awake. Ben noticed as well and announced firmly, “As soon as you finish the game, it’s time for you to go to bed, Little Joe. Adam can show you how to whittle the pegs tomorrow night.”

“Aw, I’m not tired, Pa,” the boy protested but Ben only said sternly, “Joseph,” and the boy sighed in defeat.

One corner of Adam’s mouth turned up in amusement as he opened the envelope containing Thomas’s letter.

July 15, 1858

Dear Adam,

I hope this letter finds you safely restored to the bosom of your family. After four years at Harvard, I imagine life on a remote ranch is going to take some getting used to, but I know how much you wanted to return to the Ponderosa.

As for me, I will be leaving for Europe in two days. I’m really looking forward to visiting places that I’ve read about: Chartres Cathedral, Versailles, the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter’s Basilica and so many more. I’ll spend some time in London first
seeing St. Paul’s, the Tower, the British Museum, Westminster and the London Zoo. I also plan on visiting Stonehenge and probably Oxford and Cambridge before I cross the Channel.

I plan on touring Europe for a year. I asked Rebecca if I could write her and she promised to write me as well. I think our separation will be either a case of ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’ or ‘Out of sight, out of mind’. If the latter, it’s best we find out now.

By the way, Aaron and Elsie visited me on their way back to Shelburne Falls. They are the picture of marital bliss. I confess to being a bit envious but they deserve their happiness.

The next letter you receive from me will be sent from London.

Sincerely,

Thomas

As he put the pages back in the envelope, Adam said, “I’m really tired so I think I’ll go on up to bed when you do, Little Joe. I’ll write to Aaron tomorrow.”

“Guess I might as well turn in then too,” Hoss said with a shrug.

“No one else is back from their cattle drive yet and since it will just be the four of us and Hop Sing, I think we can dress less formally this Sunday,” Ben said, smiling at his middle boy’s expression of relief at not having to wear a necktie.

“Pa, could we go over to Gold Canyon and bowl tomorrow afternoon?” Little Joe asked hopefully. “Please?”

“Adam ain’t never seen the bowling alley the miners built,” Hoss added. Then he turned to his older brother and asked, “You ever bowled? It’s fun.”
“Sure, my friends and I bowled lots of times,” Adam replied. “I prefer billiards, but I like bowling.”

“That’s an excellent suggestion, Little Joe,” Ben said, smiling broadly at his sons. His expression grew more serious as he said to his youngest. “Right now, you need to finish your game and get on up to bed.”

Sunday was a beautiful day. The cloudless sky was a brilliant blue and the sun shone brightly so it was unusually warm for the end of August up in the high country. After a big dinner of pork chops (they always had pork chops after Pa slaughtered the pigs), the Cartwrights set off for Gold Canyon.

“There aren’t nearly as many miners as there were four years ago,” Ben informed Adam as they rode along. “Most of them eventually realized they were wasting their time and pulled up stakes. A few are too stubborn to admit defeat so they stay here, living in their little shacks, and Andy and I sell them the occasional steer so they have some fresh meat.”

“Beats me why a man’d wanna spend his time diggin’ rocks lookin’ fer gold,” Hoss added, his expression bemused.

“I wouldn’t want to be a miner,” Adam agreed, “but being a mining engineer might be interesting.”

“What’s a mining engineer?” Little Joe asked.

“A mining engineer is the person who determines whether an area can be mined profitably and he also designs the mine to make it as safe as possible for the miners,” Adam answered.

“How does he do that? Make it safe, I mean,” Little Joe wanted to know.

“He applies engineering and mathematical principles to solve the problem,” Adam replied.
“And you think that’s interesting?” Little Joe asked incredulously.

“I do. I’ve always enjoyed solving problems, especially if they’re mathematical,” Adam stated with one of his crooked grins. Little Joe rolled his eyes while Hoss chuckled. Ben managed a smile, but he felt uneasy as he recognized the truth in Adam’s statement, and he found it disquieting that Adam would even consider a life separate from the Ponderosa.

Don’t borrow trouble he scolded himself. If Adam had wanted to be a mining engineer, he could have. He chose to return to the Ponderosa.

As the four Cartwrights approached the ramshackle building that served as a combined saloon, store and bowling alley, Adam grimaced. “Now that is an ugly building,” he muttered under his breath. “Violates all seven lamps of architecture.”


The door was wide open to allow in the fresh air and sunshine but there weren’t many windows and they were sooty so the building was still dark and dingy, especially when contrasted with the brilliant sunlight outside. The Cartwrights heard the wooden ball striking the wooden pins before their eyes adjusted to the dim light. They heard a man laugh and say loudly, “Ya missed two and you needed a spare to beat me.” Just then a man with a scraggly beard who was dressed in a ruffled shirt, brocade waistcoat and a threadbare black frock coat noticed their entrance and walked toward them with a smile.

“Mr. Cartwright, always a pleasure to see you, sir, and your sons.” He smiled at Hoss and Little Joe before turning to Adam and extending his hand. “And this must be the young scholar
fresh from his academic triumphs at Harvard College, that bastion of knowledge and learning.”

“Mr. Comstock, allow me to introduce my eldest son, Adam. Adam, I’d like for you to meet Mr. Henry Comstock,” Ben said. He then quickly introduced Adam to the other miners gathered at the bowling alley: Patrick McLaughlin, Peter O’Riley, Manny Penrod, Sandy Bowers and James Finney.

“Call me ‘Old Virginny’,” Finney told Adam as he shook his hand.

“I expect you come over to do some bowling,” Bowers said.

“If it’s all right,” Ben replied and Bowers smiled at Little Joe, who was looking hopefully at the miners.

“Sure it is,” Bowers said, and the others all nodded.

“We was fixin’ to stop for a while anyways,” Old Virginny added, “so the alley’s all yours.”

“Thanks!” Little Joe said, smiling happily at the miners before running into the bowling alley. “I’ll set up the pins,” he called to his family.

Adam picked up one of the wooden bowling balls. “These balls are smaller and lighter than the ones we used in Cambridge,” he commented. “And the lanes are shorter.” He shrugged, saying, “Guess I’ll adjust.”

“We let Little Joe stand closer when he bowls to compensate for the difference in size and strength,” Ben said then.

Little Joe finished setting up the pins and ran toward the others yelling, “I wanna go first!” He lifted the smooth wooden ball, which was really too big for his hand, and walked to his accustomed spot. He cradled the ball in his left hand and then
stood with his right foot a little ahead of his left and in line with the center of the lane. He moved the ball until it was a little lower than his waist and then as he stepped forward, he moved his left arm back and down, releasing the ball. He jumped in excitement at the sound of the ball hitting the pins.

“You got four. See if you can get a spare,” Ben said, giving the excited eight-year-old’s shoulder an affectionate squeeze.

Little Joe knocked down three more pins and then ran to reset them for the next player.

“Why don’t you go next, Pa,” Hoss suggested so Ben picked up the ball. His stance was the same as Little Joe’s, hardly surprising since he’d taught both his younger sons to bowl. He bowled a spare and then turned to Adam and Hoss.

“Who’s next?” he asked.

“Why don’t you go, Adam,” Hoss suggested but Adam shook his head.

“I’d rather go last.”

“Suit yerself,” Hoss said and lifted the ball in his large hand. He knocked down all ten pins and Little Joe jumped up and down, shouting, “A strike! Hoss got a strike!”

“Good job,” Adam said to his younger brother, giving his arm a playful jab. He had learned to bowl in Cambridge and his stance was different from the others. He bent slightly and held the ball in front of his face before swinging it back and down.

“How come he’s standin’ like that?” Little Joe asked Hoss in a loud whisper.

“I dunno. I reckon that’s how they bowl in Cambridge,” Hoss
replied.

Adam ended up knocking down six pins that frame and Little Joe was delighted because he’d knocked down seven.

Hoss won easily and Ben came second while Adam and Little Joe were tied at 193 points each.

“Can we play another game? Please?” Little Joe begged. A couple of the miners had drifted in to watch and Ben looked at them inquiringly.

“Go ahead and play another,” Bowers said with a friendly grin and Little Joe ran to set up the pins.

The Cartwrights bowled in the same order, and Little Joe got a spare in the first frame.

“I’m gonna get a higher score than you this time, Adam. You wait ‘n’ see,” Little Joe exclaimed gleefully. Adam only grinned crookedly.

Hoss had a strike and Ben a spare. Then it was Adam’s turn.

“You got a strike!” Little Joe exclaimed, astonishment written all over his expressive features.

“I think I’m getting the hang of this smaller ball,” Adam said with a wink.

Hoss scored at 291 points in the second game and Adam scored 289. Little Joe was proud of both his brothers’ bowling skill, and he begged to play a third game.

“Sorry, Little Joe, but we have to leave now or we’ll be late for supper,” Ben said in his no-nonsense voice so Little Joe knew it was pointless to try and cajole him into staying. “Thanks for letting us use the bowling alley, gentlemen,” Ben
said to the miners who’d gathered to watch the game.

“You’re always welcome, sir,” Old Virginny said, bowing with a flourish.

After an early supper Little Joe, Hoss and Ben gathered at one end of the table to play jackstraws while Adam sat at the other end with his pen and ink to write Aaron.

August 29, 1858

Dear Aaron,

It was good to hear from you and to know that you and Elsie are so happy. I don’t know anyone who deserves happiness more than the two of you.

You ask how I’m adjusting to being home: pretty well I’d say. The most difficult aspect of life here is the isolation. Six days out of the week I don’t see anyone but my family and our vaqueros. On Sundays all the neighboring ranches get together; the families take turns hosting the gathering. A few new families have moved into the area since I’ve been away, but I’ve only had one chance to meet them. One family has daughters, but two are little girls and my friend Ross is courting the oldest. She’s very pretty and seems pleasant, but Ross is really sweet on her so we can never be more than friends.

I miss little things like the way you and I and Thomas, Rob and Fred would decide on the spur of the moment to go rowing or to play town ball or tennis. We work from sunup to sundown and at the end of the day we’re too tired to play games. However, Sunday being a day of rest the only chore we had today was to feed and water the livestock. It seems some of the miners at Gold Canyon built a bowling alley and so this afternoon the four
of us bowled a couple of games. It was nice doing something fun as a family. Little Joe enjoyed it most of all.

I’m happy to report that Little Joe and I are getting reacquainted. He likes to watch me shave in the morning just as he did before I went away. He still likes to do things with his big brothers. The three of us had a good time harvesting our hay. Now, my father did buy a McCormick reaper. He didn’t listen to me but one of the other ranchers got one and he convinced my father to buy one. We got our cattle to market a week earlier this year because of the reaper.

In fact, we got back from the drive just two days ago, and when we did, I showed my family the design for our new home. My brothers are excited about having their own bedrooms and I could tell Hop Sing was pleased with his kitchen and washhouse. My father said he could see I had real talent. I’m hoping in a couple of weeks we’ll have selected the site and can begin preparing it.

That’s all my news for now. Tell Elsie and the rest of the family that I said hello. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Adam

Adam carefully folded the sheet of paper and then placed it one of the envelopes he’d brought with him from Cambridge and after addressing the letter, he added one of his postage stamps. Wish I’d thought of buying more at the post office in Placerville but I guess I have enough to last until spring.

He stood up and asked Little Joe, “Are you ready to learn how to whittle wooden pegs?”

“I sure am!” Little Joe exclaimed, jumping up from the table and
running over to Adam.

“Guess you ‘n’ me will hafta finish this game on our own,” Hoss said to Ben, and they both grinned. Saturday morning as the Cartwrights were finishing breakfast, Carl knocked and walked inside the cabin.

“Yes, Carl?” Ben asked.

“Me ‘n’ Tex ‘n’ Frank ‘n’ Billy were wonderin’ if we could get off work an hour early so we can go to the miners’ grand ball.”

“Certainly,” Ben replied with a warm smile.

Carl looked at Adam and grinned. “Wanna come with us?”

Adam grinned back and said, “Sure, Hoss and I’ll come.”

“Adam—” Hoss said, a note of desperation in his voice.

“We’re leaving at five,” Carl said as he walked out, and Adam called after him, “We’ll be ready.”

“Adam, I can’t go to a ball!” Hoss said indignantly.

“Why not?” Adam asked, one eyebrow arched.

“Cuz I don’t know how to dance,” Hoss muttered, his face hot.

“Time you learned then,” Adam said with a wink. “I’m sure they won’t be doing any waltzing, maybe some polkas, schottisches and reels. I can teach you the basic steps of a reel before this evening, and reels are easy. All you have to do is listen to the caller and do what he says.”

“I dunno, Adam,” Hoss said anxiously, his face still red.

“I think it’s a good idea, Hoss,” Ben said gently. “A gentleman should be able to dance. Why don’t you boys take some time this
morning and Adam can teach you.”

“I wanna learn too!” Little Joe said excitedly, his green eyes sparkling.

“Sure, the more the merrier,” Adam said, grinning at his brothers. “We’ll need an even number. Do you mind helping, Pa?”

“Not at all, but I haven’t danced in years so I’m not sure how much help I’ll be,” Ben replied.

After breakfast they moved the table and settee against the walls to create space and Adam turned to his brothers with a smile.

“A reel always begins with the caller announcing ‘Bow to your ladies’ so the men all take a step forward and bow to the lady across from them and then the ladies curtsey.”

“I don’t wanna dance with no ladies,” Little Joe complained and Adam said with a chuckle, “There aren’t going to be very many ladies at this dance. I expect Hoss and I will be dancing together a lot of the time.” He turned to Ben. “Pa, why don’t you and I be the ladies and we’ll let Hoss and Little Joe be the gentlemen.” Ben smilingly nodded his consent so Adam continued. “Hoss, you be my partner and Little Joe can be Pa’s, and partners stand facing each other.” As Hoss and Little Joe moved to face their partners, Adam quickly added, “Partners stand about six feet apart,” so they moved farther apart. Once they were lined up, Adam said, “Bow to your ladies,” and Hoss and Little Joe managed credible bows. Little Joe couldn’t help giggling at his pa’s and oldest brother’s curtsies.

The lesson continued with Adam explaining how to perform ‘stripping the willow’, a ‘do-si-do’, and other moves.
“That’s not too bad,” Hoss said, smiling happily after a few practice reels.

Adam clapped him on the shoulder and grinned. “It’s fun, and all you have to do is listen to the caller and do what he says.” By the time Adam and Hoss had had a quick supper, bathed and put on clean clothes, Hoss was beginning to regret agreeing to attend the ball. He just knew he’d make a mistake and look like a durn fool. Adam knew his brother well enough to interpret his silence as they rode together, a little behind Carl and the others.

“I was just remembering the first ball I ever attended,” he said conversationally, and Hoss glanced over at him. “It was when I was staying with the Townsends. Belle-mère had taught me the Virginia reel and the polka and I was pretty sure I could manage those, but I found out I would be expected to waltz. Mrs. Townsend gave me some lessons on waltzing but I was so nervous that I was glad I had to wear gloves so no one could tell my palms were sweating. But after I’d danced a couple of times, I was having so much fun that I forgot all about being nervous.” He smiled at Hoss, who managed a little grin. “You’ll have a good time, Hoss. I’m sure you will.”

“I’m glad there ain’t gonna be any pretty girls,” Hoss said. “I guess it won’t be so bad if I make a mistake tonight.”

“I’ll be your partner for the first reel,” Adam promised. “When they have a polka or a schottische, you can just watch how it’s done.”

“Okay,” Hoss said and this time his smile was broader and his eyes twinkled.

As the group from the Ponderosa approached the combined saloon, store and bowling alley, they saw Todd McKaren ride up. After
they exchanged greetings, Adam asked Todd if Ross was coming.

“I stopped by his place but Pedro told me that Ross got an invitation to have supper with the Talbots,” Todd replied with a grin. “Sounds like he and Delphine are gettin’ pretty serious.”

“It sure does,” Adam said, smiling broadly.

“Now if only some more families with daughters would settle here, maybe you and me could get ourselves sweethearts,” Todd said to Adam with a wink.

Carl, who’d been standing nearby, said sneeringly, “I don’t know why you boys are in such a hurry to get yourselves a ball and chain. I gotta lot of wild oats to sow before I worry about settlin’ down,” and he leered suggestively before entering the building followed by Tex, Frank and Billy.

“That Carl, he’s a wild one,” Todd said, shaking his head.

“Oh, I don’t think he’s as much of a ladies’ man as he pretends,” Adam said thoughtfully.

“I bet you’re right,” Todd said and then added quickly, “we’d better go on inside.”

Adam and Hoss saw most of the miners and several vaqueros from neighboring ranches were gathered in the room and one miner was tuning a fiddle. Adam looked to see if there were any women, and he spotted three: There was a woman with sandy brown hair who towered over most of the men and he figured she must be at least ten years his senior. There were two dark-haired women and they were both on the heavy side, but one looked about his age and she had a pretty face. She was talking with Carl who spotted the Cartwright brothers and motioned them over.

“Minnie, I’d like for you to meet the Cartwright brothers,” Carl
said with a grin. “This is Adam and this is Hoss.”

“Horse?” she repeated doubtfully.

“No, ma’am, not horse. It’s Hoss,” he answered, his face reddening.

“Hoss,” she repeated and then smiled at him. “I’m mighty glad to meet you, Hoss. And you, too, Adam. Let me introduce you to the other ladies.”

Adam and Hoss learned the tall woman was named Myrtle and the other dark-haired woman was Ida. The introductions were barely complete when the fiddler began and Old Virginny said loudly, “Let’s start this here ball with a Virginia reel.”

The women had already been claimed for the first dance and Adam and Hoss found themselves in a line with Todd, who was partnered with one of the vaqueros. Adam quickly tied his kerchief around one arm as he saw the other men dancing the women’s part do. As Adam and Hoss followed Old Virginny’s calls, and whooped and hollered with the others as each couple sashayed up and down the line, Hoss began enjoying himself so much that he forgot to be nervous, just as Adam had predicted.

Hoss danced several reels and the last one with Myrtle. As he and Adam rode home, he told Adam enthusiastically, “I had a good time tonight. Do ya think by next Saturday ya could teach me to how to polka?”

