

THE
NUBIAN
BARNSTORMER

VOLUME 1
PERSISTENCE

CHAPTER 1
VISION OF DESTINY

by **DESSA LITTLE**

To All of Us Who Dare to Be Different

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Chapter 1
Vision of Destiny

The flutters in Ava's stomach alert her this will be a significant day. "Am I excited? Or anxious? But why?!" she wonders.

Yes, she is about to become her family's first college graduate. But her train ride each August to Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University is normal. As are the glares of the white people they pass on the way to the colored section.

Her diploma will be in teaching: the most challenging course of study available at the institution. Now that the end is near, however, she's finally admitted to herself that she has no passion for it. "I can't see myself in a classroom."

The sweltering morning, typical of Tulsa, adds to her agitation. Her new peach taffeta dress provides some relief: two inches above her ankles, it's her first time wearing the latest fashion! No longer burdened by a petticoat and a floor-length skirt, her train ride will be more bearable.

She watches Mama as they continue to stroll along the Frisco train platform. Her mother insists that short frocks are for the young. Though it's old-fashioned, she decides the dress her mother wears is practical but elegant, like Mama.

Ava's straw hat shields her eyes from the sun, but not from the white travelers' expressions that range from disbelief to disdain. The only residents of Greenwood most of them see are the domestics or laborers who work for them. She knows they consider well-dressed Negroes an affront. Again, typical of Tulsa.

She glances back at her younger brothers. Andrew carries her satchel while Artest carries her books. Though he's only 16 years old, Andrew is now taller than her. She grins at the boys, who respond in kind.

Once they reach the colored section, Papa hurries towards them holding hands with Aton, the youngest. She turns to Mama to share a chuckle at how funny Papa looks. Instead, she notices tears welling in her mother's brown eyes.

"My brilliant, beautiful baby is leaving me again," Mama says as she caresses Ava's face.

"Mama, you are the most brilliant and beautiful!"

"Both my girls are fine-looking!" Papa's voice booms when he reaches them. "But I have to agree with her, Mattie. You are the loveliest woman I've ever seen." He places an arm across Mama's shoulders and squeezes.

"You are pretty, Mama. She's funny-looking!" Andrew pipes in. This earns him a shove from his sister, which he returns, and snickers from his brothers.

"Boy, hush! And a more lady-like demeanor, Miss Ava..." Papa starts, until his voice trails off.

Ava follows his gaze to a white couple glaring from their section of the platform. Papa's response is to square his shoulders and stand straighter. She does the same.

Suddenly, a noise similar to a sputtering automobile engine approaches overhead. All eyes peer at the sky as it grows louder. Little Aton points at the object. "What's that?"

Ava recognizes it instantly. "An airplane!"

She has seen sketches of aircraft with news stories about Negro aviators in the Tulsa Crescent, the Oklahoma Providence and the Chicago Advocate, which Papa has delivered to their home. "The drawings do not compare!"

The wooden bird dips twice in the middle. The aviator sits in the one close to the tail. Short thin legs with little wheels poke out from its bottom. The propeller and double wings complete the flying machine. "I've never seen anything more beautiful!"

It finally fades from view and the noise dies down. "Bet that's Mr. Billey!" Papa says. "My client Mr. Wheeler is his butler. He told me the man purchased one of those contraptions and was going to attempt to fly it! It appears today is the day."

Ava's true passion is engineering, including aeronautics. Only agricultural engineering--farming--is offered at Colored Agricultural and Normal (or "CANU" as the students call it). With the support of their advisor, Professor Adams, she helped establish the Engineering Club.

She and six other students pore over scholarly journals and books, debate designs of bridges, dams and towers in the United States and on the Continent, even craft their own blueprints and models. Today, she has seen with her own eyes the marvel of 20th century engineering!

The train to Chandler, the first leg of her journey to Langston, arrives. After kissing her parents and her brothers, she grabs her satchel and books and boards the Jim Crow car.

