



The Song Weaver- The Mountain Song Legacy- Book 3

by B.J. Hoff

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PROLOGUE

“Maggie Stuart. Maggie *MacAuley* Stuart. Mrs. Jonathan Stuart.”

Maggie stood looking out the window at the bright December morning. The snow that had fallen Christmas Eve—her wedding night—still blanketed the ground, and because of the mines being closed over the holiday the pristine whiteness had not yet turned gray with coal dust.

Even though she was alone at the moment, she felt a little foolish, practicing her new name to herself, over and over again. She turned away from the window to let her gaze play over the bedroom. Everything was new: this room, a new name, a new home.

Jonathan’s home. How many times had he reminded her that it was now *her* home, too? *Their* home.

That being the case, she wondered if she dared act on his suggestion that, once they returned from their honeymoon trip, she might consider doing some redecorating. She wasn’t sure how she felt about that. On the other hand, she wouldn’t mind turning the bedroom into *their* room rather than the masculine sanctuary it now represented. With not a feminine touch to be seen, it was almost Spartan in its decor: functional pieces of dark, sturdy wood, bare walls, heavy drapes, and shelves virtually groaning with books.

Suddenly, the thought of stripping all this away and starting over felt presumptuous, even intimidating. Not to mention extravagant. And no matter what Jonathan said, could she really bring herself to start making changes to the home in which he’d lived for so many years? Wouldn’t he ultimately resent her for it?

Besides, what did she know about redecorating? Miners’ families did well to fix their broken furniture and add a coat of fresh paint every few years. Only wealthy people had the means to *redecorate*.

People like Jonathan’s family...

The slam of panic came out of the blue, stealing her breath. . There were so many changes, so much that was new. Jonathan would expect her to know how to—do things. Things like his mother would have done. And his sister.

The thought overwhelmed her. Oh, she knew how to keep house well enough. She'd been brought up to do her share of housework: laundry and ironing, cooking and cleaning. But she knew next to nothing about the *niceties* of maintaining a home. There had been no money, thus no interest, in that sort of thing.

On the other hand, she wasn't exactly dimwitted. Didn't Jonathan insist that she'd been the brightest student he'd ever taught? And hadn't she made her way through university as an honor student? Surely she could learn--whatever she needed to learn. She'd not disappoint her husband.

Her husband.

She was a *wife*. Jonathan's wife. That was the newest—the strangest—thing of all. Jonathan wasn't new to her, of course. Across the years he'd moved from teacher to mentor to friend. But now he was her husband. Someone to come to know again in new and different ways.

The thought gave Maggie her first cold feeling of her married life.

She sank down on the side of the bed. Beside her, Jonathan's briefcase lay open, where he'd left it before going downstairs to fetch the newspaper for reading on the train. At the top of the other odds and ends he'd already packed was Maggie's book—*The Penny Whistle*—that she'd finally given to him yesterday morning. Christmas morning, the day after their wedding.

Naturally she'd told him about the book she'd written. What she hadn't told him was the reason its publication had been delayed. Originally scheduled for late fall, she'd bargained with Mr. Rice at the publishing house to delay the book's release until after Christmas in order to change the dedication appropriately: "*To Jonathan Lawrence Stuart—my mentor, my hero, my husband.*"

The thought of how moved Jonathan had been upon reading the dedication page brought a smile now, albeit a fleeting one. Her thoughts seemed bent on returning to the same treacherous direction as before.

In a little while they would leave on their honeymoon trip to Lexington. There she would finally meet Jonathan's family: his ailing father, his widowed sister. What would they think of her? Her youth, her inexperience, her lack of refinement. Would they be terribly disappointed in his choice of a wife? Even the thought of bringing disappointment or embarrassment to Jonathan and his family was intolerable.

The sound of him clearing his throat yanked her out of her thoughts. She looked up, saw him standing in the doorway, his head tilted to one side, watching her.

“So—” he said, “are you getting used to it yet?”

“Used to it?”

“Everything.” He came and took both her hands in his, tugging her to her feet. “Being married. Having a new name. A new home. A husband who’s absolutely wild about you. That’s enough for a start, I expect.”

He kissed her lightly on the forehead.