“Sure I can,” Adam replied with a big grin.

One morning about the middle of September as the four Cartwrights and Hop Sing gathered for breakfast, Ben said, “I’ve been giving a good deal of thought to where we should build our new home, and I think we should look for a site in the northeastern section of the Ponderosa near Washoe Lake. We’d be
closer to this new Carson City, and I think in time it will become more important than Genoa.”

“Really?” Adam commented, lifting one eyebrow quizzically.

“Oh yes,” Ben said emphatically. “Abraham Curry is a man with a vision. He’s hired a surveyor to lay out a town and he told me the last time we spoke that he intends to set aside ten acres for a future state capitol.”

“Now, that’s a true visionary,” Adam commented. “I’d like to meet him.”

Ben smiled at Adam and then said, “Now that we’ve finished the butchering and replenishing the woodshed, I thought the four of us could pack some food and bedrolls and head toward Washoe Lake and look for a site to build our new home.”

“I’ll go get my bedroll,” Little Joe said excitedly, starting to jump up, but Ben said firmly, “After breakfast, Little Joe.”

“We might as well bring axes and shovels so we can start preparing the site once we choose it,” Adam said and Ben nodded his agreement.

As the four Cartwrights and their pack mule headed northeast, Ben asked Adam, “Do you have any requirements for the site?”

“I want to build a springhouse for Hop Sing where he can store eggs, butter and milk so I’d like the site to be pretty close to a creek,” Adam replied.

“I know of a couple of creeks around by Washoe Lake,” Hoss said then.

Adam grinned at him and said, “Lead the way brother!”

It took them about two hours to reach the first creek, and then
they decided to split up. Ben and Little Joe would explore on one side of the creek and Hoss and Adam the other.

As Hoss finished hobbling the pack mule, Ben said, “We’ll all meet back here,” and he checked the position of the sun, “at noon.”

Hoss and Adam returned first with a pair of rabbits they’d shot and by the time their father and brother returned, they had the rabbits skinned and a fire started. As soon as Little Joe saw them, he started shouting.

“We found it! Me and Pa found the place! C’mon!”

“We’ll come after we eat,” Hoss called. “I’m gonna fry this rabbit and Adam’s gonna make us some johnnycakes.”

“And Hop Sing sent us some Joe Froggers,” Adam added as Little Joe and Ben rode up.

“Joe Froggers! Hurrah!” Little Joe said as he dismounted. Then he added hurriedly, “But let’s eat fast. Me and Pa wanna show ya the place we found.”

“Oh yes,” Adam said as the Cartwrights approached the site Ben and Little Joe had discovered, “this is a wonderful site. It’s level and we won’t need to cut down many trees to make room for the house, plus a bunkhouse and barn.”

“And that will make an excellent pasture for the caviata,” Ben added, pointing off to the west.

“I guess we might as well get started,” Hoss said, swinging out of the saddle. He walked over to the pack mule and got his axe and Adam quickly followed suit.

“While your brothers are chopping down trees, we can start moving stones,” Ben said to his youngest.
“Pile ‘em up over there,” Adam said. “We’re going to need stones for the foundation and the fireplace. And for the foundation of the workers’ cabins.”

All afternoon Adam and Hoss worked on chopping the young ponderosa pines to make a clearing. Although the temperature at this elevation was cool, they both soon had wet spots on their shirts where the sweat soaked through. Meanwhile, Ben and Little Joe cleared the area of stones and then took the pack mule to get more stones from the creek.

As the sun began to set, Ben announced it was time to begin preparing supper.

“We’ve made a good start, boys,” he said as the four of them sat around their campfire, eating beans and johnnycakes. “Hoss, you can chop down the last tree tomorrow while Adam begins chopping the other trees into logs for the bunkhouse and I’ll see if Rufus here,” and he nodded at the pack mule, “can pull up these stumps.”

“What about me, Pa?” Little Joe asked. “What can I do?”

“You’re going to go fishing at the creek and see if you can catch us some lunch,” Ben replied with a smile.

That night as Adam lay on his bedroll beside Hoss, he smiled as he gazed at the stars scattered across the velvety black sky. 

*If I close my eyes, I can see the house I designed, standing tall and rugged, at one with the forest around it, a house built for ever, just as Ruskin described.* He drifted to sleep, thinking of his house and how happy they would all be living in it.
Chapter 5  
As soon as the first rays of the sun began to brighten the night sky, Little Joe sat straight up in bed and began to shake his brothers. “Wake up, Hoss! Wake up, Adam! Do you know what day it is?” he asked excitedly.

Sitting up and yawning, his two older brothers exchanged grins over his head.

“Lemme see, what day is it?” Hoss asked, rubbing his stubbly chin. “I think it’s October 31st. Ain’t that right, Adam?”

“Yeah, today is October 31st,” Adam agreed, scratching his chest.

“And ya know what’s special about October 31st,” Little Joe said firmly.

“No, what’s special about October 31st?” Hoss asked, running his fingers through his sandy brown hair. Adam suddenly snapped his fingers.

“I know! When I was in Massachusetts, I learned that on October 31st, the Irish celebrate ‘Mischief Night’. They carve hideous faces in pumpkins and pull practical jokes like unhinging gates.”

“No, that’s not why it’s special!” Little Joe exclaimed angrily.

Adam and Hoss realized that they’d teased him enough and Hoss said quickly, “Oh, I reckon Little Joe means it’s special cuz it’s his birthday.”

“Yes, I guess, that does make it special,” Adam said, smiling warmly at his youngest brother. “Happy Birthday, Little Joe.”

“Yeah, Happy Birthday,” Hoss said, ruffling Little Joe’s curls.
“I- I knew you was just teasin’,” Little Joe said, grinning up at his brothers.
Since Little Joe’s birthday fell on a Sunday, the Cartwrights had to dress in their best clothes before their neighbors arrived. Adam and Little Joe were ready first while poor Hoss struggled with his necktie.

“Dadburnit! Adam, can you help me with this danged contraption? And you stop that gigglin’, little brother!”

“Boys, the McKarens and Ross are riding up. Aren’t you ready yet?” Ben called.

“Little Joe’s ready,” Adam replied, “and Hoss and I will be down in a minute.”

“If you’re ready, then come on down, Little Joe,” Ben commanded and the boy scurried down the ladder just as Ben welcomed their neighbors.

“There’s the birthday boy,” Andy said with a big smile while Todd and Ross chorused, “Happy Birthday, Little Joe.” Andy added, “Todd, Ross and I got you a little something,” and he handed Little Joe a paper sack.

“Thank you,” Little Joe said with a big smile. His smile grew even broader as he peeked inside the bag. “Molasses candy!”

“You can share it after dinner,” Ben said. “Why don’t you put the bag on the dresser for now.”

Adam and Hoss came down the ladder then and Little Joe told them excitedly, “Mr. McKaren and Todd and Ross got me molasses candy.” All the adults smiled at the boy’s exuberance.

“That fire sure feels good,” Andy commented, moving closer and holding out his hands.
“Yes, it is cold for the end of October,” Ben agreed, joining his old friend by the fireplace. “I think we’ll have an early winter.”

“I know I’m gettin’ old,” Andy said with a small sigh. “I feel the cold in my bones now and my joints are gettin’ stiff. I’m glad Todd’s old enough to handle more of the responsibility of running the ranch.”

“Yes, that young man has a good head on his shoulders,” Ben said, smiling warmly at his friend and placing a friendly hand on his shoulder.

“We’re both blessed in our sons,” Andy agreed. He added quietly, “I know you were worried about Adam, but he’s home now and he’s seems to have fit back into his old life without any difficulty.”

“My prayers were answered,” Ben said earnestly. Then he added thoughtfully, “I do wish some more families with daughters would settle here. I know it’s hard on Adam and Todd, especially when they see how happy Ross and Delphine are.”

“At least our boys aren’t as wild as Carl Reagan,” Andy said. “I feel for poor Will.”

“Yes, so do I,” Ben said.

The Talbots, Edwards and Johnsons all arrived a few minutes later and after everyone had wished Little Joe Happy Birthday, Mrs. Talbot turned to him and said, “Since it’s your birthday, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Edwards and I made you something as our gifts.” Each woman produced a small package she’d hidden in her coat pocket.

“Thank you,” Little Joe said, positively beaming at the three women, who smiled fondly at him.
“Open ours first,” Billy Johnson said eagerly so Little Joe took the package from Mrs. Johnson and tore off the wrappings to reveal a blue wool cap.

“It’s like mine ’cept mine’s red,” Billy said with a grin.

“Thank you, Mrs. Johnson,” Little Joe said, smiling brightly.

“Open ours next,” Celestine commanded.

When Little Joe opened the package, he found a new pair of mittens that matched his hat. Mrs. Edwards had made him a new muffler of the same blue yarn. Ben felt his eyes burn and had to blink back tears since these were gifts Marie would have made for her little boy.

Dinner, as always, was potluck with the host family providing the meat and the others providing the side dishes. Even though the Cartwrights’ hens had almost stopped laying, Hop Sing had managed to come up with enough eggs to make a cake with two layers and boiled icing, and he served it after dinner to the great delight of Little Joe, Billy, Evangeline and Celestine. However, Hoss and the Talbot brothers ate it with as much relish as their younger siblings.

As soon as their neighbors departed, Little Joe turned to Ben and asked hopefully, “Can I open the rest of my gifts? Please, Pa?”

“Yes, you may,” Ben corrected with a smile.

“Diego is hidin’ my gift and Adam’s in the bunkhouse,” Hoss said, grinning at his brother, “so we gotta go get ‘em.”

In a few minutes the four Cartwrights gathered in the cabin with Little Joe seated in the rocking chair.

“Here’s my gift,” Hoss said, handing Little Joe a package
wrapped in brown paper that Adam had decorated with ink drawings of horses.

“A new bridle for Buttermilk!” Little Joe exclaimed in delight. “Thanks, Hoss.” He quickly tore the paper off the gift Adam handed him, then stared in puzzlement at the oddly shaped board covered with rows of holes and a bunch of white pegs and one black.

“It’s a Fox and Geese game,” Adam explained. “I know how much you like playing checkers, so I thought you’d like Fox and Geese.”

“Your Uncle John and I used to play Fox and Geese when we were boys,” Ben said with a reminiscent smile. Little Joe was pleased to have a game his pa used to play when he was a little boy. He grinned up at his oldest brother. “Thanks, Adam.”

“I’ll teach you how to play after supper,” Adam promised. “Hoss, too,” he added with a grin.

“Now, here’s my gift,” Ben said.

“A jackknife! My own jackknife,” Little Joe said joyfully. “Now I don’t have to borrow Hoss’s or Adam’s. Oh, thank you, Pa,” and he ran over and hugged Ben.

“You’re welcome, son,” Ben said, ruffling his youngest’s thick golden-brown curls. “I know you’ll take good care of it.”

After supper the three brothers gathered around the table while Ben looked on.

“The white pegs are the geese and you set them up on the board like this,” Adam explained as his long, slender fingers deftly maneuvered the pegs. “This black peg is the fox,” he continued, “and he goes here, facing the geese. Now, the fox moves one
hole each turn and he can move forward, backward or sideways. He can’t move diagonally. The fox ‘kills’ a goose by jumping over it and landing in an empty hole.”

“Just like checkers,” Little Joe said enthusiastically and Adam smiled at him.

“Exactly. Now, one goose moves on each turn and geese can only move forward or sideways. Also, geese can’t jump,” Adam stated.

“How do ya win?” Hoss asked, feeling a little confused.

“The geese win by surrounding the fox so he can’t move; the fox wins by ‘killing’ so many geese that they can’t surround him or by breaking through the geese and getting behind them,” Adam answered.

“Will you play a game with me, Pa? Please,” Little Joe asked, turning his most winning smile on his pa.

“Certainly,” Ben replied, sitting down across from Little Joe. “Do you want to be the fox or the geese?”

“I wanna be the fox,” Little Joe declared.

“I’m gonna watch,” Hoss decided, sitting at the head of the table.

Adam went to the crate of books he’d opened and selected one of his favorites, The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Moving the rocking chair so the fire would provide enough light, he sat down and began to read. He was soon so engrossed in his reading that he jumped when Little Joe shouted, “I win!” He shook his head slightly and grinned before returning to his book.

“Can I play a game?” Hoss asked and Little Joe replied, “Sure.”

Ben decided to read the newspaper. He lit a candle and set it
at the other end of the table and then retrieved the Placerville Mountain Democrat from where he’d set it on the dresser. Before sitting at the table, he glanced over at his first-born and seeing Adam totally absorbed in his book, Ben smiled. Some things never change.

“I won again,” crowed Little Joe triumphantly a short time later. “You wanna play, Adam?”

“All right,” Adam said, standing up and stretching.

Little Joe smiled in anticipation of another victory, and this one would be especially sweet. He won about half the checker games he played with Hoss and he occasionally won a game against his pa, although he had a niggling suspicion that Pa let him win. He’d never won a game he played with Adam, but after defeating both Pa and Hoss, he was confident of victory.

“I wanna be the fox,” he declared as Adam sat in the chair Hoss vacated. Ben turned back to his newspaper and Hoss sat down on the settee in front of the fireplace and began to whittle a wooden peg for the new house.

Little Joe frowned in concentration but no matter how hard he looked, Adam never moved a goose where he could ‘kill’ it. Suddenly, he spied his chance and gleefully made his move. As he smiled up at his brother, he saw Adam grin his crooked grin before moving a goose so Little Joe’s fox was surrounded.

“Looks like the geese win this game,” Adam remarked with a wink and Little Joe frowned at the board.

“Let’s play again and you be the fox,” he said, his tone just a little belligerent.

“You and Adam can play tomorrow after supper,” Ben said firmly. “Right now, it’s past your bedtime.”
Little Joe realized he was sleepy so he didn’t try to wheedle his pa into letting him stay up and play one more game. “Goodnight, Pa,” he said. “Goodnight, Hoss and Adam.” He started for the ladder, then stopped, turned back toward them and said with a beaming smile, “This was my best birthday ever!”

Two weeks later on November 14, Adam woke to the sound of sleet beating against the loft’s only window. *It doesn’t matter if I’m in Massachusetts or here on the Ponderosa, it always seems to rain on my birthday,* he thought.

He got out of bed carefully to avoid waking his siblings and walked to the window. It was already glazed over with ice. *Guess we won’t be going to the Talbots today. Poor Ross. He’s really going to miss seeing Delphine.* Thoughts of Ross and Delphine brought Aaron and Elsie to his mind. *I’m surprised I haven’t gotten a letter from Aaron. Or from Grandfather. Hope they didn’t get lost.*

Sleet or no sleet, the livestock in the barn still needed food and water. The cow had to be milked and stalls had to be mucked out. Adam began to dress quickly. He couldn’t face the thought of shaving with the icy cold water in the washstand pitcher; he’d do his chores and then bring up some hot water to shave with.

When he turned to get his mackintosh from where it hung on the wall by his brothers’, he heard Little Joe ask sleepily, “Aren’t you gonna shave?”

“After I do my chores,” he replied, adding, “You and Hoss need to hurry up.”

Hoss said through an enormous yawn, “I’m up. Guess I’ll shave afterward too,” and he sat up and swung his legs out of bed. He looked at Little Joe and they both grinned as they said, “Happy Birthday Adam!”
“I’ve been away so long I wasn’t sure you’d remember,” Adam said with a big smile.

“Your birthday’s easy to remember cuz it’s exactly two weeks after mine,” Little Joe declared, and then he winked at Adam. (He liked the way Adam winked and he’d been practicing.)

“I’d forgotten that,” Adam said with a chuckle. Then his smile grew wider and he added, “You’re in luck, Hoss. It’s too icy to travel so you won’t have to wear a necktie.”

“Yahoo!” Hoss shouted but Little Joe looked disappointed and said, “I wanted to play with Billy.”

“They’ll be other Sundays,” Adam said, “but right now you two need to get dressed.”

Adam came down the ladder just as Hop Sing was coming out of his room to start preparing breakfast. The cook smiled and said, “Happy Birthday, Mistah Adam.”

Adam returned Hop Sing’s smile and thanked him. Then he added, “When we come back, could Hoss and I have some hot water for shaving?”

“I have ready for you,” the cook promised as Little Joe and Hoss clattered down the ladder with their mackintoshes. The brothers managed to cross the yard to the barn without slipping and falling and did their chores quickly. On the return trip they had a contest to see who could slide the furthest and Adam won although Little Joe was a very close second.

“It ain’t fair, is it, Little Joe, since he’s got them long legs?” Hoss complained, grinning at his older brother, who playfully punched his arm.
“I’d say the advantage is with Little Joe,” Adam said, winking at his youngest brother. “He’s more agile than the two of us combined.” Little Joe was smiling at the compliment as they entered the cabin.

After breakfast and their normal Sunday routine of reading from the Bible, praying and singing hymns, Little Joe immediately wanted to know if Adam could open his gifts.

“Oh, I think we should wait until after dinner,” Ben said gently.

“Why don’t you ‘n’ me whittle some pegs fer our new house,” Hoss suggested.

“Okay,” Little Joe agreed and Ben said, “I’ll join you. What about you, Adam?”

“How about I read to you while you whittle?” Adam replied.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” Ben said. Hoss and Little Joe were less enthusiastic, but it was Adam’s birthday so they would humor him. They sat side by side on the settee and began to whittle while Adam hunted through his open crate of books.

“Ah, I think you’ll like this one,” he said as he extracted a volume. He moved the rocking chair closer to the fireplace, opened the book and began to read:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. . . .

“Dinner ready,” Hop Sing announced so Adam picked up the piece of paper he used as a bookmark and closed the book while the
rest of the family put down their knives and sticks of wood.

“That was mean to make poor little Davy wear that sign,” Hoss commented indignantly as he walked to the table.

“I would’ve bit that awful Mr. Murdstone too!” Little Joe declared as he sat down. Then he asked his brother hopefully, “Will you read more of the book?”