She takes a seat by a window, so she can wave good-bye to her family as the train departs. A thought pops into her head: "I want to fly an airplane!"

Astonished, she leans back in her seat. She quickly sits up, however, when she remembers where she is. "Mustn't stain my new dress!"

She surveys the car. Most of its occupants are also dressed in their finery. The best seats, old and tattered, are occupied by women, children and the elderly. The able-bodied men sit on wooden benches.

They all must place their feet on a grimy floor that hasn't been cleaned since the car transported livestock. At least, it smells that way.

But what she's seen today fortifies her. "The articles assert that partaking in aeronautics is a progressive way to uplift the Race. I can achieve much more than this world expects from someone like me!" "I will fly!" Ava chants quietly as Tulsa fades from view.

Her second and last train pulls into the Frost depot. As much as she hates the Frisco Railroad's Jim Crow cars, the ones on the Rock Island Line are even worse. She suspects that the dirtiest and most decrepit cars are chosen for this stretch because most occupants are traveling to CANU.

As the locomotive stops, she spies her Uncle Solomon and two of her cousins. They sit in their buckboard wagon, waiting for her.

Though Uncle Solomon and Papa are brothers, two men couldn't be more different. Papa bought a brand new automobile this year. Uncle Solomon swears he'll never give up his horses.

Free from the rail car, she steps onto the platform. Uncle Solomon rushes to her. They hug.

"You look right pretty! Pearl made me change my shirt so I wouldn't mess up your frock as I'm wont to do!" Uncle Solomon is loud: one thing he shares with Papa.

Aunt Pearl is Uncle Solomon's wife. They have five sons--including the two who are here to meet her. "Hey, Ava," the boys say while standing behind their father.

"Hey, Jimmy! Hey, Johnny," she replies. She hugs them and rubs the tops of their heads. This elicits the giggles she can always count on.

Out of nine children in the Odell family, she is the only girl. That has its advantages--and disadvantages.

"Jimmy, get her things." Uncle Solomon helps her up to the front seat, while Jimmy and Johnny sit in the back of the wagon with her satchel and books.

She savors the sweet smells of the grass and the trees on the way to Langston. She appreciates that small towns like it exist--with farms, cattle ranches, churches, its own little business district and, most importantly, CANU.

She feels most at home in Greenwood's urban setting, but she recognizes the importance of Negroes owning land. For all of its faults, Oklahoma is the only place she knows where Negroes control their own municipalities.

Tipping her head back, she closes her eyes. She listens to the roughhousing between the boys and Uncle Solomon's threats to "tan their hides." They always remain just threats, another way Uncle Solomon and Papa are alike.

Uncle Solomon clears his throat. She knows what's next. "How's Samuel?"

Ava lowers her head, opens her eyes and smiles at her uncle. She has his full attention. "Papa's doing well."

"And Mattie? And your brothers?"

"All well. Mama and Papa send their regards."

Uncle Solomon goes back to minding the road. She dons a neutral expression before he turns back to her. "Guess he's still makin' all that big money up in Greenwood."

"Apparently so." She's proud that there's no hint of a chuckle in her response. He presses his lips together, lifts the left corner of his mouth and grunts.

Ava faces away from him, pretending to observe the trees. The smirk she has suppressed surfaces. She believes the discord between her father and uncle is now a silly habit.

It started when Papa decided to leave the Odell family farm and move to Greenwood. She was three when Papa chose to take Mama and her to the new Negro section of north Tulsa.

Though Papa is the eldest (by two years), Uncle Solomon always has to have things his way. She has few memories from that time, but recalls him trying to get Papa to stay.

Instead of taking their nap, Ava and cousin Josiah sneak into the parlor and hide behind the couch. They play quietly with their favorite toys. The adults burst into the room with no idea they have a silent, captive audience.