At the moment, Maggie wasn’t eager to talk about *newness*. “I see you’re taking my book along,” she said, gesturing to his travel case.

“Of course, I’m taking it along. I can’t wait to show it to my father and Patricia. A man’s entitled to boast a little about his wife’s accomplishments after all.”

“Don’t you dare, Jonathan.”

He drew her into his arms. “It’s not every day a man has a book dedicated to him, you know.”

Maggie framed his face with her hands. “It’s really your story, Jonathan. Of course, I dedicated it to you.”

“Do you have any idea how proud I am of you?” he said quietly.

She loved the way he seemed to draw her into himself just by searching her eyes. And the way a strand of his flaxen hair would fall over one eye when he dipped his head to kiss her. And the way he always breathed her name *after* he kissed her. Oh, she loved everything about him, this man who had been her husband for all of...thirty-eight hours now! She had never known such a feeling as this dizzying whirlwind of love and happiness.

An unexpected chill passed over her, as if to thwart the rush of emotion bubbling up in her. She recognized it for what it was: the old Irish superstition she’d too often heard as she was growing up: too much joy was likely to invite an equal cup of sorrow.

“Maggie?” Jonathan was watching her, his expression one of concern. He held her slightly away from him, saying, “Are you all right?”

Maggie managed a smile and nodded. “Just trying to think of anything I might have forgotten.”

He didn't look convinced. "Are you quite sure you've no regrets about leaving your family so soon after Christmas? We could have waited a day or two more."

They had spent their wedding night at Jonathan's house. *Their* house, he would have reminded her. Yesterday they shared Christmas with Maggie's family, coming back here in the evening to prepare for their trip.

"I've no regrets about anything, so long as we're together," she said, resolved to give truth to her words. Forcing a note of brightness into her tone, she added, "Although I confess that I already miss Figaro a little."

"Ah. So my competition is to be a hound."

"I loved your dog before I married you," she reminded him.

"Yes, I know," he said dryly. "Is it possible that's *why* you married me? So you could move in with my dog?"

"He's an awfully handsome fella. But then so are you."

"And both of us are obviously besotted with you."

He drew her close again as if to act on his besotted state, but Maggie stole a glance at the clock on the bedroom mantel.

"Jonathan—we have to go or we're going to miss the train."

He sighed, still managing a brief kiss before taking a last look around the bedroom.

"Our luggage—" Maggie said.

"Already in the buggy."

"Did Figaro settle in with my folks all right?" she asked as they left the room.

"The big faker. He tried to pull that pitiful-pup routine on me until I was almost out the door. He'll be fine. By now he's probably driving your mother crazy, tagging along on her heels through the house."

They hurried down the steps, making a final check of the first floor before locking the door behind them. Once they were settled in the buggy, Jonathan hesitated before driving away. "Well, Mrs. Stuart," he said, turning to Maggie, "this is our first trip together. How do you feel?"

Maggie thought for a moment, then decided to be honest. "Nervous."

Jonathan's face fell. "Why?"

"Because I'm meeting your family for the first time, and I want them to like me. I want you—to be proud of me."

He shook his head. "Maggie, it's not possible for me to be any prouder of you than I already am. And my family is going to *love* you."

"I'm sure I'm not the kind of wife they'd have chosen for you."

"They would never presume to choose a wife for me." He took her hand. "Listen to me, Maggie. You have nothing to worry about where my family is concerned."

"You can't know that."

"Oh, but I can. I know my father and my sister. And I promise you, they're going to love you. They'll love you because you're irresistible, and because they'll see how much *I* love you, and because the only thing my family has ever wanted for me is my happiness." He squeezed her hand. "And there is no way whatsoever, my dear, that they'll be able to miss the fact that I am now the happiest man in the world."

Maggie took a deep breath, tempted to scandalize the neighborhood by throwing her arms around her husband this very minute, in broad daylight, never mind who was watching. He was still Jonathan, after all. Her husband, yes. But also still her friend. And as he had so many times in the past, he'd managed to dispel her doubts, her fears, with his quiet, steady reassurance.

She took one more long look at the man beside her and in that moment realized that as long as they were together in the shelter of God's love and their love for each other, she had nothing to fear.

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