“Yeah, I’d like to know what happens to poor little Davy,” Hoss said.

“I’d be happy to read in the evenings while you whittle,” Adam said, smiling at his brothers. His smile grew bigger when he saw Hop Sing had prepared pot roast with potatoes, carrots and onions just the way he liked it.

When everyone finished, Hop Sing said apologetically, “No eggs to make you a cake, Mistah Adam, so I make apple pie instead.”

“I’d just as soon have apple pie as cake,” Adam said. “Thank you for preparing such a delicious meal, Hop Sing.”

Little Joe waited impatiently for the rest of the family to finish eating their pie before asking eagerly, “Can-I mean may Adam open his presents now?”

“I suppose so,” Ben said with a chuckle and Little Joe looked at Hop Sing, who smiled at him and then went into his room.

“Me and Little Joe went together on your present and asked Hop Sing to keep it in his room,” Hoss explained.

“I have my present to you in my room,” Ben said, “but I’ll let you open your brothers’ first.”

When Adam removed the paper from the package Hop Sing handed him, he saw brand-new saddlebags. “Thanks, Hoss and Little
Joe. I sure needed new ones,” he said enthusiastically.

“That’s what we figured and they go with Pa’s gift,” Little Joe said, and then clapped his hand over his mouth looking stricken.

“It’s all right, son. I’m going to give Adam his gift now anyway,” Ben said, grinning at his third born. He went into his room and returned a moment later with a new saddle. “Sure glad I got this from where I’d hidden it in the barn last night before it began sleetin’,” he commented as he handed it to Adam.

“Pa, it’s beautiful,” Adam exclaimed, admiring the tooling on the brown leather. “Thank you so much,” he said, smiling at his father, his hazel eyes shining. Ben reached over and put an arm around his son’s shoulders and gave him a quick hug.

“It’s hard for me to believe it’s been twenty-two years since I first picked you up and held you in my arms,” he said. “You were so tiny. Thank God for Margaret Baldwin because the Captain and I didn’t know anything about taking care of an infant. But I learned fast. Over the years, I’ve watched you grow from a baby to a boy to a man. I want you to know that I am proud of the man you’ve become.”

“You’ve been the best father anyone could ask for,” Adam said, “and I know Hoss and Little Joe agree.”

“Sure do!” Hoss said, nodding his head for emphasis, and Little Joe said, “You are the best, Pa!”

“I don’t know about the best, but I’m the most blessed,” Ben told them. “Now, how about Hoss and Little Joe and I whittle while Adam reads us more about David Copperfield?”

Tuesday afternoon the sun came out and the temperature rose so by evening the ice had melted. Wednesday morning Hoss volunteered to ride to Genoa and get the mail.
Hop Sing was beginning to fuss about supper being ruined when Hoss came through the door that evening. “That wind is cold,” he said as he closed the door, and then he reached into his saddlebags. “Here’s your *Mountain Democrat*, Pa. You got two letters and a package from your grandfather, Adam.”

“Two letters?” Adam said in surprise as he held out his hand.

“Yeah. One from Massachusetts and one from Miss-is-sip-pi,” Hoss replied as he handed over the letters.

“I don’t know anyone in Mississippi,” Adam said, clearly baffled. “Oh, it’s from Charles Seaton. But I figured he’d be back in San Francisco; wonder what he’s doing in Mississippi.”

“You can find out after supper,” Ben said.

“Right,” Adam said and reluctantly set his letters and package on the dresser by his father’s newspaper.

After supper Hoss and Little Joe moved to the settee and began to whittle, Ben sat in the rocking chair and started to read his newspaper while Adam lit a candle and set it at the end of the table and opened the letter from Charles. A few minutes later he sighed audibly as he refolded the letter and put it in the envelope.

“Bad news, son?” Ben asked solicitously.

“I suppose that depends on one’s point of view,” Adam replied quietly. “Charles writes that he met a young woman who was visiting relatives in Richmond. They fell in love and they’re going to be married. Actually, they are married now.”

“That doesn’t sound like bad news,” Ben commented.

“It’s not. But Eugenia—that’s his wife’s name—is the only child of a rich plantation owner in the Mississippi Delta and she’ll
inherit the plantation and all its slaves. A wife’s property goes to her husband so Charles will be a slave owner. We’ve had lots of philosophical discussions about slavery and abolition, but now he will actually own men, women and children.” Adam sighed again. “I just don’t see how anyone can believe he has the right to own other people, to treat them as property.”

“Me neither,” Hoss said emphatically while Little Joe grappled with the concept of one human being owning another.

“I’ll just congratulate Charles on his marriage and not mention the plantation,” Adam said. Then he eagerly opened the letter from Aaron.

October 3, 1858

Dear Adam,

It was good to receive your letter and learn that you are readjusting to life on the Ponderosa. I had to smile as I read your comment about how isolated you felt because Elsie and I have experienced the same isolation since we moved to the farm, although not quite to the same degree since we do drive to Shelburne Falls every Sunday to attend church and sometimes we go to town on Saturdays. Still, during the week we typically only see our family.

I don’t really have a lot of news to share. The price of potatoes is down so we didn’t get as much money for the crop as we’d hoped. Still, it could be much worse, especially when I think of all the families left destitute by the panic and revulsion. We have plenty to eat and a roof over our heads.

In your last letter you wrote you were hoping to find a site for your house and start preparing it. Have you found one?
Here’s some news for you: Fred finally got up the courage to propose to Cynthia. They are planning to marry this coming June. We should be finished with spring planting so Elsie and I will plan to attend. I know she’ll enjoy a visit to Boston so she can visit her old friends and we’ll see a play at the Boston Museum.

That’s all the news from Shelburne Falls.

Sincerely yours,
Aaron

Adam put Aaron’s letter to one side and reached for his grandfather’s package. He opened it and discovered a letter setting on top of a small wooden box. Adam opened the box and saw some good quality stationary. He smiled as he saw engraved on the top sheet:

Adam Cartwright
The Ponderosa Ranch
Western Utah

He set the box of stationary by Aaron’s letter and opened his grandfather’s.

October 11, 1858

Dear Adam,

I hope your first birthday back on the Ponderosa with your family is a happy one. You’ll be in my thoughts that day as well as Polly’s and Biddy’s.

I don’t have a lot of news to report. I’m in good health, or as good as I can expect at my age. One thing that’s changed since
you’ve been gone is that these newfangled letter boxes are being attached to lampposts all over Boston. I suppose it will be handy to walk to the street corner to mail a letter instead of all the way to the post office.

I’ve been reading in the Herald about the debates between the two men running for senator in Illinois: the incumbent, Stephan Douglas and his opponent, Abraham Lincoln. When I read these words of Mr. Lincoln, I thought of you:

Now, I confess myself as belonging to that class in the country who contemplate slavery as a moral, social, and political evil, having due regard for its actual existence amongst us and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way, and to all the constitutional obligations which have been thrown about it; but, nevertheless, desire a policy that looks to the prevention of it as a wrong, and looks hopefully to the time when as a wrong it may come to an end.

I know you share Mr. Lincoln’s sentiments. I think the time is not far off when the issue of slavery will be settled, but I greatly fear it will not be settled peacefully. But enough of an old man’s rambling. Polly and Biddy wish me to send you their best. We all enjoyed reading about how you and Hoss went to a dance where there were only three women and the men had to take turns dancing the women’s part.

Give my best to your father and brothers.

God bless you, Adam
“Grandfather sends everyone his best,” Adam announced as he refolded the letter.

“Is he well?” Ben asked.

“He says he’s as good as can be expected for an eighty-one year old man,” Adam answered with a slight smile.

“What’d he send you for your birthday?” Little Joe asked curiously.

“Stationary engraved with my name and address,” Adam replied. “See,” he added, holding up the top sheet. The others all came over to get a closer look and admire the gift.

As Adam went to get his pen and ink to write his replies on his new stationary, Ben said to Little Joe, “I’ve finished the paper so let’s get started on your lessons, young man.”

“Can’t I finish the peg I’m whittlin’?” Little Joe asked hopefully but his father shook his head, so with a sigh the boy went to get the American Spelling Book and McGuffey Reader that his brothers had used before him for their lessons. About three weeks later, Little Joe was drying the breakfast dishes that Hop Sing was washing and they were both startled by a knock at the door. Before Little Joe could answer it, Ross stepped inside.

“Howdy, Little Joe, Hop Sing. I don’t suppose Mr. Cartwright is around, is he?”

“Pa ‘n’ Hoss ‘n’ Miguel went to hunt a pack of wolves,” Joe replied.

“Oh,” Ross said then, obviously disappointed. Then he asked
quickly, “What about Adam?”

“He just left for the lumber camp and sawmill,” Little Joe said. “Wants to see how they’re comin’ on the lumber for our new house. Ya can catch up with him if ya hurry.”

“My horse is pretty spent. Okay if I borrow one of yers?”

Hop Sing nodded as Little Joe replied, “Sure.”

Adam was riding Beauty, thinking he’d enjoy the beautiful scenery all around him more if only it weren’t so cold, when he heard someone calling his name. He reined Beauty in and waited for the other rider to catch up. He was surprised to recognize Ross.

“Hey, Skinny! What brings you over to the Ponderosa on such a freezing cold morning?” he called, smiling at his friend. The smile disappeared as his friend rode up beside him. “Ross, what’s wrong?” he asked, his expression and his tone displaying his concern.

“It’s my pa, Adam. He didn’t get up for breakfast and when I went to check on him, I saw he was dead,” Ross said quietly.

“Ross, I’m sorry,” Adam said sincerely.

“I know I should be sad, but I don’t think I am. It felt like I really lost him back when Betsy and Ma died; that’s when I grieved,” Ross said, his voice flat. Adam was silent, but he put a comforting hand on his friend’s shoulder. After a minute or two their mounts became restive and so Ross said, “I was hopin’ your pa might be willin’ to read from the Bible when we bury Pa, but Little Joe said he’s away huntin’ wolves.”

“Yeah, and I have no idea when he’ll be back,” Adam said slowly. “What about Mr. McKaren?”
Ross nodded and said, “I’ll ride over to the McKarens’ place now.”

He started to leave and Adam said quickly, “I’ll get someone at the sawmill to help me make a coffin for your pa.”

“Thanks, Adam,” Ross said, smiling for just a moment before riding off.

It was a small group the next morning that gathered around the grave Ross, Adam and Todd had managed to hack out of the frozen ground: Adam, Little Joe and Hop Sing represented the Cartwright family and the two McKarens stood by them. On the other side of the grave, Delphine stood by Ross, holding his hand comfortably. As Andy McKaren recited the Twenty-third Psalm, Little Joe moved closer to Adam, finding comfort in his presence. He wished Pa and Hoss would come back so he’d know for certain they were all right.

When they returned home from the burial and went in the barn to care for their mounts, Little Joe said excitedly, “Look! There’s Buck and Chub! They’re back!” He started to run for the cabin and felt Adam’s hand on his shoulder.

“You’ve got to take care of Buttermilk first,” Adam said firmly and reluctantly Little Joe nodded.

A few minutes later, the barn door opened and Ben and Hoss walked in.

“So here you are! We wondered where you’d had gotten off to,” Ben said, his voice a little gruff since he’d been worried to arrive home and find the cabin empty and no sign of Little Joe and Hop Sing.

“Yeah, where ya been?” Hoss asked, grabbing a hoof pick and then starting to work on one of Buttermilk’s hooves while the little
mustang contentedly ate the hay Little Joe had been giving him.

“We buried Mr. Marquette,” Adam answered quietly. “Yesterday morning Ross discovered his pa had died in his sleep.”

“How is Ross?” Ben asked, his voice full of concern, and Adam replied, “I think he’s all right. He’s been really quiet.”

“Poor Ross. He’s all alone now,” Hoss commented sadly. He remembered how much it had hurt when they lost Ma, and he didn’t want to imagine how great the pain would be if he lost Pa, Adam and Little Joe as well.

“Yes, that young man has had to bear a heavy load of grief these past two years,” Ben said bleakly.

“Mr. McKaren invited Ross to stay with them; he doesn’t think Ross should be alone at the Marquette’s cabin now,” Adam said.

“Andy is a good man,” Ben said. “I hope Ross agreed?” he asked and Adam said that he had. Then Ben said, “I expect you buried Dan by Abby and Betsy.” At Adam’s nod, he said, “I would like to pay my last respects. Don’t hold supper for me, Hop Sing, if I’m late.” He smiled at his youngest son and, noting his forlorn face, said, “When I come back, we can play a game—checkers or Fox and Geese. All right?”

Little Joe’s expression brightened immediately and he smiled happily as he said, “Sure, Pa.”
A few days before Christmas, the cabin began to fill with the delicious aromas of Hop Sing’s baking: gingerbread men cookies and sugar cookies cut in the shapes of stars and Christmas trees.

“Can we go pick out our tree today, Pa?” Little Joe asked just as he had every morning that week, but this time Ben smiled and replied, “Yes, I think today would be a good day.”
“I pack sandwiches for lunch,” Hop Sing said.

“And some cookies?” Hoss asked hopefully.

“And cookies,” Hop Sing replied with a smile.

It wasn’t long before the four Cartwrights were ready to set out. Little Joe was wearing his birthday mittens, cap and muffler. He ran ahead of the others and quickly scooped up a handful of snow from the yard and formed a snowball. Smiling gleefully, he threw and watched it explode on Hoss’s chest. He was laughing so hard that he never noticed Adam’s snowball until it hit the back of his neck and it was followed almost immediately by Hoss’s snowball hitting his back. He was forming another snowball when he saw Pa’s snowball knock Adam’s hat off. Snowballs whizzed back and forth until they were all covered in snow and bareheaded except for Little Joe, and his blue cap was dusted with snow.

Trying to stifle his laughter, Ben held up his hand and said, “All right, boys, if we’re going to find our tree we need to get started.”

They were all laughing as they helped each other brush off the snow and retrieved their hats.

It took quite a while for the four of them to agree on a tree but they finally found one about five feet tall and perfectly pyramidal in shape. They marked it and would return on Christmas Eve to cut it down.

“I wish we’d gotten a bigger tree,” Little Joe complained. His favorite had been as tall as Pa, but Hoss pointed out it was lopsided and Pa and Adam agreed with him so that tree was rejected.

“Next Christmas we can have a much taller tree,” Adam said,
smiling at his little brother. “We can have one almost twice as tall as this one.”

“Really?” Little Joe asked excitedly.

“Absolutely,” Adam replied. “We can have a tree so tall we’ll have to stand on a ladder to put the decorations on the top branches.”

“That’s next Christmas,” Ben said. “I think the tree we picked out is perfect for our cabin and it will be beautiful when we add our decorations.”

“It sure will,” Hoss said emphatically.

“It’s a lot like the first tree we had,” Adam remarked with a little smile. “Remember, Pa?” Ben nodded and then Adam said with a snigger, “I remember Hoss tried to eat the popcorn off the tree.”

“Did you really, Hoss?” Little Joe asked, giggling while Hoss said, “Aw, Adam, yer joshin’ me.

“You were only three,” Ben said, chuckling at the memory.

When they reached home and were caring for their horses, Adam recognized Ross’s dappled gray quarter horse in one of the stalls.

“Looks like we have company,” he remarked, gesturing at the gelding.

They worked quickly and when they entered the cabin, they found Ross sitting on the settee beside a small pile of letters and packages, drinking a cup of coffee and eating a gingerbread man.

“Hello, Ross,” Ben said, smiling warmly at the young man while the Cartwrights began removing their heavy coats.
After greeting the Cartwrights, Ross said, “I went to Genoa to check the mail and old Jake mentioned he had lots of mail for the Ponderosa so I volunteered to deliver it.”

“Thank you very much,” Ben said, accepting a cup of coffee from Hop Sing.

“Glad to do it,” Ross said. Then he added, “If I want to get to the McKarens’ before dark, I’d best be on my way. Thanks for the coffee and cookie, Hop Sing.” He started putting on his heavy coat.

“You welcome, Mistah Ross,” Hop Sing said with a beaming smile. “You take these cookies for you, Mistah Todd and Mistah McKaren.” (Ever since Jessie McKaren’s death eight years earlier, Hop Sing had always made a batch of Christmas cookies for the McKarens.)

“Thanks,” Ross said, grinning broadly as he took the cookies from Hop Sing and headed for the barn.

“Do you think one of the packages is for me?” Little Joe asked excitedly as Ben sat down on the settee.

“They’re all from Adam’s grandfather. Here’s one addressed to Master Joseph Cartwright,” Ben replied, holding up one of the brown paper parcels. “And there’s one for Adam, one for Hoss and one for me. And this one is addressed to The Cartwrights of the Ponderosa Ranch and it says to open it on Christmas Eve.”

“I’m gonna open mine now!” Little Joe announced excitedly, making a grab for the package.

“We’ll open our packages on Christmas,” Ben said firmly, ignoring Little Joe’s scowl. “Looks like the letters are yours,” he said to Adam as he handed them over. “One has a foreign stamp.”
“It’s from Thomas,” Adam said. “He said the next letter I’d receive would be from London.” He moved the rocking chair closer to the fireplace and sat down. When he opened the envelope containing Thomas’s letter, he discovered a small card along with the letter. The card showed a pretty winter scene with snow-covered buildings and at the bottom A Happy Christmas was printed. He turned the card over and saw a drawing of a branch covered with blossoms and underneath he read:

Christmas Greeting
Christmas bells are pealing,
And I think, I hear
Their sweet echoes stealing,
Through the closing year;
Joyous thoughts of loved one’s
In their echoes ring,
Heaven bless and keep thee,
Thus the sweet bells sing.

“Thomas sent us a Christmas card,” Adam said, holding it up.

“Let me see!” Little Joe exclaimed as he ran over. Adam handed him the card, saying, “Let Pa and Hoss see it, too.”

While the others admired the card, Adam read Thomas’s letter. When he put it down, Ben asked, “Is Thomas spending Christmas abroad?”