"Samuel, we come to Indian Territory so we could have our own, so we can hand it down to our children. This will always be ours! Can't nobody take it from us!"

"I ain't no farmer. The land in Tulsa's been bought by colored men and they only sellin' lots to coloreds, just like here in Langston. Negroes gonna own it all!"

"We already got our own! You really think them white people gonna leave y'all be? You an' your high fallutin' ideas! What's wrong with bein' a farmer?"

"Ain't nothin' wrong with it. Better than pickin' cotton for the white man. But you love workin' the land. It ain't in me. Time I make the life I want."

"You is a damn fool! Think about Mattie an' Ava."

"I will take care of 'em! How I see fit!" Papa storms out.

"I'll be here when you come back with your tail between your legs!" Uncle Solomon shouts. He grumbles as he stalks to the kitchen to find Aunt Pearl.

But Papa never moved back. Instead, he took the money he had saved from his yearly share of the farm's profits and bought the plot of land where their house now stands.

He leased his office in the building that he now owns on North Greenwood Avenue. It's the main street of the business district, called Deep Greenwood by the locals. Within five years, Odell Accountancy Ltd. was thriving. Papa became a very wealthy man.

As they enter Langston, they ride past the road that leads to CANU. Ava always stays with the family when she first arrives. She returns to her room in the Ladies' Dormitory a few days before classes begin.

They arrive at the farm's main house. It's about as large as the Odell residence on North Detroit Avenue, but more country than grand. The two-story white house with its wrap-around porch was built by Papa and Uncle Solomon.

As they pull up to the front, her cousin Josiah and Aunt Pearl run down the porch steps to greet her.

Josiah reaches the buckboard. In one swift move, he lowers her to the ground and gives her a hug. "They let people lookin' any ole kinda way out and about!" he teases.

"Hush!" Aunt Pearl smacks his arm. "Hey, Li'l Sis!" She and Aunt Pearl hug and kiss each other's cheeks. "Go clean up. Got all your favorites: ham, cucumbers, corn--even made you a pie! Josh! Jenks! Ava's here. We ready to eat!"

Aunt Pearl is yelling for her other cousins. In order, eldest to youngest, they are: Josiah (the same age as Ava), Joshua, Jenkins, James and Johnathan. Or, as everybody calls them: Josie, Josh, Jenks, Jimmy and Johnny.

As she's about to climb the porch stairs, Ava stops. She sees Josie's wife Carrie holding hands with their little boy, Harry, who's about knee-high. Carrie's very pregnant!

Ava stays on the porch while Aunt Pearl continues into the house. She lifts Harry and kisses his mother's cheek.

Carrie reciprocates and smiles shyly. "Hey, Ava."

'Sweet--and quiet! Josie's perfect match! He never stops talking.' Ava grins at him.

"Don't start," he warns playfully. Ava was about to comment on Carrie repeating Aunt Pearl's pattern: she had her boys every three years. Mama was different. Andrew came along when she was four (a year after they moved to Greenwood), Artest three years later and Aton three after that.

"I told you to build a bigger house..." Ava begins. Josie, with help from Uncle Solomon and the older boys, built a smaller home behind the main house for himself and Carrie when they were first married.

Before Josie can respond, Aunt Pearl yells, "Y'all get in here. Food's ready!"

After Ava freshens up in the bathroom, she walks downstairs and enters the dining room. She beams at the sight of everyone sitting around the huge table.

She takes her seat across from Josie. He licks his tongue at her and she does the same to him. Carrie and Harry snicker at them. Aunt Pearl smacks Jimmy's and Johnny's hands away from the food as Uncle Solomon says grace.

Ava bows her head, thankful for her family. "And I'm thankful that I now know what I want to do with my life!"

"This war is the perfect opportunity for colored engineers to gain entrance into the military!" Martin Paulson stands in the middle of the Humanities Professors' Lounge as he always does when he makes his assertions.

