

Challenging Mountains-(Settlers Book 3) Excerpt:

He walked off, but Tim lingered. He knelt to stroke Bracken's ear as Josephine approached. "Can I come with you?" she asked.

"And just where do you wish to accompany me, young Jo?" Straightening, he began to stroll towards the house with her at his side.

"Rude of me, I know, but I couldn't help but overhear your discussion with your uncle." She lowered her voice and bent closer. Tim caught a scent of lavender. Carefree of feminine ways she might be, but she smelt as good as any young miss. "I shouldn't sound so ungrateful, as your aunt ensured I had employment in her emporium when I arrived here in town, but the tasks are so tedious. I am bored. I thought of running off and making my own way in the world." Her face grew comical as she wrinkled her pert nose.

"Silly chit. Don't you dare even contemplate such a rash move," he scolded. "You are not naïve, I think, and must know the dangers that exist beyond the sanctuary of a safe home. Anyway, I could not consider taking you along on such a dangerous journey."

She made an unladylike noise. "Don't you dare suggest I could not cope with such a journey. I roved free for all of my childhood while my parents worked their mine. I told you, my father treated me more as a son than a daughter. A wizened old woman, who took care of the cooking, also saw to my schooling. Matilda was governess to a family in England before being transported for thieving—a false charge according to her. She had gained her ticket of leave and accompanied my parents on their quest for gold. She was very knowledgeable." A deep sadness clouded her eyes, as she said, "Poor Matilda was slain on that terrible day."

"It must have been awful for you." She seldom spoke about the tragedy so they had no idea how deeply she felt about losing not only her parents, but people who were like family to her. Her shoulders lifted as she sighed. "Awful yes, but my father taught me to be strong and my mother taught me to be brave." Her face brightened. "Always look to the future, he advised, there is no room in life for regrets."

"Wise words." Tim had been curious about her schooling, as according to Aunt Sara she did well at the emporium, coping with any problem that arose. To change to a more cheerful subject he said, "My aunt would not wish to lose you. She assures me you will make manager one day soon."

"Nonsense." She waved that suggestion aside. "The husband and wife who presently run the store do so adequately, and will be doing so for at least another twenty years. I do not wish to wait around that long. And anyway, I have dreams and plans." She touched her nose with a finger.

"So tell me, Jo, just what plans are these—apart from thinking to accompany me on a trek that may take months?"

"Well, to be honest, the idea only occurred to me while I was listening in to your conversation with your uncle, but I wish to travel. This country is huge..." She spread her arms wide. "And so much of it has never been trod upon by a white man. If I had been born a man I would have joined one of the surveying teams, preferably one such as that led by Gregory Blaxland, William Wentworth or William Lawson." Her smile held a wistful quality. "Imagine what it would be like to come upon a river or stretch of land that only the natives knew about."

Tim had to admit her dreams were not so different to his own, but for fear of encouraging her he wasn't about to admit such. The children shouting for him to come inside cut their conversation short. As they reached the doorway, Tim stopped her with a touch on the arm.

“Jo, you are at an age for marriage, and by now should be contemplating the beaux of your choice, not thinking of gallivanting off around the country in search of green pastures—leave that to us men.”

The sound she made would have been unacceptable in polite company. Tim suppressed a smile. “Have you looked around here lately at the young males? The men who seek my company are simpering fools. Anyway, I am but seventeen and am not about to consider marriage, and what goes with it, for quite a few years yet.” She arched a brow. “Now that’s an idea, I could marry you, and then you would have no qualms about me tagging along with you on your travels.”