“Yes,” Adam replied. “He wrote that now he knows what it was like for me at Harvard, but that there is a family of Americans who are also staying at his hotel, and they’ve invited him to spend Christmas with them. He said that he’s enjoying London and that he wished I could have been with him when he visited St. Paul’s because he knew I would have appreciated the architecture and the structural engineering. He walked to the top of the dome and said the view of London is amazing.” Adam’s
expression grew wistful as he said softly, “I wish I could have
seen the cathedral.” He smiled at his brothers and added, “He
also wrote that Hoss and Little Joe would have enjoyed the
London Zoo because when he visited he saw an orangutan named
Jenny, a hippopotamus named Obaysch, and lots of monkeys.”

“I’d sure like to ‘ve seen that hippopotamus,” Hoss said. “It
was a mighty strange lookin’ critter in that book you gave me.”

“I’d like to have seen the hippopotamus and all the monkeys,”
Little Joe added.

“Supper ready,” Hop Sing announced then, and all thoughts of
cathedrals, hippopotami and monkeys disappeared from the minds
of the four hungry Cartwrights.
Little Joe woke up in the middle of the night, and he tried to
climb out of bed without disturbing his brothers. Hoss, as
always, slept like a log, but Adam stirred and asked sleepily,
“You okay, Little Joe?”

“Yeah, I just need to use the chamber pot,” Little Joe replied
in a whisper as he stuck his feet in his slippers.

It was cold in the loft, even wearing his flannel underwear
under his flannel nightshirt, but when he finished, he didn’t
get back into bed. Instead he crept over to the bedside table
and quietly felt for the flint and steel and the candlestick.
When he’d found them, he put them inside his undershirt so his
hands would be free to grasp the ladder, shivering when the cold
objects touched his bare skin. He carefully climbed down the
ladder in the dark, and just as carefully made his way over to
the dresser where Pa had placed the gifts from Captain
Stoddard. He stubbed his toe on one of the settee’s legs,
uttering a loud, “Ouch!” Then he froze. When he didn’t hear
any sound from Pa’s or Hop Sing’s rooms, he continued as quietly
as he could manage. When he reached the dresser, he extracted
the candle, flint and steel from his undershirt and began striking the flint and steel.

Ben had been startled awake by noise in the main room. He lay still, listening, and heard the sound of someone stealthily creeping about in the dark room. He reached for the revolver he kept by his bed every night, and then slowly and quietly walked to his door. He opened the door silently just as Little Joe succeeded in lighting his candle. Ben let out his breath in a rush, then replaced his gun before stalking out of his bedroom.

Little Joe was so intent on finding his gift that he didn’t hear his pa’s approach and when Ben put a hand on his shoulder, the boy gave a yelp of terror.

“Little Joe!” Adam yelled from the loft and Hop Sing burst out of his room.

“It’s all right,” Ben said loudly enough for Adam to hear. “Go back to sleep.” Once Hop Sing had returned to his room, Ben turned to his youngest and said sternly, “All right, Joseph Francis Cartwright, explain to me what you are doing down here in the middle of the night.”

“I—” but the nine-year-old couldn’t think of any explanation that would satisfy his pa and just looked at him as his eyes began to fill with tears because he knew he would be punished.

“You were going to open your gift from Adam’s grandfather, weren’t you?” Ben demanded and the boy just nodded miserably, dropping his eyes. “Even though I specifically told you that you were to wait until Christmas.” Little Joe just hung his head. “Well, Joseph, since you chose to disobey me, you must face the consequences. Bend over.” Ben gave the boy three swats. “Now get up to bed,” he ordered, and the child stumbled up the ladder.
Adam remembered how he’d felt after a tanning so he pretended to be asleep as his little brother climbed into the bed, trying to hold back his tears. Adam found he couldn’t go back to sleep with Little Joe crying right beside him so very softly he asked, “You okay?”

“Y- yeah,” Little Joe replied in a quavering voice. Then he asked, “Adam, d- did you and Pa ever have necessary talks?”

“Sure we did,” Adam replied and Little Joe could hear his smile even though he couldn’t see it in the dark. “I was no angel.” He paused and then said, “There are worse things than Pa’s necessary talks. I remember once a couple months before you were born Ross and Todd and I were all angry because our fathers wouldn’t let us come on the drive, so we all decided that instead of doing our chores, we’d sneak off and go fishing without telling anyone.” He smiled wryly at the bittersweet memory before continuing. “Was I ever in trouble with your ma and Hop Sing when I got home! First, I was sent to bed with no supper, and then Hop Sing and your ma had all kinds of chores for me to do as a punishment.”

“What kinda chores?” Little Joe wanted to know.

“I had to do the laundry, dig a new hole for the outhouse, clean and whitewash the henhouse plus all my regular chores of chopping wood, slopping the pigs, milking the cow and mucking out the barn. Oh, and your ma made me write that I wouldn’t leave the ranch without permission one hundred times.”

“Gosh!” Little Joe exclaimed. “That’s a lot of chores!”

“I would much rather have had one of Pa’s necessary talks,” Adam said firmly.

“Me too!” Little Joe said and the fervor in his voice made Adam
smile. “G’night, Adam,” Little Joe added sleepily.

“Goodnight,” Adam said softly, closing his eyes.
“All right, boys, we’re ready to put on the ornaments,” Ben said as they finished tying apples and gingerbread men on the tree and winding the strings of popcorn around the branches. “Little Joe, you can put up the angel first.” He reached into the box that held the little animals carved from wood and pulled out the lace angel Marie had made for Little Joe’s second Christmas. He handed the angel to Little Joe, who held it reverently, knowing his mama had made it. Then Ben lifted the boy so he could reach the top of the tree.

Once the angel had been placed, they all reached into the box for an ornament. When they got to the bottom of the box, Adam pulled out a wooden figure obviously carved by a child.

“So you still have my horse,” he said, smiling as he held the little carving in the palm of his hand.

“We put your horse up every Christmas,” Hoss said. “It was a way to have you with us.”

“Pa said it was the first ornament you ever carved,” Little Joe added.

“That’s right. I was the same age you are now,” Adam said. “I thought it was ugly and wanted to get rid of it.”

“But it was precious to me,” Ben said quietly.

When the last ornament had been hung, Little Joe asked eagerly, “Can we open Captain Stoddard’s gift to all of us?”

“After we’ve read the Christmas story, we’ll open the gift,” Ben promised. “Is supper ready, Hop Sing?”
“Almost,” Hop Sing replied. “Everybody wash up, and then be ready.”

After supper, the brothers turned the settee and the rocking chair so they faced the Christmas tree in its corner while Ben got the family Bible. Ben, Hoss and Little Joe sat on the settee while Adam chose the rocking chair.

“All right, Little Joe, we’re ready for you,” Ben said, smiling fondly at his youngest. Last Christmas Little Joe had begged to be the one to recite *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, and he’d been working on memorizing it for several weeks.

Little Joe stood up and cleared his throat. He looked at the expectant faces of his pa and brothers, and suddenly his mind went blank. He swallowed hard and asked nervously, “C- can Hoss say it with me?”

Hoss grinned at him and said, “Be happy to.” He got up and stood beside his brother, who smiled up at him, and they recited the poem together. Then they sat back down on either side of their pa, who opened the Bible to the first chapter of Luke.

As his father read, Adam found his thoughts drifting back to their very first Christmas in the cabin. He and Pa and Hoss had sat on the settee facing the cheerful fire since they had no Christmas tree. Pa had held baby Hoss on his lap while he’d recited the poem about Santa Claus. When he had finished, he’d put Hoss on Adam’s lap and then he’d read the story of the birth of Jesus from the big family Bible. Adam could remember how happy and secure he’d felt, sitting beside his pa in the circle of his arm, holding his baby brother, who’d smiled and gurgled at him.

Adam was startled from his reverie by his father’s voice saying his name. “Adam, will you read the story of the Wise Men?”
“I’d be glad to,” Adam replied as he stood up. Little Joe moved closer to Ben, not sure if he liked this change to the Christmas tradition. However, as he listened, he decided it was only right Adam should participate as he and Hoss had.

When Adam finished, Little Joe said, “Now we can open our gift. Can I open it? Please?”

“Yes, you may,” Ben replied.

Little Joe ran and got the package from under the tree and carried it back to the settee. He tore off the paper, revealing a paper bag and some long strips of colored paper with shiny pieces on them, and a piece of paper.

“Let me read the note,” Ben said, picking up the paper and unfolding it.

Dear Benjamin, Adam, Hoss and Little Joe,

People here in Boston are using these streamers and bits of foil to decorate their Christmas trees so I thought you would like to use them on yours. You drape them over the branches.

I’ve also included some chestnuts you can roast. Adam said you can’t get them in Western Utah.

Merry Christmas!

Abel Morgan Stoddard

“I told Grandfather I was going to miss roasting chestnuts at Christmas,” Adam said with a happy smile.

“Let’s put the streamers on the tree,” Little Joe commanded, not much interested in nuts.
"We’ll drape the tree and then we’ll roast a few chestnuts,” Ben said. “I haven’t had any in years, but I remember how good they are.”

“The streamers are a nice touch,” Adam said as they sat around the tree, eating their chestnuts.

“And these here chestnuts are dee-licious,” Hoss declared.

“After we finish eating, you boys need to get to bed or Santa Claus may skip over us,” Ben said, and his older sons exchanged grins over their little brother’s head.

After the boys had gone up to the loft and Ben was sure that Little Joe was asleep, he got the gifts from Santa Claus and put them under the tree. Then he filled the three stockings with almonds, raisons, licorice sticks, molasses candy and one orange each. He smiled in satisfaction as he looked around the room at the gaily decorated tree and the bulging stockings hanging over the mantle. He banked the fire and put out all the candles but one, which he carried into the lean-to. The room was chilly so he got ready for bed quickly, blew out his candle, and got under the blankets and quilts. As he lay in the dark lean-to, his thoughts turned to past Christmases in the cabin.

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Ben was awakened from a sound sleep by his first-born shouting, “Lookee, Hoss! Look at our stockings!” He opened his eyes and saw his two little boys jump out of bed and run for the fireplace. He grinned as he watched Adam stand on tiptoe to unhook first his own stocking and then his brother’s. Ben quickly got out of bed and hurried over to them. “Empty your stockings on the table, boys,” he commanded. He smiled fondly
as he watched Adam’s golden-brown eyes and Hoss’s sky-blue ones widen as they spilled the contents of their stockings on the table. Adam reached for one of his peppermint drops and Hoss for one of his licorice sticks, so Ben said quickly, “No candy before breakfast. Besides, you haven’t looked under the Christmas tree yet.”

The two boys instantly whirled around and Ben wished he had some means of preserving the moment when they saw the gifts under the tree: their eyes were so big and round and their mouths formed an ‘O’.

Adam’s long legs got him to the tree first. “This one says it’s for me and this one is for you, Hoss,” he said as he handed a package to his baby brother before ripping his open. “A book!” he exclaimed in delight. “The Deerslayer by James Fenimore Cooper.”

“I guess Santa Claus didn’t think you were a bad boy after all,” Ben said as he ruffled his son’s dark curls. Then he turned to his younger son who was struggling with the wrapping paper on his gift. “Let Pa help,” he said with a smile as he tore away the paper revealing ten flat blocks painted with Biblical scenes. “It’s a Jacob’s Ladder,” he said to the child. “Watch,” and he picked it up on one end and the pictures flipped over. Hoss’s eyes grew even wider and then his pa picked up the other end and the pictures flipped over again.”

“Me! Me!” Hoss shouted and with a grin, Ben handed the boy his toy.

“There’s more, Hoss,” Adam exclaimed. “Here’s one for you and one for me.”

“These are from your grandfather,” Ben explained before he helped Hoss unwrap his gift, which was a hand-spun top. Ben was
grateful Captain Stoddard had been thoughtful enough to send a gift for Hoss as well as Adam. “This is how it works, son,” Ben said as he spun it between the palms of his hands.

“I got a pennywhistle,” Adam announced happily. “I told Grandfather that I’d like to have one.” He turned and smiled at his pa. “This was the best Christmas ever.”

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“No, Hoss. We gotta wait until Pa says we can come down,” Ben heard his oldest whisper loudly while beside him Marie giggled softly.

“But I wanna see what Santa Claus brung me,” Hoss’s voice replied loudly.

“Quiet!” Ben and Marie heard Adam hiss. “You’ll wake up the baby and he’ll start cryin’.”

As if on cue, whimpering sounds came from the cradle on the other side of the sheet separating the lean-to into two sections.

“I will feed Joseph and then I think we should let Adam and Hoss come down, n’est-ce-pas?” Marie said softly as she sat up, and he nodded.

While Marie sat in the rocking chair and nursed the baby, Ben added wood to the fire as quietly as he could, but not quietly enough. Almost immediately Hoss called down excitedly, “Pa, can me ‘n’ Adam come down?”

“Not yet. In a few minutes,” Ben called back. “You boys go ahead and get dressed.”

As he was dressing in the lean-to, Ben heard Hoss squeal, “Adam,
that water’s too cold!"

“Don’t be such a baby. I washed my face in it, didn’t I?” Ben heard Adam reply. “Just do it quick and get it over with.”

Ben rejoined Marie, who was burping the baby, and they heard Adam say, “We’ve gotta comb our hair.” There was a slight pause and then they heard Adam comment, “Yours is fine.”

“Let me take Joseph while you get dressed,” Ben said softly and Marie handed him the baby. As she was entering the lean-to, they both heard Adam say angrily, “These dang curls! I don’t know why my hair couldn’t be straight like yours.”

Ben and Marie couldn’t hear Hoss’s giggles for their own smothered laughter.

Marie dressed as quickly as she could, leaving her hair in its long braid that hung down her back, and then hurried to join Ben and the baby.

“All right, boys, you can come down now,” Ben called and the boys quickly climbed down the ladder. Hoss’s clear blue eyes opened wide at the sight of the packages under the tree they’d decorated the night before, and then he saw his bulging stocking hanging from the mantle.

“Let’s save the stockings until after breakfast,” Marie suggested, Ben knew she didn’t want Hoss filling up on lemon drops and licorice sticks. Adam didn’t have quite as much of a sweet tooth, but they couldn’t be certain he wouldn’t eat his candy first. The boys were too eager to open their gifts to mind waiting.

“We always start with the youngest,” Ben explained to Marie, “and this year that means Joseph.” He smiled at Hoss and said, “Would you like to open one of your brother’s gifts for him?”
“I’ll open the gift me ‘n’ Adam made him,” Hoss said, a happy smile lighting up his face. He ran to where he’d placed the gift under the tree the night before. He quickly tore the paper off the bulky package and revealed about a dozen small wooden blocks that had letters of the alphabet carved on two sides. “Pa helped us,” the six-year-old confessed, “but I rubbed ‘em with a piece of pumice until they was real smooth and then Adam carved the letters.”

“It is a wonderful gift,” Marie said, her eyes beginning to fill with tears. Ben knew she shared his joy at this proof that Hoss, and especially Adam, loved their baby brother.

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Ben was awakened, as he always was on Christmas mornings, by his sons’ voices.

“Ya can’t go down yet, Little Joe,” he heard Hoss’s voice say patiently. “We don’t go down until Pa says we can.”

“And since we’re all up, why don’t we get dressed so we’ll be ready when he does call,” Adam suggested, his tone reasonable.

“No! I wanna see what Santa Claus brought me!” Little Joe’s voice was loud and impatient.

Ben heard the sound of running feet and then Adam’s voice saying, “You’re not going anywhere, little brother.”

“I guess we better tie him up while we get dressed,” Ben heard Hoss say and then Adam added, “Good idea. We can use my neckties.”

“No! You’re mean!” Little Joe yelled.

“Mean! Why, we’re only tyin’ ya up fer yer own good,” Hoss said
cheerfully.

“That’s right,” Adam agreed. “Why, if we let you sneak downstairs before Pa gave his permission, Santa Claus would come back down the chimney and exchange your present for a bundle of switches.”

“He would not,” Little Joe said, but Ben heard the uncertainty in his youngest’s voice and smiled as he began to dress.

“Ifn I was you, little brother, I wouldn’t take a chance,” Hoss said. After that, there was no more talking and Ben knew his boys were dressing.

As soon as Ben announced they could come down, Little Joe practically flew down the ladder and made a beeline for the tree. His brothers followed at a slightly slower pace and Hop Sing emerged from his room.

“Little Joe, don’t open yours until we each have a gift,” Ben cautioned, and sighing loudly, the child complied.

Everyone was delighted with his gifts. Hoss was especially pleased to have some new shirts and pants, underwear and nightshirts since he’d outgrown everything. Adam was delighted with a new bottle of bay rum aftershave, a new pair of canvas work pants, a black suede vest and a chess set. Little Joe was thrilled with everything he received: marbles, a whirligig, a bilbo catcher and a subscription to the children’s magazine Robert Merry’s Museum.

After a big Christmas dinner, they all sang Christmas carols until they were hoarse. Then Little Joe settled down with the first issue of his magazine while Adam taught Hoss to play chess and Ben borrowed Adam’s copy of The Pickwick Papers and lost himself in Dickens.
“I think this was the best Christmas ever,” Little Joe announced before heading up to bed. Then he turned to his oldest brother and said with a warm smile, “I’m glad you were here, Adam, and not at college.”

“So am I,” Adam said, smiling at him. Then he looked at the rest of the family and added in a voice that wasn’t quite steady, “Every year I was away, I missed all of you so much at Christmas and it’s so wonderful to be here with all of you.”

Ben’s heart overflowed with joy at Adam’s declaration.

Chapter 6

“Sure is a beautiful mornin’, ain’t it?” Hoss commented as the four Cartwrights and Hop Sing were eating breakfast. The hens had started laying again so Hop Sing had scrambled eggs to go with their sausage, biscuits and gravy—first eggs they’d had in months.

“Yes, it is,” Adam agreed, smiling warmly, “and it’s the perfect morning for me to go to Placerville to begin hiring workmen to build our new house, starting with stonemasons to build the foundation.”

“Yahoo!” Little Joe shouted and the others shared his eagerness so Ben didn’t reprimand him for shouting at the table, but just grinned at him.