"Bet his father sounds the same when he preaches!"

Bryant Norcross always challenges him. "They're just now training colored soldiers to be Army officers. In Iowa, of all places! If they have no use for our brawn in the war effort, they're definitely not going to utilize our brains."

She enjoys the Engineering Club's debates. They discuss current events and consider how these developments may impact their personal futures and the future of the Race.

This one began with her account of viewing the airplane in Tulsa. "How can you think they will involve colored engineers at all, much less let us fly with the air corps?" Bryant adds.

She leans forward in the leather chair she always commandeers. It's not only the most comfortable seat in the room, but it also reminds her of Papa's chair at home. "The Black Hawk is flying with great success in Europe!" she interjects.

"He flies for France, not the United States." Bryant sits on the arm of her chair. "If they won't let colored men serve in any important capacity, I'm afraid you'll have to give up your notion of them letting a colored woman fly!" He grins down at her.

She knows that he's trying to goad her. Though she finds him attractive, she doesn't take his attentions seriously.

"Who ever heard of such a thing--a woman aviator?" Montague Driver scoffs. "You would never entertain such ridiculous thoughts, would you Varcella?"

"Of course not! Physical feats such as taking flight should be left to men," Varcella Barnes replies.

Montague, Cualey Porter and Wilson Guy occupy their usual spots on the couch with her. Today, Wilson's the unlucky one not beside her. They support her response with "Here, here!" They call themselves the "Three Musketeers," though they challenge each other for Varcella's attention.

Professor Adams shakes his head at the couch's occupants. "There is no reason why a woman cannot pilot an aircraft. Brute strength is not a requirement: intelligence and courage appear to be necessities. Ava possesses those qualities as much as anyone in this room--if not more so."

Ava blushes as she lifts her cup and saucer from the side table and drinks her tea. She appreciates the professor's constant support.

The Musketeers annoy her with their endless instigation of competition between her and Varcella. Ava enjoys competing academically, but they derive a bizarre pleasure from pitting her and Varcella against each other socially.

Members of the Engineering Club are acknowledged as the best and brightest at CANU. Ava's academic achievements have not only singled her out within the Club, but also within the institution.

All seven members had been the most academically-gifted students in their communities prior to attending the university. The Musketeers and Varcella resent Ava. So they emphasize what they consider Varcella's outstanding attributes: her beauty and femininity.

When they formed the Club, Ava was excited to be joined with a young lady who was an intellectual peer. She had imagined they would not only challenge each other, but at times would join forces against the men.

Mostly, she had hoped to have a female friend who would truly understand her and not ridicule her dreams. It was not to be.

"Ava the aviatress! Maybe that will be a song someday!" Martin adds with a twinkle in his eye. She chuckles along with him, Bryant and the professor.

Graduation is in two days and major changes are occurring at CANU. "Life is a series of upheavals," Ava muses as she knocks on Professor Adams' office door.

"Come in," he says.

She enters. Boxes are scattered around the room. He stands behind his desk, packing books into one.

"This is so unfair! How are we to uplift the Race if classical education is removed from the curriculum?!" she declares as she closes the door behind her.

"It is no longer your concern. You and your fellow graduates have received a proper education..."

"But if President Douquette and the board would heed the words of our great intellectuals such as X. J. Morgan!"

"Please, have a seat." She sits in the only empty chair left in the office. "They consider philosophers like Morgan radical, uppity Negroes. Times have changed--not for the better. This university is now led by those who see our race as fit for little more than menial occupations."

"Well, Wilkins University's gain is Colored Agricultural and Normal's loss!"

"Thank you. I fear this trend is gaining ground in all of our institutions. I've had this discussion with the other members of your Engineering Club, but I suspect you're the only one who will heed what I say."

"Bryant and Martin..."

"Are good fellows. I have no doubt they will be quite successful: neither will ever challenge authority. And Varella, Cualey, Montague and Wilson...well..."