“Of course, we have to dig the foundation before we’ll need the stonemasons,” Adam said with a wink.

“We can start diggin’ today, right Pa?” Hoss asked. “Me ‘n’ Adam already put out the stakes showin’ where to dig.”
“I think that’s an excellent idea,” Ben said with a smile for his middle boy. “I’ll just speak with Will and let him know where we’ll be in case something comes up,” Ben stated then, his dark eyes alight with enthusiasm. “And I’ll see if I can get some volunteers to help with the digging. Hop Sing and Little Joe, you’ll be on your own for a while; Hoss and I will stay at the cabin there.”

“But I wanna help dig!” Little Joe protested and Hop Sing added, “Hop Sing good with shovel and want to help. Diego be happy take care of pigs and chickens for Hop Sing.”

“We don’t just need people to dig the foundation,” Adam interjected. “I checked the other day and we need more big, flat stones we can use for bond stones and footing stones.”

“How big?” Hoss asked, reaching for his coffee cup.

“The foundation is going to be six feet high, and two and a half feet thick so the footing stones need to be about eight inches thick and three feet wide,” Adam replied. “The bonding stones need to be just as thick, but they don’t have to be as wide, only about thirty inches.”

“I have an idea of where there’s the kind stones yer needin’,” Hoss declared. “Ya wanna come with me, Little Joe, and haul the stones over to the new house?”

Little Joe quickly swallowed the milk he’d just drunk and said with a grin, “Okay.”

Adam finished his breakfast and, as he put down his napkin, he said, “Pa, I’m also going to need to buy supplies—more wheelbarrows, tools and Portland cement for the mortar.” He glanced at Hop Sing and then quickly added, “Hop Sing’s given me a list of items the cook I hire is going to need as well.”
“All right, I’ll give you a bank draft,” Ben said. “Since you’re keeping the books now, you know how much we can afford.” When Adam had offered to take over the bookkeeping duties, Ben had accepted with alacrity. He was amused that Adam actually enjoyed a task he loathed. He was his mother’s son in that respect because Liz had liked keeping the chandlery’s books, Ben remembered, with the wistfulness that always accompanied any memory of his first love.

“Do you mind if I ask Carl to come with me?” Adam asked. Hoss would have been better company but he and Little Joe were eager to find the stones they needed, and Adam wasn’t looking forward to traveling through the mountains alone.

“I think that’s a fine idea,” Ben said. As Carl rode along side the wagon, he glanced over at Adam. “Ya know, Adam, there’s somethin’ I’ve been wantin’ to ask ya for a long time.” Adam turned to look at Carl with one eyebrow raised. “Why the hell did ya come back? If I’d had a chance to strike out on my own, I’d ’ve grabbed it with both hands, but ya came back here to work for yer pa.”

“The Ponderosa is my home; I always intended to return here,” Adam replied quietly.

“And ya never thought of stayin’ back East?” Carl asked skeptically.

Adam was quiet for so long that Carl thought he wasn’t going to answer, but then he said slowly, “I thought about it. The architectural firm where I worked the last two summers offered me a position, and I had another offer from a mining company to work for them as a mining engineer. They were good jobs and I considered them very seriously, especially the one from the architectural firm.” He smiled crookedly as he added, “But I missed my family and I missed the Ponderosa so I turned down the
offers and came home.”

Carl just shook his head and changed the subject. That night around the campfire as they ate, Carl remarked, “I’ve been thinkin’ of headin’ down to Mexico.”

“Mexico?” Adam said, surprised. “Why Mexico?”

“It’s gotta be more excitin’ than around here,” Carl replied. “And there’s all those pretty, black-eyed señoritas. A good-lookin’ fellow like me shouldn’t have no problems gettin’ all the women he wants.” He grinned slyly at Adam. “You could most likely find some that’d like hearin’ you spout off poetry—if you know any Spanish poems.” Adam just smiled, refusing to take the bait.

“What’s your father have to say about your plan,” he asked curiously, sipping his coffee slowly as he gazed at Carl over the rim of his cup.

“Oh, he’d be against it—if he knew anything about it,” Carl admitted. “I don’t wanna hurt him, but I don’t wanna spend my life chasin’ cows neither. I want some excitement!” He sat up straight then and looked at Adam intently. “Come with me, Adam. We’d have a good time.”

“What? Just leave for Mexico now? Without a word to anyone?” Adam asked, setting his cup down and staring at Carl.

“We could send a letter and let ‘em know where we’re headed once we get to a town,” Carl answered, his dark eyes glowing with enthusiasm.

“I wouldn’t do that to my pa,” Adam said decisively. “And I don’t wanna leave the Ponderosa.”

“I know you, Adam,” Carl said with a slight sneer. “You’ve had
a taste of bein’ on yer own, of seein’ other places. Ya ain’t gonna be happy here livin’ under yer pa’s thumb. Ya know ya ain’t. Come with me, and we can see the world.”

“No, Carl,” Adam said firmly. He held up his hand to let Carl know he wasn’t interested in hearing anymore. “Maybe someday I’ll want to travel, to be on my own. Not now. Now I want to stay here with my pa and brothers. I want to build the house that I designed and I want to live in it. I want to help my pa make the Ponderosa the most successful ranch in Western Utah.”

“Suit yerself,” Carl said with a shrug, and they finished their meal in silence.
The first thing Adam noticed when he woke up the next morning was that Carl and his bedroll were gone. He sat up quickly and glanced at their picket line. Both mules grazed contentedly but Carl’s brown gelding was gone.

“Nice of you to leave me the job of telling your father that you’ve run off,” Adam muttered as he stood up. When he started to fix his breakfast, he discovered most of his supplies were gone and shook his head. Just have to be sparing with them until I can buy more in Placerville, he thought, heaving a sigh of resignation.

Hoss stopped digging long enough to mop the sweat running down his face, using his sleeve. Digging the foundation was backbreaking work. The vaqueros had all taken turns helping but he and Pa and Hop Sing had been either digging or hauling the dirt away every day. They were just about finished, and if he never saw a shovel or wheelbarrow again, it would be too soon.

“Hey Little Joe,” he called, “bring me some water.”

Little Joe grinned as he walked over carrying a bucket of water and a tin dipper. It was his job to fetch water from the well they’d dug the previous autumn, and he also snared rabbits and
As Hoss lifted the dipper to his mouth, Little Joe said excitedly, “I think I see a wagon and some riders. Look!”

“Yer right. I bet it’s Adam and the men he hired,” Hoss said with an enormous grin. “Pa,” he shouted, pointing. “Look yonder!”

Adam drove the mules up to the bunkhouse and then set the wagon’s brake before jumping down. “Looks like you’ve been working hard while I’ve been away,” he said with a grin as he removed his hat and ran his fingers through his mop of curls.

“That’s right, son,” Ben agreed with just the hint of a smile. “Tomorrow your stonemasons can begin work.”

“Great!” Adam exclaimed happily. Then his exuberance dimmed a little as he added, “Actually, I couldn’t find any stonemasons, but I hired some bricklayers who’ve done the masonry for foundations.” His expression brightened as he added, “I was able to hire some carpenters who have experience in post and beam carpentry. While the bricklayers are working on the foundation, they’ll use the second cabin as a workshop to prepare the mortise and tenon joints. They’re bringing their tools in a separate wagon. Oh, and I hired a cook. They should all be right behind me.”

“They are,” Ben said, pointing at the approaching wagon. He naturally wanted to meet the men Adam had hired. He and Adam showed the workers the cabin serving as a bunkhouse and the one that would be a workshop. Then they began unloading their tools and the supplies Adam had purchased. Once that was done the workers began to inspect the site while Adam rode Beauty to the sawmill to request the lumber be delivered to the construction site the next morning. Just before he left, he told the men...
that he would return so they could haul the sand they needed for the mortar from the lakeshore.

It was about an hour later when the work of digging the foundation was completed. The three Cartwrights, Hop Sing, Tex and Billy all packed up their gear and headed back to the old cabin. Ben drove the buckboard and Hop Sing sat beside him while the boys sat in the back with the picks and shovels.

“Pa,” Little Joe asked, “can, I mean may, I go back tomorrow and watch ‘em build the walls? Please?”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Ben began.

“I wouldn’t get in the way and I wouldn’t pester ‘em with questions. I promise,” Little Joe pleaded.

“I’d kinda like to go too,” Hoss said then. “Just for a bit. We’d stay outa the way.”

“Your brother is in charge of the construction site. If he agrees, you can go and watch for an hour, but no more. Understand?”

“Thanks, Pa,” Little Joe said, his smile lighting up his face.

“Yeah, thanks,” Hoss said quietly. He wasn’t so sure that Adam would agree.

By the time Adam reached the cabin, the moon had risen high above the horizon. He was tired, but he had a duty to perform. He cared for Beauty first, and then reluctantly headed for the bunkhouse. He knocked and Tex called out, “C’mon in!”

Adam walked inside and saw all the vaqueros except José and Mr. Reagan were playing cards. José was mending his tack but Mr. Reagan wasn’t in sight so Adam figured he was in the lean-to that served as his room.
“Howdy Adam,” Billy said. “We thought it was Carl. His pa’s wonderin’ where he is since we told him you were back.”

José was watching Adam’s face and said quietly, “Señor Reagan is in his room.”

Adam smiled slightly as he said, “Gracias, José,” and walked over and knocked on Reagan’s door. He saw the disappointment on the older man’s face before he masked it with a smile.

“Good to see ya, Adam. I heard ya was back and I’ve been lookin’ fer Carl.”

“Carl didn’t come back with me,” Adam said gently. “While we were traveling, he told me that he wanted to go to Mexico. He didn’t want to hurt you, but he didn’t want to stay here either. One morning when I woke up, he and his horse were gone.” Seeing the pain in the other man’s eyes, he added quickly, “I’m sure he’ll write to you when he gets to a town.”

“I knew he was restless, but I didn’t believe he’d just up and leave. I- I guess he figured he’d go when I wasn’t around to talk him out of it,” Will said sadly. Then with an effort, he squared his shoulders and said, “He’s over twenty-one and he’s got a right to choose his own way, and I have to respect that.” He managed a smile that didn’t reach his eyes and said, “Yer pa’s probably wonderin’ where ya are.”

“Yeah, I- I’d better go,” Adam said and left quickly.

As soon as Adam opened the cabin door, Ben looked up from the newspaper he’d been pretending to read and Hop Sing hurried out of his room.

“There you are!” Ben said, and Adam heard the relief in his pa’s voice. “I was beginning to worry, and I know Will is wondering where Carl has gotten off to.”
“Mexico,” Adam said wearily.

Before Ben could react to Adam’s statement, Hop Sing scolded, “Supper all dry up! Throw away!” But then his severe expression softened and he added, “Can make you sandwich.”

“Thanks, Hop Sing, but I’m not hungry,” Adam replied quietly. “I’m sorry I’m so late. It took longer than I thought to haul the sand, and then I had to talk to Mr. Reagan about Carl.” He repeated the story, and at the end, Hop Sing shook his head and muttered in his own tongue and Ben said sadly, “Poor Will.” Then he put a hand on Adam’s shoulder, saying, “You look tired, son. If you don’t want to eat, you may as well go on up and get some rest.”

Adam nodded and headed for the loft. It seemed he’d just fallen asleep when he felt someone shaking his shoulder and heard Hoss’s voice saying, “Get up, Adam, or yer gonna be late.”

“I’m awake,” Adam replied with a yawn. As soon as he swung his legs over the side of the bed, Little Joe asked excitedly, “Can we watch ‘em build the wall? Pa said we could if it was all right with you.”

Seeing his older brother’s frown, Hoss added quickly, “Just fer an hour. We’d keep outa the way and Little Joe promised not to ask questions.”

Adam sighed as he put on his shirt. This was his first time being ‘the boss’, and he was a little nervous, especially since all the men he’d hired were older and more experienced. He didn’t think having his younger brothers underfoot would add to his confidence, but Little Joe looked at him so pleadingly that he reluctantly said, “All right, but come after dinner.” Seeing his little brother’s face light up, he cautioned, “If you get in the way or start bothering the men with questions, then you’ll
have to leave."

“We won’t. Thanks, Adam,” Little Joe said happily. When Adam arrived at the site, the bricklayers were already at work, laying a bed of mortar and setting the footing stones. He hurriedly took the saddlebags containing his clothes and shaving paraphernalia and put them in the lean-to that would be his room. Then he grabbed his working drawings to confer with the carpenters.

The most experienced carpenter, John Miller, normally worked as master builder on his jobs. At first he hadn’t been interested working under an architect, and particularly such an inexperienced one. However, when Cartwright had offered to pay ten cents more an hour than the going rate, he decided the offer was too good to pass up. Besides, young Cartwright was in over his head, and Miller was ready to take charge when the time came.

He and the other carpenters gathered around the table in the workshop as Adam spread out the drawings, pointing out the details. Even Miller grudgingly admitted Cartwright knew what he was doing when it came to design. Managing a construction site, however, was a different matter, he reminded himself.

They were just finishing going over the drawings when the lumber began to arrive. The carpenters were eager to check the quality of the wood they would be working with.

“This is excellent,” Miller stated authoritatively as he examined the timbers and boards for cupping, bowing and twisting. “Ponderosa pine, right?” and Adam nodded. “You’ll need oak or maple for the floors and stair treads,” Miller said then.

“Yes, I’ve ordered quartersawn oak boards from the lumberyard in
Placerville for them and the wainscoting. They should be here within the week,” Adam said, pleased to be able to demonstrate his competence. Miller began to think that perhaps he’d misjudged the young architect.

He turned to the other carpenters and said, “Let’s get started on these timbers.”

Adam and the workmen had just finished dinner when Hoss and Little Joe rode up. They dismounted, looking about with interest at the changes since they’d left the day before. Adam said to the men, “My brothers were curious about how the foundation is built and asked if they could watch for a bit.” The bricklayers shrugged and all the men went back to work while Adam hurried over to his brothers.

“Howdy, Adam,” Hoss said with a grin. Then he held out a package wrapped in one of their red gingham napkins. “Hop Sing made gingersnaps and he sent these fer ya.”

“Thanks,” Adam said, smiling with pleasure as he accepted the cookies. “If you go sit by the sand, you can watch without being in the way.”

“Okay,” Little Joe said happily, and he and Hoss hurried to the spot Adam had suggested. As they sat down, they watched one of the bricklayers mix sand and something from a big sack with water. When he was satisfied, he took a trowel and scooped up some of the mixture he’d made and spread it on the existing wall where he’d left off at dinnertime. Next he selected one of the long stones that Hoss remembered Adam had called a bond stone and placed it in the mixture next to several smaller stones. Then he rubbed it in and hit it with the trowel.

“I guess he hit it to make sure it’s in the paste,” Hoss whispered to Little Joe.
“Adam didn’t call it paste,” Little Joe whispered back.

“I know, but I don’t remember what he called it,” Hoss said.

As they watched, the man used some of the smaller stones and repeated the same process of rubbing and pounding until he’d covered the ‘paste’ with stones. Then he used pebbles to fill in the cracks, rubbing and pounding just as he had with the stones. He turned toward the bucket containing the ‘paste’ and as he did, he glanced up and spied Hoss and Little Joe. With a friendly smile, he walked toward them and then asked, “Would you boys like to help?”

“Sure would!” Little Joe replied enthusiastically while Hoss answered cautiously, “If we won’t be in the way.”

“You won’t. My name is Ike, by the way,” the man said. He had a barrel chest, muscular arms and a friendly face with twinkling blue eyes.

“I’m Little Joe and this is Hoss,” Little Joe said with an engaging grin.

“Horse?” the man said in surprise and Hoss said quickly, “No, not horse, Hoss.”

“Sorry, Hoss,” Ike said. “Well, you boys come on down and I’ll show you how to build a stone rubble foundation for your new house.”

Hoss and Little Joe ran quickly down the dirt ramp and over to Ike, who greeted them with a friendly smile.

“Little Joe, you can go first,” he said, handing the boy his trowel. “First thing you have to do is put down a bed of mortar,” and Little Joe nodded. He remembered now that mortar is what Adam had called the paste. He scooped up some mortar
and began to spread it the way he’d watched Ike do.

“Not too thin,” Ike cautioned. When he was satisfied, he told Little Joe to get a stone and put it in the mortar next to the dirt wall. After that was accomplished, Little Joe began to rub the stone into the mortar, and Ike smiled. “I see you were watching carefully. All right, now you need to pound it with the trowel to make sure it’s set.”

Under Ike’s supervision, Little Joe covered the bed of mortar with stones and then filled in the crevices with pebbles and set them in the mortar. While he was working, Adam came over to check on his brothers. When he saw where they were, he almost yelled at them, but before he opened his mouth, he realized Ike must have invited them to come down. He saw with a smile that Little Joe was concentrating on following Ike’s instruction. Hoss had already played a part in building their house by helping to dig the foundation, and now Little Joe would always know that he’d played a part as well.

When Little Joe finished, Ike smiled at him. “Good job,” he said and then turned to Hoss. “Now it’s your turn.”

Hoss spread the mortar and then reached for one of the bond stones, but Ike said quickly, “No, we don’t want a bond stone here.”

“How come?” Little Joe asked as Hoss picked up one of the smaller stones and began the process of setting it in the mortar.

“We put the bond stones every three feet in height and every four feet of length,” Ike replied. “The bond stones bind the stones of the wall together so the foundation doesn’t split crosswise when it bears the weight of the house.” He smiled down at Little Joe. “Your brother’s designed a big house, so he
needs us to build a good, strong foundation.” He glanced over at Hoss and said, “You’re doin’ a fine job.”

When Hoss finished, he and Little Joe thanked Ike for letting them help. As they walked up the ramp, Hoss said, “We’d better get goin’ cuz Pa said to stay about an hour and then head back.”

“Wait’ll we tell him that Ike let us help build the foundation,” Little Joe said with a happy grin.

Sunday being a day of rest, late Saturday afternoon Adam paid the workmen and then he headed for the cabin. He and Hoss went to the miners’ grand ball and on the way home Hoss said, “Dadburnit! I knew there was somethin’ I shoulda told ya. Tex brought back the mail from Genoa and you got a letter from Aaron.”

“Good,” Adam said with a big smile. “I’ll read it tonight.”

When they got home, Hoss told Ben goodnight and headed up the ladder while Adam spotted his letter on the dresser. He lit a candle to read by and then sat down at the table and hurriedly opened the envelope and pulled out the letter. A few minutes later, Ben happened to look up from his *Mountain Democrat* and saw Adam’s face was lit up by a happy smile.

“Aaron’s news was good I take it,” Ben said with a little grin.

“The best!” Adam replied. “Listen: ‘Adam, Elsie and I wanted you to be among first to know our wonderful news. Around the end of October or the first of November, our little family will increase.’ Aaron’s going to be a father!”

“Yes, that is the best news,” Ben said, smiling broadly. “When you write to Aaron, be sure to extend my congratulations.”

“I will,” Adam said enthusiastically. “Papa Aaron,” he added with a chuckle.
The Sunday gathering was at the Talbots’ cabin and the Cartwrights were the first to arrive—the first except for Ross. He was pacing in front of the cabin when the brothers rode up, just ahead of Ben, who was driving the buckboard with their contribution to Sunday dinner.

“I’ve been waitin’ to talk with ya, Adam,” Ross said excitedly as Adam swung out of the saddle. “Let’s go over by the corral,” and he grabbed Adam’s arm and hurried him along.

“I’m coming,” Adam said with a chuckle. “You don’t have to drag me.”

“I wanted ya to be the first to know,” Ross stated, beaming at Adam. “I- I got Mr. Talbot’s permission to ask Delphine to be my wife and last night she said yes.”

“That’s wonderful!” Adam exclaimed, thumping his friend on the back. “When’s the wedding?”

“We’re thinkin’ late June, and I wanted to ask ya to stand up with me,” Ross replied.

“I’d be honored,” Adam said, smiling at his friend.

“We’re gonna talk with that circuit preacher, Rev. Bennett, about havin’ the weddin’ here,” Ross added. “There was somethin’ else I wanted to ask ya. I- I don’t want to take Delphine to our old cabin; I want to build her a little house and I was hopin’ ya could help me.”

“Of course I will,” Adam said emphatically. “After dinner, the three of us can get together and talk about the kind of house you want. I can probably have some preliminary, uh, I mean rough sketches for you next Sunday.”

“Thanks, Adam. I really appreciate it,” Ross said warmly.
When everyone had arrived, George Talbot said, “Neighbors, before we get started, Angeline and I are very happy to announce Delphine and Ross’s engagement.”

Everyone congratulated Ross and wished Delphine happiness. After dinner, all the women gathered around Delphine. Ross and Adam saw they didn’t have a prayer of prying her away so when her brother Matthew suggested riding over to Gold Canyon to bowl, they joined the group.

“We’ll bowl one game and then come back,” Ross suggested. “By that time the womenfolk should be talked out.”

As they headed for the door, Delphine’s eleven-year-old sister, Evangeline, came running over. “Are you leavin’, Adam?” she asked, staring up at him with big blue eyes. “I was hopin’ that you’d sing.”

“Some other Sunday,” Adam replied, smiling down at her. “Right now Ross and I are going to bowl.”

“Oh,” Evangeline said, sighing tragically while at the same time, Little Joe’s voice could be heard shouting impatiently, “C’mon, Adam and Ross!”

As they headed to their horses, Ross said with a smirk, “If Evangeline has her way, you ‘n’ me are gonna be brothers-in-law.”

“Very funny,” Adam replied, rolling his eyes.

When they arrived at the bowling alley, they found O’Riley and McLaughlin drinking whiskey and bemoaning the annoying blue stuff they kept digging up.

“Our claim’d be as rich as Gold Hill if it weren’t fer that blue stuff,” O’Riley declared. “Look at it!” he added, practically
shoving a piece of crumbly black rock in Adam’s and Ross’s faces.

“No thanks,” Ross said, shoving the rock away, but Adam said quickly, “Mind if I have a closer look, Mr. O’Riley?”

“Keep it, lad,” O’Riley replied. “There’s plenty more where that came from. More’s the pity.”

“C’mon, Adam,” Ross said so Adam slipped the rock into the pocket of his jacket.

When Adam and Ross returned after their one game, they found the Edwards had gone home and the Johnsons were on their way to get Billy and head home.

“I’ll give your brothers time enough to finish another game and then we need to be headed home ourselves,” Ben remarked to Adam.

“Fine,” Adam said. Then he turned to Mrs. Talbot and asked, “Do you happen to have some paper and a pencil I could use?”

“I’ll get it for you, Adam,” Evangeline said, running from the room, causing her parents and Ben to grin.

“Adam said he’d help me with our house,” Ross said to Delphine, who turned to Adam, saying, “Oh thank you!”

Evangeline ran in with the paper and pencil. “Here you are, Adam,” she said breathlessly as she handed them to him, and he smiled at her as he said, “Thanks, Evangeline.”

Adam, Ross and Delphine sat down at the kitchen table. (Evangeline would have joined them but her mother shooed her away.) “Tell me what kind of house you want,” Adam began. “For example, how many rooms?”

“Let me see,” Delphine said. “Three bedrooms, a parlor, a nice
big kitchen and pantry and a washhouse.”

“So six rooms,” Adam said as he wrote down her requirements.

“I think it should have two stories, don’t you, Del?” Ross asked her.

“Yes,” she agreed, smiling lovingly at Ross. Then she turned to Adam and said, “Two of the bedrooms should be upstairs.”

Adam nodded and then asked, “Would you like a porch?”

“Yeah, I’d like a porch,” Ross said and Delphine nodded.

“I’ll have some rough drawings for you next Sunday,” Adam promised.

“I know you’re awfully busy building your own house,” Delphine said hesitantly, but Adam smiled reassuringly.

“I’m not busy in the evenings. And I want to do this for the two of you. Consider it a wedding gift.”

“Thanks, Adam,” Ross said with a huge smile. Then he gazed at Delphine and their happiness was palpable. Adam was annoyed with himself for the sharp stab of envy he experienced.

“We’ve got to stop and get Hoss and Little Joe,” he said, “so I’d better be on my way. I’ll see you next Sunday.”

Ben was talking with Andy McKaren and George Talbot by the corral, and when he saw Adam leave the cabin, he excused himself.

“Why don’t you tie Beauty behind and ride in the buckboard with me,” Ben suggested. “We haven’t had much of a chance to talk,” and Adam nodded.
Once they were on their way, Ben turned to Adam and asked, “How is everything going at the construction site?”

“It’s going very well. We’ll be finished with the foundation by the end of the week as I planned and the plumber will be here next Monday—” He stopped suddenly and smacked his forehead. “I forgot! Can you spare someone to go to Sacramento? I talked with the manager at the Cary House and learned they bought their plumbing equipment from a company in Sacramento. I purchased a bathtub, a kitchen sink and pipes there, and I need someone to haul them back here.”

“We need to start planting the hay and oats,” Ben said, his eyebrows drawing together in a frown. “I’ll send José,” he said slowly. “While he’s in Sacramento, he can hire a new vaquero to replace Carl.”

“Thanks, Pa,” Adam said, relieved. Forgetting to have the plumbing fixtures and pipe delivered before the plumber arrived would have been a costly mistake and would have made him appear incompetent just when he felt he was gaining the men’s respect.

As they rode along, Adam thought of the rock O’Riley had given him and pulled it out of his pocket and began to study it.

Ben glanced over and asked, “What do you have there?”

“It’s a rock I got from O’Riley. When I was at the bowling alley, O’Riley was complaining about the blue stuff they have to remove to get at the gold on their new claim.”

“I know. He and Comstock, McLaughlin, and Penrod complain about it all the time,” Ben said. “Comstock told me the deeper they dig for gold, the more blue stuff they find.”

“I asked if I could see some and he gave me this rock,” Adam said, continuing to examine it. Then he said slowly, “Pa, you
Ben nodded and said with a little grin, “Yes, I remember thinking it sounded very dull, although it was clear from your letters that you didn’t share my opinion.

Adam smiled crookedly, but his expression quickly sobered. “I can’t be absolutely certain without running the proper tests, but I think this annoying blue stuff is silver ore.”

Ben hauled back on the reins, halting the horses. “Have you told anyone else what you suspect?” he demanded.

“No. I just now took a good look at the rock.”

“Adam, I don’t want you to say a word about this to anyone,” Ben commanded. “I don’t want to see the same madness here that destroyed John Sutter when gold was discovered on his land.”

“I won’t say anything but, Pa, someone else is bound to discover the silver eventually,” Adam said earnestly.

“We’ll deal with that when it happens, but I’d like to postpone that day for as long as possible,” Ben said somberly, and Adam nodded his agreement.

Adam had supper with his family and then he returned to the construction site with his drafting tools, India ink, watercolors, and roll paper. He discovered he was the first one to return and since he’d been thinking about Ross and Delphine’s house on his ride, he immediately sat down at the small table in his lean-to and began working on “napkin sketches”. By the time the men returned about two hours later, he was hard at work with his square, triangles and compass.

Every evening after supper, he worked on the design and when he was satisfied with it, he created the meticulous working drawings. As the men played cards or checkers, they would
glance over through the lean-to’s open door and see him bent over his work.

“Someone needs to tell young Mr. Cartwright that all work and no play make him a dull boy,” Ike remarked with a grin.

“Ah, but I don’t think he regards designing this house for his friends as work,” Miller said with a wink.

Ike shook his head slightly, his expression bemused. “I think you’re right.” Then he shrugged. “Sure looks like work to me, but to each his own.”

Adam didn’t get home until after dark Saturday, earning a scolding from Hop Sing for being so late his supper was ruined.

“I’m sorry, but I wanted to finish the design for Ross and Delphine,” Adam apologized. “I promised them I’d have it tomorrow.” He turned to Hoss who was playing Fox and Geese with Little Joe. “And I’m sorry you missed the ball because of me.”

Hoss dismissed his apology with a wave of his hand. “They’ll be plenty more. If ya wanna make it up to me, play a game of chess after Little Joe goes up to bed.” Little Joe stuck out his tongue at this reminder that everyone else could stay up later than he could.

“Joseph!” Ben said warningly and the boy muttered, “Sorry.” Ben turned back to Adam. “So the plumbing supplies were delivered today?”

“Yes, José and the new vaquero—Hank, uh, Hank Meyers—dropped them off around sundown,” Adam replied. Then he said to Hop Sing, who was fixing him a sandwich, “I hope you like your kitchen sink.”

“Hop Sing sure very nice,” the cook said, smiling happily.
“So is our bathtub like the one at the hotel?” Hoss asked then while Little Joe made a face at the mention of bathing.

“Yes, it’s copper lined,” Adam replied, “but I bought the biggest one they make: six feet long and twenty-six inches wide.”

“Now that’s a bathtub!” Hoss exclaimed. “I think I’m gonna like takin’ baths as much as you do, older brother.” He and Adam both chuckled.

“Um, Adam, you are keeping within the budget we set up?” Ben asked, not wanting to sound as if he didn’t trust his son, but a little concerned.

Adam just grinned at him. “Don’t worry, Pa. Not that many people are interested in a bathtub that big so I convinced the storeowner I was doing him a favor buying it and got it for almost half price.” They all smiled and then Adam reached into one of his jacket’s pockets and pulled out an envelope. “Could you see this gets mailed, please?” he asked, handing it to Ben.

Ben glanced at the address. “Opal Townsend?”

“I know she can tell us where we can get good quality furniture at the best price,” Adam replied. “We’re going to need five beds, wash stands, and chest of drawers at the very least.” He glanced over at Hoss. “You’re still growing so I think we’d better have a bed especially made for you. I’ll ask John Miller if he knows of someone we can hire.” Then he snapped his fingers. “Almost forgot. Pa, you and Hop Sing need to get over to Placerville and buy his kitchen range and haul it back here. I saw several but I don’t know which he’d prefer.”

“We can’t go until after the branding is done,” Ben stated.

“There’s no hurry,” said Adam with a little shrug.
The next day the neighbors gathered at the Johnsons’ cabin and after dinner, Delphine asked Adam eagerly if he’d brought the drawings of the house.

He unrolled the watercolor presentation drawing first, and Delphine’s face lit up as she gazed at the drawing of the two-story clapboard house.

“Adam, it’s lovely,” she breathed. Then she turned to Ross and said happily, “Isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” he replied, gazing lovingly into her eyes.

Adam cleared his throat and once he had their attention, he smiled and spread out the floor plan, gesturing as he talked. “When you enter, the parlor is to your left and one of the three bedrooms is on your right. As you go down the hall, the kitchen and pantry are on the left and the washhouse on the right. The stairway leading upstairs is at the end of the hall. Upstairs are two bedrooms. As you can see, one faces the front yard and one the back.”

“It’s perfect,” Delphine said, then added, “except for one tiny thing. Could you add a mud room by the backdoor?”

“Of course,” Adam replied with a little grin. “Do you have any other changes?”

“It really is a lovely design, but if you don’t mind, there is just one,” she said hesitantly and he replied with a wink, “It’s your house, Delphine. I’m just the architect.”

“I’d like the parlor to be a little larger and the kitchen can be a little smaller,” she said, and Adam made another note.

“Uh, as long as we’re makin’ changes,” Ross said, “could the downstairs bedroom be a little larger?”
“As long as Delphine doesn’t mind her washhouse being smaller,” Adam replied.

“No, that’s fine,” she said.

“All right, next Sunday I’ll bring the final set of floor plans, and I’ll be able to tell you exactly how many board feet of lumber you’ll need.” Adam started to roll up the drawings but Delphine said quickly, “Could I have the one of the finished house?” He handed it to her with a smile.

“Mr. Cartwright, do you have lumber to sell?” Ross asked Ben then.

“We certainly do,” Ben said. “And at a special discount for newlyweds,” he added with a warm smile.

“As soon as you’re ready to start building, the boys ‘n’ I will be there to help,” George Talbot said.

“Todd and I will be glad to help as well,” Andy said then. Flint Johnson and Tom Edwards also promised to help. Not to be outdone by their menfolk, the women all volunteered to help Delphine sew curtains and hook rugs for her new home.

“We thank you all,” Ross said, putting an arm around Delphine’s shoulders. “As soon as I’m finished brandin’, I’m gonna start work on the house. Already picked out a perfect spot.”

As they returned to their own homes, everyone was happy for the young couple and the wives were wondering if they could persuade their husbands to replace their log cabins with houses.

As Ben and Hoss were returning from the spring roundup and branding, Hoss turned to his pa and suggested, “Let’s go see how
work is comin’ on the new house.”

“Good idea. I’m anxious to see their progress myself,” Ben said, smiling warmly at Hoss.

As they approached the clearing, Hoss’s face lit up in an enormous grin. “They raised the walls!”

“And it looks like they’re about half finished with the roof,” Ben said and his grin was as broad as his son’s. “C’mon, let’s go have a closer look.”

It was noon so the men were eating dinner. They’d brought the table out of the bunkhouse so they could eat outside in the sunshine. Ben was surprised to see Little Joe sitting beside Adam, eating fried chicken with the men.

Adam spotted Ben and Hoss and got up quickly. As he did, Little Joe turned and saw his pa and brother and ran to greet them, calling, “Howdy, Pa! Howdy, Hoss!”

“Howdy yerself, little brother,” Hoss said as he swung out of the saddle while Adam walked over to join the rest of the family.

Smiling proudly, Adam asked Ben and Hoss, “What do you think?”

“I think you have all been working hard,” Ben said, returning Adam’s smile.

“Adam invited me to have dinner here with him while you and Hoss was away,” Little Joe interjected. “Me ‘n’ Hop Sing was both here the day they raised the walls,” he added excitedly. “You shoulda seen it! We hitched up Rufus, Horatio, Caesar and Pompey to help,” he added, naming their four mules, who’d all been christened years before by a young Adam.
“Wish I coulda been here,” Hoss said dejectedly.

“I would’ve like to have been here, too, but the calves needed to be branded,” Ben said quietly. Then he turned to Adam. “You’re on schedule?”

Adam nodded and added, “We should finish the roof by Saturday, and Ike will be back on Monday with the other bricklayers and the plasterers and joiners. They’ll be working on the interior while the carpenters put the rough-sawn boards on the exterior.”

“What’s a joiner? And what’s he do?” Little Joe asked, wrinkling his nose in puzzlement.

“A joiner is a kind of carpenter but he specializes in fine woodwork,” Adam replied, smiling down at his little brother. “The joiners working on our house will build the doors and stairs and the wainscoting.”

“Wainscoting?” Little Joe and Hoss asked at the same time, causing their pa and brother to chuckle.

“Wainscoting is wooden paneling on the lower part of a wall,” Adam answered, still grinning. “I decided the hallway upstairs will have wainscoting, and the joiners will be working on that.”

“Little Joe, why don’t you finish your dinner while Hoss and I look around,” Ben suggested. “Then we’ll ride back to the cabin together.”

“Okay, Pa,” Little Joe said and scampered back to the table.

“Hey, Adam,” Hoss said then. “Our herd has grown to 1,200 head!”

Adam whistled. “Hard to believe our herd could have grown from the dozen cows and bull calf we started with to 1,200 head.”
Ben smiled as he said, “We don’t want to keep you from your dinner, Adam. We’ll look around on our own.” Adam grinned as he went to rejoin the workers at the table.

Ben and Hoss walked around the house, looking closely at how the horizontal pieces were joined with glove-like precision to the vertical posts. The same precision was seen in the joining of the diagonal braces that added rigidity to the structure. As they walked together, Ben said to Hoss, “You’re awfully quiet.”

Hoss smiled at his pa. “Oh, I was jest thinkin’ what a wonder it is that Adam can picture a house like this in his head and then put it down on paper so other people can build it.”

“Yes, your brother is talented, no doubt about that,” Ben said, looking admiringly at the structure. “The house will be magnificent when it’s complete.”