"Bryant and Martin can be silly, but that's a bit harsh. Witnessing the destruction of the Humanities department he helped build must be affecting him!"

"You, however, possess a backbone. Your students will benefit from the maturation of your fortitude as you confront this world's challenges."

She's awed by his sentiment. "Thank you, sir! I will do my best to confirm your faith in me."

"How long did you work on your speech?" Varella asks Ava. They wait in the gymnasium with the other graduates: 58 soon-to-be alumni wearing navy blue caps and gowns. This is their holding room until they enter the auditorium for the ceremony.

It takes all of her self-control not to laugh at Varella's countenance, which resembles someone who's bit into a lemon. Though every member of the Engineering Club will graduate Summa Cum Laude, Varella's peeved that Ava is valedictorian.

"I finished early this morning. Much to my family's dismay, I stayed in the dormitory last night so I could concentrate," she replies.

Varella lets a fleeting look of disapproval escape before displaying a more pleasant face. "Please express to your family my thanks for their invitation to the party, but I won't be able to attend. My family is here and..." She scans the room before she motions to Martin to join her.

Grinning, he bounds to them. "Did you tell her?!" he asks Varella as he stands beside her.

"You do the honors," she says.

Martin takes Varcella's hand and smiles at Ava. "Varcella and I are engaged! We will be married next month."

Ava knows her mouth is hanging open, but she's shocked. "This is a surprise!"

"A happy one, I hope," Varcella says.

"Of course! Congratulations!" Ava and Martin first clasp hands, then hug. When she attempts to embrace Varcella, Varcella holds out her hand instead.

As the women shake hands, Ava notes, "Poor Martin's so confused!" But she's determined not to lessen his joy. "I wish you both every happiness!"

"We can't come to your uncle's because our families are heading to Boley after we get our diplomas. I've secured a position and my father's already talking about me taking over as reverend...but that can wait. First we have to decide where we'll honeymoon!" Varcella glares at him.

Ava smiles. "I'm sure it will be wonderful." Instead of beaming the way her fiancé does, Varcella examines Ava. Ava returns the favor. "Is she disappointed by my reaction?!"

Varcella links arms with Martin. "If we don't have the opportunity to speak again today, I wish you the best."

He grabs Ava's hand and squeezes. "I have no doubt we'll be seeing you in the papers!" They wave at each other as Varcella drags him away.

As Ava attempts to process what just occurred, Bryant walks up to her. "They told you the news?"

"Astonishing! I wonder how the Musketeers are taking it?" Her eyes search the gym for them.

He clears his throat, drawing her attention. He tugs at the neckline of his gown and gazes at her. "We're finally transitioning to adulthood," he says, minus his usual bravado.

"We are indeed!"

"The most important element of adulthood, I believe, is establishing a family. Once one has determined with whom one wants to establish his family." Bryant takes her right hand and caresses it.

"I..." Her voice fades. "Oh, no!"

"This may not be the most convenient time or place, but I'm sure you have no doubt of my feelings..."

"Ladies and gentlemen, time to line up to enter the auditorium!" the president's secretary shouts. Relieved, Ava shrugs and runs to the front of the line.

She shares the stage with President Douquette, the board of trustees, the department heads and two low-level, interchangeable, white state education administrators who always attend significant events at CANU.

As the president and the white officials drone on from the lectern, she observes her family in the audience. Papa and Mama grin from ear to ear, bursting with pride. Though she often teases her mother for crying at the drop of a hat, it takes all of Ava's willpower not to tear up.

Aunt Pearl and Uncle Solomon are happy, too. But he, her brothers and her cousins squirm in their seats from boredom. Andrew rolls his eyes at a speaker and winks at her.

President Douquette speaks again. "It is my pleasure to introduce Colored Agricultural and Normal University's Class of 1918 Valedictorian: Miss Ava Odell!"