The bricklayers and the plasterers and joiners Ike had hired on Adam’s behalf arrived Monday morning and immediately started working. Adam began to walk around, watching the men work, and spotted one of the plasterers, Petersen he thought his name was, drinking from a flask so he walked over.

Keeping his tone firm but pleasant, he said, “Afraid I don’t allow drinking on the job, Petersen.”

“Li’l drink never hurt anyone, sonny,” Petersen stated, looking at Adam defiantly. Petersen’s nose was swollen and his skin was a sickly yellow tone, Adam noted, along with a slight tremor in his right hand. All signs of a hard drinker Adam knew. He wished now that he hadn’t relied on Ike to hire the plasterers, but he’d thought he could trust Ike’s judgment and his experience in construction.

Keeping his tone even, Adam said, “You can drink as much as you want on your time, but not while I’m paying you to work. There
won’t be any more warnings. If I catch you drinking on the job again, you’re fired. Do I make myself clear?” Petersen nodded, his expression surly.

Adam hoped that would be the end of it. Ike heard about what happened and explained to Adam that Petersen had been the best plasterer in Placerville, and still was—when he was sober. “I didn’t know his drinking had gotten so out of hand or I’d never have hired him,” he added.

Adam reached back to rub the tension from his neck, saying to Ike, “I made it clear if I caught him drinking on the job again, he’d be fired. He must want this job because so far he’s stayed sober.” The corners of his mouth turned up in a wry smile. “And you’re right: When he’s sober, he does excellent work.”

Three days later as Adam walked down the upstairs hallway to check on the progress in his pa’s and Little Joe’s bedrooms, he could hear one of the plasterers working in Ben’s bedroom say, “Petersen, go sleep it off. If Cartwright catches you, you’re through.”

“Let ’m try,” Adam heard Petersen reply. “No fancy-pants arch’tect who’s still green ‘s gonna fire me. No sir!”

Adam stepped into the room and saw the botched job the drunken plasterer had done. “Petersen, I told you what would happen if I caught you drinking on the job. I’ll pay you for four days and then I want you on your way back to Placerville,” he said coldly.

With an enraged roar, Petersen lurched toward Adam, thinking to throttle him, but Adam pushed him away easily. The drunk wasn’t ready to quit and managed to punch Adam in the eye before Adam hit him on the jaw and he passed out.

“Can you fix the mess he made of that wall?” Adam demanded of
the other plasterer, who’d watched the altercation warily.

“Yessir, Mr. Cartwright,” he said quickly. “I’ll fix it up so you’ll never know.”

“Fine,” Adam said curtly. “When Petersen comes to, tell him that he’ll find his wages and his gear outside the bunkhouse and he’s to take them and be on his way.”

“I’ll tell him, Mr. Cartwright,” the man promised, his tone and demeanor demonstrating an increased respect.

Chapter 7
The last Friday in May while Hop Sing and Little Joe were weeding the kitchen garden, Adam came riding up to the cabin. “Hop Sing! Little Joe!” he shouted as he swung out of the saddle. They came running around from the garden as Adam continued to shout their names.

“Where are Pa and Hoss?” Adam asked, and they sensed his pent-up excitement.

“Mistah Cartwright go to lumber camp,” Hop Sing replied and Little Joe added, “Hoss is down in the south pasture, checkin’ on some cows with bloat.”

“We finished the house!” Adam said excitedly, his face lit up by a big, dimpled smile.

“I wanna see it!” Little Joe exclaimed joyfully.

“You two go get Pa and I’ll get Hoss and we can all see it,” Adam said, still smiling proudly. He mounted up while Little Joe and Hop Sing headed for the corral.
Little Joe, Ben and Hop Sing were the first to arrive at the house. The workmen and their tools were all gone giving the clearing a deserted look. Little Joe immediately dismounted and sprinted toward the house. He stopped reluctantly at his pa’s command.

“I wanna see the house,” he whined, scuffing his boots in the dirt.

“When your brothers get here, we’ll see it together,” Ben said in his best no-nonsense tone. “Meanwhile, Buttermilk would like a drink and so would Buck and Lily.” He smiled at Little Joe. “Once that’s done, we’ll look around the outside.”

“Okay,” Little Joe said, his expression brightening.

As Ben tied Buck to the hitching post, he said, “I’m pleased Adam agreed to leave these two pine trees standing. It makes the yard seem more welcoming.”

Hop Sing looked at the porch and said thoughtfully, “Need color. Plant flowers that grow over roof. And plant more flowers in front of porch.”

“That’s an excellent idea,” Ben said, smiling at the cook. As he looked over the front of the house, he added, “I like the way Adam used the rough-sawn boards on the exterior so the house reminds me of our cabin.”

They were looking over the back of the house when they heard Adam and Hoss calling their names and hurried around to the front yard.

“Now we can go in!” Little Joe said, starting to open the door, but Adam said, “Wait. I want Pa to be first, then the rest of us.”
Ben stopped as he stepped through the door, gazing appreciatively at the large great room with its cathedral ceiling and massive fireplace. As he walked inside, he heard Hoss whistle behind him while Little Joe exclaimed, “Gosh, it’s bigger than I thought!”

Adam walked over by the fireplace and leaned against it as he watched his family explore the house, a smile of contentment on his face. His father walked over to his study while Hoss, Little Joe and Hop Sing moved toward the dining room and from there to the kitchen.

“Hey, Pa!” Little Joe shouted, “come see the brick walls in Hop Sing’s kitchen.”

“I’m coming,” Ben called. Then raising one eyebrow quizzically, he asked Adam, “Brick walls?”

“Brick is easy to clean,” Adam replied with a hint of a grin. “That’s why it’s recommended for kitchens. The washhouse has brick walls as well.”

When they joined the others in the kitchen, Hop Sing was so happy he was beaming. “Can hardly wait to use new sink and kitchen range. Many thanks, Mistah Adam.”

“Ya pump water right into the sink and then it drains out,” Hoss said with a big grin. “Ain’t that somethin’!”

“Can ya pump water in the bathtub?” Little Joe asked.

“Let’s go see,” Adam said with a big grin and they followed him to the washhouse.

“That sure is a big bathtub!” Little Joe exclaimed. “Oh, do you turn these knobs to get water?” he asked and answered his own question by turning them.
"The one on the right is for hot water and I hope someday we’ll have hot and cold running water, but now we only have cold so the stove is for heating water as well as heating the room,” Adam stated.

“Still beats takin’ a bath in one of Hop Sing’s wash tubs,” Hoss said with a laugh, clapping Adam on the back.

“I wanna see my bedroom,” Little Joe said impatiently.

“All right. We’ll go upstairs and see ours, and Hop Sing can go ahead and take a look at his,” Adam said.

No sooner were the words out of Adam’s mouth, than his youngest brother sprinted off, heading for the stairway. He flew up the stairs and then ran down the wainscoted hallway, ignoring his brothers’ rooms and his pa’s, and flung open the door to the room he knew was his. He gazed in delight at the freshly plastered walls and then ran to open the shutters and push up the sash on his window. He whirled around at the sound of his brother’s voice, asking, “So, do you like it?”

“Yeah, I sure do!” Little Joe exclaimed, smiling up at his brother. “I wanna see the other rooms,” he declared, running out his door and into the room adjoining his. “Your room is big, Pa,” he said admiringly.

“Pa is the master of the house, so he has the biggest bedroom,” Adam explained as he leaned against the doorjamb.

“Now I wanna see Hoss’s room,” Little Joe said, running past his pa and brother and then around the corner. When he entered Hoss’s room, the first thing he noticed was that while his window and his pa’s looked out at the pine trees surrounding the house, his brother’s overlooked the front yard.

“Sure is nice havin’ our own rooms, ain’t it?” Hoss asked as he
grinned at his brothers.

“Sure is!” Little Joe agreed. “Now I wanna see Adam’s room.”

While his room and Hoss’s each shared a wall with their pa’s, Adam’s room was across the hall, separate from the others. Like Hoss’s room, Adam’s overlooked the front yard. Little Joe thought it over and decided that he liked his own room the best.

“I wanna sleep in my room tonight,” he declared.

“There’s no bed, son,” Ben said with a chuckle.

“I can sleep in a bedroll on the floor,” the boy stated firmly.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Hoss said slowly while Adam added, “There’s some clean bedding over in the bunkhouse and some food and tin plates and cups.”

“All right,” Ben said, shaking his head slightly, “if you boys want to spend the night here, that’s fine. Hop Sing and I will be back tomorrow morning with the dishes, kitchen dresser, and table. We’ll also bring your clothes press and Adam’s trunk and books. Or at least as many of the crates of books as we can fit on the wagon. Then I guess we’ll be on our way to San Francisco to choose the furnishings for our new home.”

“I’m glad Mr. McKaren and Mr. Johnson agreed to let us borrow their wagons and mules because I’m sure we’re going to need them,” Adam stated.

“And I’m glad we got such a good price for our cattle because I’m sure we’re going to need the money,” Ben said with a wry grin.

Once Ben and Hop Sing rode off, Adam said to his brothers, “You two go get the bedding for our bedrolls and I’ll see what food
Adam only found a little lard, cornmeal, coffee and bacon in the bunkhouse along with the skillet, kettle and coffeepot he’d purchased. “We better save the bacon for breakfast,” he decided, “and I can make johnnycakes but we’ll need more than that for supper.”

“Let’s go fishin’,” Little Joe suggested and his brothers readily agreed. They cut themselves some fishing poles and set off for the creek.

A couple of hours later, Little Joe said despondently, “The fish aren’t bitin’ and I’m gettin’ hungry.”

“Yeah and I want more fer supper than johnnycakes so I hope there’s plenty of bacon,” Hoss said.

“I told you the bacon is for breakfast. Don’t worry; I’ll get us some meat,” Adam said, standing up and stretching. He peered up into the branches of the tree they’d been sitting under and suddenly drew his revolver with lightening speed and fired into the branches twice. “Got ‘em both,” he said with a satisfied smile.

“Got what?” Little Joe asked, jumping to his feet, adding admiringly, “you sure can draw fast, Adam.”

“Squirrels,” Adam replied, picking up the two he’d shot. “When Pa and I traveled west, we ate a lot of squirrel and rabbit.” He looked over at Hoss and grinned lazily. “We’re gonna need a lot more than two squirrels to feed Hoss.”

“I’ll find my own squirrels,” Hoss said, punching Adam’s stomach lightly while Little Joe giggled. “You just take care of your supper and Little Joe’s.”
“C’mon, Little Joe, and bring these two,” Adam commanded. “Two or three more ought to be enough for us.”

“Adam, would you teach me a fast draw like yours?” Little Joe asked as he trotted to keep up with Adam’s much longer stride.

“When you’re old enough, I will,” Adam replied, smiling down at his little brother. “Mostly it just takes practice.” He stopped suddenly and aimed his revolver at a tall pine and fired three times. “Got one but the other one was too fast,” he said, sounding disgusted. While Little Joe got the squirrel, Adam reloaded his gun. As he and Little Joe continued walking, he said seriously, “Don’t mention anything about me having a fast draw around Pa. He doesn’t like it. I hadn’t used a revolver since I went to Harvard, so I had to practice in secret to be as fast and as accurate as I used to be. But I don’t want him to know about it because I know he wouldn’t approve.”

“Okay, Adam, it’ll be our secret,” Little Joe said, feeling very proud that his big brother trusted him.

“Fried squirrel tastes pretty good,” Little Joe said as he licked the grease from his fingers. The three brothers sat on the hearth of the immense fireplace where Adam had cooked dinner, holding their plates on their laps and eating with their fingers.

Adam grinned as he said, “This reminds me of when I was a little boy. Pa and I would sit around the campfire, eating off of tin plates like these. After we’d washed up, he’d tell me stories about when he was a sailor or we’d sing songs.”

“Like the one about the drunk sailor?” Little Joe asked eagerly.

“Yeah, that was one of my favorites,” Adam replied with a wink. “After we wash up, do you want to sing?” Hoss and Little Joe both thought that would be fun.
“We can wash the dishes in the new sink,” Hoss suggested, but Adam frowned.

“I think Hop Sing would like to be the first to use the sink,” he said and Little Joe agreed, so they took everything over to the bunkhouse and washed up there. It was growing dark so Adam got the oil lamp he’d purchased in Placerville and used his flint and steel to light it. Little Joe kept close to his brothers as they crossed the yard, the lamplight casting ghostly shadows in the dying light. The dark empty house now seemed sinister to Little Joe and he wished he was back at the cabin, but he didn’t want his older brothers to think he was a baby, scared of the dark.

“Let’s sing about the drunk sailor,” he suggested as he hurried toward the fireplace and its light. Their voices reverberated through the empty house as they sang the sea shanties their father had taught them and then other favorites. Little Joe enjoyed the singing so much that he didn’t feel nervous, but when Adam said it was time for them to go to bed, he noticed the house was totally dark except for the dying fire in the fireplace and the meager illumination provided by Adam’s lamp. He didn’t want to go up the dark stairs and down the dark hallway and sleep by himself, but he didn’t want to admit it to his brothers.

“Ya know, Adam,” Hoss said, “I got an idea. Why don’t we all put our bedrolls in Little Joe’s room? This big empty house is kinda spooky.” Little Joe sighed in relief. Hoss thought it was scary too.

“It is eerie without the furniture,” Adam agreed. “I’ll lead the way,” he added, picking up the lamp. “Little Joe, you’re next and, Hoss, you can bring up the rear.”

“Don’t walk so fast!” Little Joe snapped as Adam started off at
his usual pace.

Adam immediately slowed. “I’m sorry. I forgot my legs are lots longer than yours.”

After stopping first in Adam’s room and then Hoss’s for their bedrolls, the three brothers arranged their bedrolls on the floor of Little Joe’s room. Little Joe moved his close to Hoss’s while Adam put his near the window and set the lamp on the windowsill. Once he saw his brothers were settled, he blew out the lamp and lay down. In the quiet, they could hear the tree crickets outside and the call of a burrowing owl. Further in the distance they heard a pack of wolves howling to each other. Hearing these familiar sounds and knowing his brothers were nearby, Little Joe relaxed and fell asleep. Hoss said quietly to Adam, “Ya know, it really was kinda spooky downstairs,” and Adam chuckled softly.

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Two days before Ross and Delphine’s wedding on the last Saturday in June, the Cartwrights returned from San Francisco with three wagons and a buckboard loaded down with furniture. Hop Sing drove the buckboard with the pieces of everyone’s bed but Hoss. (Hoss’s bed wasn’t finished yet. The joiner in Placerville told them it should be ready in another week.) The buckboard also contained bed linens, blankets, pillows and mattresses and some rugs. Adam drove the Johnsons’ wagon and it was loaded with armchairs and tables of different sizes, their washstands, plus the standup desk he’d purchased for himself. Hoss drove the McKarens’ wagon containing the dining room table and chairs, a buffet, a credenza and Ben’s partner’s desk and chair. Ben drove the final wagon, which held a grandfather clock, a breakfront, a large bookcase with glass doors and five chests of drawers.
As soon as they pulled into the front yard, Ben took charge. “Adam, I want you to water the mules. Then I want you to return the Johnsons’ wagon and mules.”

“Okay if I stop by Ross’s place to let him know we’re back?” Adam asked. “He may be thinking he needs another best man.”

“That’s fine, but don’t stay too long. We’ve got lots to do here.” Adam nodded as he unhitched their mules first and led them to the horse trough. “Hop Sing and Little Joe, you start carrying the mattresses, bedding and pillows to the different bedrooms,” Ben instructed next. “Hoss, you and I will start unloading the Johnsons’ wagon first and then the McKarens’. Once we have the McKarens’ wagon unloaded, then you’ll return it and their mules.”

By the time Adam had finished with the mules, the Johnsons’ wagon was empty so he set off, stopping first at the cabin to get Beauty and his tack. It was a beautiful summer day—warm enough he didn’t need his jacket but not enough to be uncomfortable. He was feeling so happy that as he drove along he began to sing:

Black, black, black
is the color of my true love’s hair
Her lips are like a rose so fair
And the prettiest face and the neatest hands.
I love the grass whereon she stands
She with the wondrous hair.

As he sang, he found his thoughts turning to Julia Quincy. Her hair had been golden brown but he’d certainly thought her heart-shaped face with its large brown eyes, retroussé nose and soft mouth was the prettiest he’d ever seen. He could still remember what it had felt like to hold her in his arms and taste her sweet kisses. He recalled how he’d longed for the day when they
married and he could make her truly his. He was so sure that he’d found his true love, but how wrong he’d been. She’d loved the ease and security of her life in Boston, her position in society more than she’d loved him.

His thoughts turned then to Ross and Delphine. They were so much in love; one only had to be in the same room with them to see it in the intimate glances they shared or the way Ross would reach for Delphine’s hand and entwine their fingers.

Ross found his true love here in Western Utah so maybe I will, too. Or maybe Carl was right, he thought. Oh, not about a wife being a ball and chain, but I am only twenty-two and I’m not sure I want to settle down and start a family like Aaron is doing. There’s plenty of time for that.

He wasn’t in the mood to sing love songs now so he switched to the comic adventures of Betsy from Pike. As he pulled up in front of the Johnsons’ cabin he was singing:

The Shanghai ran off, and the cattle all died,  
That morning the last piece of bacon was fried  
Ike got discouraged, Betsy got mad,  
The dog drooped his tail and looked wonderfully sad.

Mrs. Johnson hurried out, smiling a welcome. “Adam Cartwright! I thought I recognized your singing. When did your family get back?”

“Just this morning, ma’am” he replied with a smile of his own. “Pa asked me to return your wagon and mules, and thank you for their use. I’ll take care of them for you.”

“I’d appreciate that, Adam,” she said, smoothing back a tendril of her carrot-colored hair. “We’re shorthanded right now.”

“That so?” Adam queried.
“Yes. Our hand, Harrison, just up and left today. Said he was headed to Placerville with a piece of rock he got from one of the miners. Got the fool notion it might be worth something,” she added with a snort.

“I suppose he went to have the rock assayed,” Adam said, talking to himself. Then he smiled again at Mrs. Johnson, and tipping his hat, he drove the wagon toward the barn.

I won’t say anything to Pa, he told himself. If I’m right about it being silver ore, we’ll all find out soon enough. At least the silver is in the mountain and not on the Ponderosa.

When Adam left the Johnsons, he headed for Ross’s new house. As he approached, he saw Ross was painting the house while his future father-in-law and brothers-in-law were using mules to raise the walls of a new barn. Young Matthew was the first to spot Adam approach, and yelled, “Hey Ross! Here comes Adam!”

Ross called, “Del, Adam’s here!” and she and her sisters stopped hanging curtains and hurried onto the porch with Evangeline in the lead.

As Adam swung out of the saddle, Ross grinned at Delphine, saying, “I told ya Adam’d be back in time for the weddin’.” Then he called out, “Howdy, Adam. Whatta ya think of the house?”

Adam tied Beauty to the hitching rail and then said with a big smile, “The house looks wonderful. I like the brown paint you chose.”

“We all went to Placerville so Del and Ross could choose the paint,” Evangeline said, smiling shyly at Adam.

“We had a hard time choosing between dark brown and medium brown,” Delphine said, “but we finally decided on medium.”
“And we’re gonna paint the shutters green,” Ross added.

“Palm green,” Evangeline corrected. “It’s very pretty.”

“Why don’t you come inside and take a look,” Delphine invited, but regretfully Adam shook his head.

“I wish I could, but I’d better get going because we have a lot of unloading to do.” He grinned at Ross, saying, “I’ll see you Saturday morning at 10:30 sharp at the Talbots’.”

“You be on time,” Ross said as Adam mounted Beauty, “cuz I’m gonna need help with the durn tie I hafta wear.” Adam was laughing as he rode out of the yard.

It was a little past noon when Adam rode up to the new house. There was no sign of the McKarens’ wagon and mules so he knew Hoss must be delivering them. His father walked out onto the porch, having heard Adam ride up.

“I’m glad you’re back,” Ben said. “Hop Sing is fixing dinner and in the meantime we need to unload the last wagon.”

Adam let Beauty drink and then unsaddled her and staked her on the picket line with their four mules. Ben carried Beauty’s saddle into the cabin that had served as a workshop and now would be a temporary barn. That accomplished, they began the task of unloading the remaining furniture. They had finished unloading the last chest of drawers when Hoss and Chub rode up. He took care of Chub and then the three of them carried in the breakfront, the large bookcase and the grandfather clock.

“There, that’s done,” Ben said, dusting his hands as Adam and Hoss set the clock by the front door.

Hop Sing came out of the kitchen then, trailed by Little Joe. “Dinner ready so you wash up,” he commanded.
“Hop Sing had me fill the pitchers on your wash stands,” Little Joe added with a sunny smile. “I got to use the new sink.”

When the three men came back downstairs, Little Joe was just finishing setting the new dining room table, which Hop Sing had covered with a red-and-white checkered tablecloth.

“You only set four places, son,” Ben commented and Little Joe said, “That’s how many Hop Sing told me to set. He said he’s gonna eat in the kitchen.”

Hop Sing entered the room then with a tureen of beef stew and Ben said, “Hop Sing, now what’s this nonsense about you eating in the kitchen?”

“Not nonsense, Mistah Cartwright,” replied Hop Sing as he sat the tureen in the center of the table. “You have fine house now so not proper I eat with family.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Adam exclaimed, but Hop Sing shook his head and said, “Hop Sing know what proper if Cartwrights do not.” Then he headed back to the kitchen.

“We can’t force him to eat with us,” Ben said.

“I never dreamed that he’d react this way,” Adam stated, his expression baffled.

“Maybe he’ll get tired of eatin’ by himself in the kitchen,” Hoss suggested.

“I guess we’ll just have to wait and see,” Ben commented and just then Hop Sing returned with a platter of hot biscuits. They were a darker brown than usual and Hop Sing explained, “Cooking with range different, but learning.”

As they enjoyed the beef stew and biscuits, Ben laid out his
plans for the rest of the afternoon. “After dinner we’ll put the beds together. Once that’s done, Hoss will go bring a load of hay and our horses here. Adam, you’ll take the buckboard and bring back the chickens and their coop and tie Blossom behind the buckboard. Little Joe and I will make the beds and then we’ll put everyone’s clothes up.”

“Let’s put my bed together first. Please,” Little Joe begged.

“All right,” Ben said with a smile for his youngest. When they finished eating, they walked up the stairs and down the hall to Little Joe’s room. His chest of drawers was sitting by the window while his washstand was by the door. The bed’s headboard and footboard were propped against a wall and the bed rails were on the floor.

“Where do you want the bed?” Ben asked, and Little Joe pointed. “Here, across from the window.”

The four of them quickly fit the bed rails to the bed posts. Hoss noted the bed fit together with the same mortise and tenon joints that the carpenters had used in constructing the house. Once the frame was assembled, Ben suggested, “Adam and Hoss, why don’t you go put my frame together while I tie the ropes for Little Joe’s bed.” They left and while Little Joe watched, Ben deftly tied a sailor’s knot and then quickly began roping lengthwise, wrapping the ropes around the pegs on the bed rails. When he finished, he said to Little Joe, “Now I’m going to need your help. We’re going to weave the rope back and forth between the side pegs, going under and over the lengthwise rope. You take the left side and I’ll take the right.”

They worked quickly and when they got to the last peg, Ben tied the rope around it. “You’re a good helper,” he told Little Joe, smiling affectionately, “but I’ll do the tightening myself.”
“I could help,” Little Joe insisted, but his pa only smiled at him.

“No, I’m afraid you’re too young to be able to pull the ropes tight enough,” Ben said kindly. “Just watch.” Ben went back to the first peg and began pulling the rope as tight as possible. When he finished tightening all the pegs, he retied the last knot and then he and Little Joe lifted his new mattress, which was stuffed with cotton and wool, onto the ropes.

“Let’s see how your brothers are doing,” Ben said, ruffling his son’s hair. “Hmm. Pa’s going to cut your hair tonight.”

“Aw, do ya hafta?” Little Joe complained.

“Yes, I have to,” Ben replied while thinking how different his oldest and youngest were when it came to their hair because Adam always kept his curly hair cut short.

Adam was tightening his rope when Little Joe and Ben found him. “Where’s Hoss?” Little Joe asked.

“He’s bringing up my desk,” Adam replied and they heard footsteps coming up the stairs. “He’s going to put it in the corner by the window.” Little Joe had been standing there and quickly moved out of the way. Just in time because Hoss appeared in the doorway with the desk.

“Why do ya want a desk where ya have to stand up to work?” Hoss asked, puzzlement written all over his expressive features.

“It’s easier to stand up and work on drawings and plans,” Adam explained. “When I have to bend over a desk like Pa’s, my back starts to ache after a while.

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Hoss said. Then he slapped Adam on the back saying, “I guess we’d better be on our way. I’ll help
ya catch the chickens; we can put ‘em in the empty crates yer books was in.”

The Cartwrights and Hop Sing spent a quiet first evening in their new home. Hoss and Little Joe played checkers using the new game table while Adam and Ben put Adam’s books in the new bookcase behind Ben’s desk. When they filled it, they put the remainder on the middle shelf of the breakfront that stood by the fireplace. Meanwhile, Hop Sing was busy organizing his kitchen and pantry.

The house no longer seemed menacing to Little Joe so he didn’t complain any more than usual about having to go to bed before everyone else. He took a candle and started up the stairs and Ben called, “I’ll be up in a few minutes to say goodnight.”

Little Joe walked quickly down the dark hallway to his room. He smiled when he saw his new bed, and setting his candle on his chest of drawers, he quickly changed into his nightshirt and then knelt by his bed and said his prayers. He was just getting into bed when Ben entered the room.

Sitting on the bed beside Little Joe, Ben asked, “How do you like your new room, son?”

“I like it a lot,” the boy said, and then yawned sleepily. “I’m sure glad Adam learned about how to build houses when he was at school.” He could hardly keep his eyes open as he said, “’Night, Pa.”

“Goodnight,” Ben said, smiling. Then he dropped a kiss on his youngest’s forehead. He realized that he’d forgotten to cut Little Joe’s hair. He’d do it tomorrow before Little Joe took a bath so he’d be clean for the wedding the day after tomorrow.

When he came back downstairs, he saw Hoss was ready for their game of checkers while Adam was sitting in one of their new
leather armchairs, a leg dangling over one of the chair arms, his nose buried in a book. Ben smiled at the sight. Adam might be a grown man now, but some things would never change. He let his gaze travel around the great room, thinking that it was both grand and homey at the same time. Adam’s idea of arranging the three leather armchairs and the red velvet wingchair in a semicircle around the fireplace and placing the pedestal table in the center gave it a cozy feeling.

*I’m also happy Adam learned how to design and build houses, he thought. I can picture future generations of Cartwrights living here in this house. It will be part of their legacy here on the Ponderosa.*

~ ~ ~

The morning of Delphine and Ross’s wedding the Cartwrights were awakened by deafening claps of thunder and sheets of rain lashing their windows.

*I sure hope the rain lets up before the wedding, Adam thought as he sat up and stretched. He dressed quickly and then hurried out to the temporary barn to care for Beauty and Blossom. His father and brothers joined him a few minutes later.*

“Some storm, ain’t it?” Hoss commented as he and Adam mucked out the makeshift stalls. “Too bad cuz I bet Ross and Delphine was hopin’ fer a sunny day.”

“The wedding’s at eleven o’clock and the storm will most likely be over before then,” Ben said as he used a hoofpick on Buck while Little Joe milked Blossom.

They finished their chores and then went to their bedrooms to dress in their best clothes for the wedding, Adam taking some hot water to shave with. He just finished tying his necktie
when Hoss appeared in the doorway, holding his tie.

“Adam, can ya help me with this?” he asked.

“No, ‘fraid not,” Adam replied as he put on his bluish-gray frockcoat. “You’ll have to ask Pa because I’ve got to leave now. I promised Ross I’d be there to help him with his tie,” he added with a wink and Hoss chuckled.

“Say, could I use some of yer bay rum?” he asked as Adam hurried by him.

“Sure, help yourself,” Adam said.

The rain had stopped, but the sky was a sullen gray so Adam brought his mackintosh with him just in case the rain started up again. He arrived at the Talbots and found Ross pacing in front of the cabin, in a black frock coat and a black and white striped silk waistcoat, but no necktie. Adam had never seen his friend attired so formally and couldn’t suppress a grin.

“Adam’s here,” Ross shouted, and Matthew Talbot, wearing a starched white shirt, ran out of the cabin and over to Adam. “I’ll take care of yer horse, Adam,” he said with a smile. “I ain’t never seen anyone dressed as fancy as you and Ross and Pa, and I wouldn’t want ya to get yer clothes dirty.”

“Thanks,” Adam said as he swung out of the saddle and handed Matthew Beauty’s reins before hurrying over to join Ross.

“You sure look different all dressed up,” Adam said, grinning crookedly.

“So do you,” Ross said, eyeing Adam’s bluish-gray frock coat, trousers of a lighter shade of bluish-gray and blue silk waistcoat. “Did ya really dress like this every day when you were in college?”
“That’s right,” Adam replied. “Can’t say as I miss it,” he added, winking at Ross. “Now, where’s your tie?” Ross reached into one of his pockets and pulled out a rumpled necktie. “Um, I think we’d better trade,” Adam said. He tied his tie on Ross and said, “Now I need a mirror to tie mine.” Matthew had been watching the proceedings with interest and offered the use of his pa’s shaving mirror.

However, it was Evangeline who brought the mirror outside. She was the maid of honor and so had a new dress of pink muslin and new pink ribbons on her pigtails. “Here’s the mirror, Adam,” she said with a shy smile. “Oh my, you sure are handsome,” she said as she handed him the mirror, but then her face turned fiery red and she ran back in the cabin.

“You certainly have a way with women, or should I say, little girls,” Ross chuckled as held the mirror for Adam, who rolled his eyes.

“Do you have the ring?” Adam asked and Ross reached into a pocket and pulled it out. He handed it to Adam, who carefully put it in his pocket, as Rev. Bennett arrived followed by the McKarens, Johnsons, the rest of the Cartwrights and the Edwards.

It was too wet and muddy to have the wedding outside as planned so all the guests crowded into the cabin. Rev. Bennett, Ross and Adam stood in front of the fireplace and as soon as everyone was inside, Rueben knocked on the door of the lean-to that served as his sisters’ bedroom. Evangeline came out first, followed by Delphine on her father’s arm. Adam saw that like Elsie, Delphine was dressed in blue, and remembered the old rhyme Mrs. Townsend had quoted: “Married in Blue, you will always be true”. Delphine wore a lace veil that been in her mother’s family for three generations, passed from mother to daughter. After her father gave her away, she lifted her veil
back, so Ross could see her face, radiant with love for him.

The ceremony was brief but moving. Mrs. Talbot cried throughout and Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Edwards were dabbing at their eyes by the time the young couple exchanged their vows. Ben had to blink back tears as he remembered the three times he’d promised to love and to cherish, only to be parted all too soon by death. Adam and Hoss found themselves wondering if they would be as lucky as Ross. Little Joe was just in a hurry to eat a piece of cake.

~ ~ ~ ~

A few days later, Ben and Adam were riding to the northeast corner of the Ponderosa to see about moving the herd there so they wouldn’t overgraze the south pasture.

“Look, Pa,” Adam said suddenly. “There’s smoke!”

They galloped toward the smoke, reining Buck and Beauty in abruptly at the site of five men and their pack mules, loaded down with pickaxes and shovels. Their campfire was still smoldering and the men were obviously preparing to leave.

“You’re trespassing on my property,” Ben said evenly, “and you’d oblige me by putting out that fire and getting off my land.”

“All right, mister,” one of the men said, getting a shovel and smothering the fire with dirt. Another man said, “We’re leavin’ anyway but they’ll be plenty more men cuttin’ through here on the way to Sun Mountain.”

“Sun Mountain?” Ben repeated, then glanced at Adam, who shrugged slightly.

“Ain’t ya heard?” a third man asked. “There’s rock on Sun Mountain yielding thousands of dollars worth of silver! It’s a
bonanza!

As Ben and Adam watched the men ride off with their mules, Ben stated somberly, “And so it begins.”

“And our lives will never be the same,” said Adam, his tone a mixture of apprehension and exhilaration.

End Notes:

Author’s Note: There are many discrepancies on Bonanza about the ranch house. In “The Philip Deidesheimer Story,” Gil Fenton tells Deidesheimer that Adam designed and built the house, but in other episodes it’s stated that Joe was born in the house. Since Adam is only twelve years older than Joe, they can’t both be true. I choose to believe Adam designed and built the house because it makes more sense to me. Another inconsistency is the location of the bedrooms. For example, in “The Magnificent Adah” Hoss explains he took so long because Adam’s door was open and tells Joe he’s lucky that he lives at the other end of the house. Yet, in “Vengeance” it appears Hoss’s room is next to Joe’s. Since “The Magnificent Adah” is a first season episode and closer to the time frame of this story, I put Hoss’s room at the front of the house by Adam’s. The furniture in the great room is different in the first season and I used “A Rose for Lotta” and “Mr. Henry Comstock” as my guides for the furniture the Cartwrights purchase for that room. My description of Hop Sing’s kitchen comes from “Feet of Clay” and I plead guilty to moving the kitchen, washhouse and Hop Sing’s bedroom around to where they made sense to me. I used a combination of “Elizabeth, My Love” and “The Spitfire” for how Adam’s bedroom was furnished, but mostly “The Spitfire”. For the furnishings in Joe’s bedroom, I used “Marie, My Love” and “My Brother’s Keeper”. I used “The Outcast” for descriptions of the front
References:
The basis of Adam and Dave Townsend’s conversation in Chapter 1 comes from The American Pageant: A History of the Republic by Thomas A. Bailey. For information about Nevada in the late 1850s, I used The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode by Ronald M. James and the following web sites:
http://www.nevada-history.org/beginning.html#invasion
http://www.nevadaheritage.com/timeline/timelinemainpage.htm
I found the lyrics to Kiss Me Quick and Go, which was written in 1856, at the following web site:
http://www.pdmusic.org/1800s/56kmqag.txt
I learned about Joe Froggers, a type of cookie that existed in 1858, at:
I found information on the McCormick reaper at the following web sites:
http://www.vaes.vt.edu/steeles/mccormick/harvest.html
http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blmccormick.htm
I used this web site to describe what Little Joe saw as he watched Adam shave:
I used the following web sites for information on cattle drives:
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3741/is_n12_v39/ai_12111899/
http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodpioneer.html#cowboy
http://www.cowboyshowcase.com/cowboy_chuckwagon.htm
For information on Placerville, I used
http://ci.placerville.ca.us/our_city/about/history.asp and
Wikipedia. For information on the Cary House Hotel I used http://www.caryhouse.com/history_new.htm
Adam quotes from the works of Christopher Marlowe, Robert Herrick and Ben Jonson in Chapter 3.
I used the following web sites to get information about bowling during this time:
http://www.bowlingballs.us/bowling.htm
http://www.tenpinbowling.org/view.php?page=the_game.history
http://www.hickoksports.com/history/bowling.shtml
I found information on the history of Halloween in the U.S. at the following:
http://halloween.monstrous.com/mischief_night.htm
http://www.jeremiahproject.com/culture/halloween.html
I used the web site http://www.onlinequilter.com/MommyMe/19thCenturyChildrensGames/tabid/275/Default.aspx for information on Fox and Geese
I used the following web sites for information relating to Adam’s house:
http://www.popularmechanics.com/home/improvement/outdoor-buildings/4213580?click=main_sr
http://chestofbooks.com/architecture/Building-Construction-V4/Plumbing-Fixtures-Sinks.html
http://sawdustmaking.com/Wood/wood.html
http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/documnts/fplgtr/fplgtr113/ch05.pdf
I checked www.winklerandmoss.com/images/heritage-color.jpg for the colors Ross and Delphine could paint their house.