She shakes hands with him when she reaches the lectern. Then she gives a brief nod to Professor Adams. He raises his left eyebrow, curiosity piqued.

She faces the audience. "Thank you, President Douquette. I welcome the board of trustees, the faculty of this great university, our honored guests, friends and families."

"We, the Class of 1918, thank you, our benefactors, for the opportunities you have afforded us. To honor you, we must now utilize all we have learned to secure our presence as a great race on the world stage!"

"Part of that charge includes enlightening the greater society through the display of our talents. Not only in horticulture and education, but also in fields as diverse as mathematics, anthropology, science, music, painting, law, and--the discipline I believe will most affect the future of humanity--engineering."

She glances around and notes the discomfort of President Douquette and the white guests. Professor Adams is elated.

"In a world mired in global conflict, our unique experience of transcendence offers tangible hope of what the aftermath of struggle can be. The advancements we have made as a people in the short time since emerging from the ravages of slavery foretells there is no limit to what we can achieve."

"The Negro Race steadily fights for progress, not only for itself, but for all of civilization. It joins with those who seek the suffrage of women, democracy for all nations and world peace."

"This Class of 1918, our generation, is the vanguard for this moment in our Race's advancement. We will protest and combat any and all efforts to relegate us to the servitude of the past."

She pauses before her conclusion.

"Through God's grace, we will be a beacon that not only uplifts the Negro, but uplifts all of humanity. Per Angusta Ad Augusta: Through Difficulties to Honors. Go forth, Class of 1918!"

Ava scrutinizes the audience, not daring to peek at the others onstage. The range of emotions exhilarates her: the pride of her family, the astonishment of her classmates, the bewilderment of the other spectators.

As her heart pounds louder, the auditorium remains silent. "Maybe I've gone too far--but I'm right!" She squares her shoulders and stands straighter.

Papa and Uncle Solomon look around the room, then at each other. They stand and clap loudly. The rest of the family joins them. Next, the majority her classmates jump up in unison! Their applause is punctuated with cheers.

Behind her, she hears enthusiastic claps that she knows belong to Professor Adams. As she turns to acknowledge him, the other occupants of the stage stand and applaud politely. However, it's evident that President Douquette and the white officials are appalled.

Facing the audience again, she beholds a full standing ovation.

Most of her class and the town of Langston are at the Odell Farm. After Mama, Aunt Pearl and Carrie shoo her out of the kitchen, Ava goes out to mingle with the crowd.

She stands at the side door and takes in the scene. The glow of the afternoon sun enhances the greens of the grass and leaves, the white of the linen tablecloths and the various hues of the food, drink and tableware.

She circulates through groups of neighbors, graduates and their families. Some stand, others sit and eat at the tables or on the porch while others lounge on blankets underneath shade trees. Artest, Jimmy, Aton and Johnny chase each other in a rambunctious game of tag.

She joins Papa, Uncle Solomon, Professor Adams and a few of Langston's merchants. Papa hugs her shoulders. "That was quite the speech!" The men chuckle while she blushes.

"Your professor been tellin' us what's goin' on at the university. Shakin' things up, Miss Ava!" Uncle Solomon adds.

Professor Adams smiles at her. "You and your wife must be very proud," he says to Papa.

"Whole family is! What they call her--valedictorian?! Expect nothin' less," Uncle Solomon interjects.

Papa nods. "We are. Me and her mother have been blessed with all our children. But this one...Came into the world smart as a whip!"

"Got most of 'em smarts from her mama. Maybe a little from you," Uncle Solomon teases. Then he says to Professor Adams, "Sorry ya gotta go! I like talkin' to ya."

She questions the professor with her eyes. "I must leave if I'm to be in Washington in time orientation," he answers. He shakes hands with the men. "Ava, may I speak with you?"

She and Professor Adams step away from the group. He pulls a slip of paper from his breast pocket and hands it to her. "This is my address at Wilkins. Give me a couple of months to settle in, then please write to me."

"Let me go to the house and write down my address..."

"Don't bother. I am so scattered by moving, I will probably misplace it." Professor Adams pauses. "Regarding your speech?" He shakes her hand. "Well done!"

As he walks to a buggy that awaits him, she yells, "Godspeed, sir!" They wave at each other one last time as it departs.

Josie sneaks up from behind. "Who's that?"

She smacks his arm. "Professor Adams: my mentor and a truly gifted man!"

"Y'all had an audience. Matter-fact, he been watchin' you since we come home." Josie pivots towards the main house. Ava follows his gaze to an unhappy Bryant, leaning on a tree near the front porch. "He sweet on ya?"

"I would have said 'yes.' But his expression suggests otherwise."

Josie examines Bryant. "Want me to have words with him?"

Her cousin's protective streak makes Ava grin. "No. But," she glances again at Bryant, "it's time I did!"

"Let me get up on the porch first." She starts to object. "I ain't gonna listen! Just wanna keep an eye on 'im." Josie trots to the porch and sits on the railing near the tree.

Bryant continues to glare as she reaches him. "Why are you standing here alone? Have you had anything to eat?" she says in a light-hearted manner. He doesn't respond.

She hangs her head. "I had no idea his feelings were this strong!" "It's time we discuss what you attempted to..."

"I am extremely disappointed in you!"

Her head snaps up. "Pardon?!"

"How could you say such things?! Whether we agree with the direction the university is taking or not, decisions have been made. What do you expect to profit by embarrassing President Douquette, particularly in front of those white men?!"

"I had no thought of what I would or would not 'profit!' My only consideration was to highlight what we have done as a people and to encourage our class to continue carrying the torch. To not let backward thinking stop us!"

He paces. "Professor Adams is a good man, but be wary of his influence! He lost his position..."

"He is a literature professor who would not allow himself to be relegated to teaching only elementary English! His move to Wilkins should be seen as a promotion!" Bryant's face indicates that he concedes her point.

"And you are mistaken. My thoughts and feelings on any and all subjects are strictly my own!"

Bryant lowers his voice. "You are not X. J. Morgan! I agree with many of his ideas, but he can say what he pleases at Harvard, in Europe or wherever else he goes. We must live and work in Oklahoma."

"Your notions--challenging those who will employ us and flying airplanes--are tolerable for a co-ed. But they are neither desirable nor practical for a wife and mother!"

He takes her right hand in both of his. "You must abide by my feelings to set the proper tone for our marriage. I will find your father and ask his permission..."

Ava removes her hand. "You have gotten ahead of yourself. I value our friendship--but friendship is the limit of my regard for you."

The alarm on his face would be comical, under other circumstances. "If I have angered you..."

"You say that my 'notions' are undesirable. If you can't abide by them, then you truly don't desire me."

"We have both been heated. Maybe if we revisit..."

"Neither of us will change our opinions or feelings. You must see that."

Bryant studies her face. "This is good-bye, then."

She offers her hand. "I wish you every happiness."

"I'd wish you the same, but I doubt you'll ever find it!" He storms off.

Josie stands next to her. "That ain't polite."

"You said you weren't going to listen!"

"Can't help it if I have ears like a bat. He ain't for you. What's this about you flyin' airplanes?"

Ava grabs both of his biceps. "Josiah Odell, don't you dare breathe a word about that to anyone! Not until I'm ready to broach the subject with Mama and Papa."

He releases himself from her death grip. "I ain't gonna say a word. Most men gonna find it hard to marry a girl smart as you, much less one who wants to fly airplanes!"

"I don't plan to ever marry, so it's of no concern."

Josie links arms with her and leads her to the porch. "Don't give up! You might trap a blind fella."

"Or I could find a man who, like Carrie, can see beyond someone's appearance!" They sit on the porch steps and continue to poke fun at each other.

End of Chapter 1