

## Chapter 1

### Denby Bookkeeping

With a raised eyebrow and a sigh, Emma looked at the seemingly never ending stacks of bank statements, ledger sheets, and quarterly reports. She shrugged as she studied the clear plastic boxes lining her desk piled with even more work. Bookkeeping had certainly kept her busy and gave her a modest income, but somehow she felt life had passed her by. She had friends, actually business acquaintances, but no one with whom she truly felt a connection; certainly no soul mate like people talked about these days. She decided coffee might be just the ticket to help her get through at least a part of the mound she was working on while she pondered her life. She lived a simple but good life; a widow's life. She had raised her only child to be a successful accountant. He'd built a successful accounting business. Although secretly she wished he was more successful as a husband and father; she was still proud of him. She wondered if she had taught him how to love. She wondered if anyone truly knew how to love. She shuddered and decided she had quite enough contemplating life for one day. She was relieved to see two familiar smiling faces looking through her glass door giving her a welcome distraction from her thoughts.

The doorbell jangled as Janie and Julie entered with a plastic container of receipts for their flower shop, *Hot Biscuits*. They had used Emma's services for several years. With Emma's help their books were always current.

"Thanks for all your hard work Emma; you'll never know how much we appreciate you keeping our books in such good order."

"That's right; we never worry about a thing."

"Oh it's my pleasure, I like to stay busy. May I get you girls some coffee? I was just about to make some fresh. You know you're always more than welcome to help yourselves. I do have some freshly baked banana nut bread; it's scratchy."

"Scratchy?"

"My son, Stephen always called made from scratch, scratchy."

"That sounds great Emma we'll have both."

Emma served the sweet bread while Janie made fresh coffee. She smiled as she watched the young florist fill the coffee maker with the gourmet stuff her daughter-in-law gave her for Christmas. She hoped it was still in date.

"Girls, I've been curious why your flower shop is called *Hot Biscuits*?"

"Oh, that's a great story. Our mother had been trying to raise tropical hibiscus plants out in the front yard when we were little girls. Those plants were new to everyone around here and quite exotic. She wanted to show the off to the neighborhood, you know."

Emma enjoyed the girls' rich southern accents.

"Daddy liked to fix things. He'd been trying to get an old weed eater running for quite some time. After he got it going he weed-eated everything in both the front and back yards. I think he worked on the neighbor's yard too. When Mama came home, he was so proud of himself he kept talking about the

yard and how nice it looked, trimmed and all. Mama tried to be kind and appreciative, but then she just couldn't take it any longer and asked him what happened to the hibiscus?"

"Daddy said hot biscuits! I didn't see any hot biscuits; so hibiscus flowers have been hot biscuits in our family ever since."

All three ladies joined in the laughter. Emma had been acquainted with Janie and Julie's parents and could tell they probably had dozens more wonderful stories just like that one.

After finishing their consultation and dessert; the two ladies excused themselves to their next appointment.

"We'll be back at the end of the week to pick everything up for our appointment with our accountant, Ron Jenkins."

"Oh don't worry I'll have everything ready."

"Well, Jules did we forget anything?"

"We do need to stop by the store to pick up some things for the Sunday school party."

Emma laughed as she watched the two sisters walk animatedly down her driveway like carefree butterflies. Janie and Julie's lively personalities were always a bright spot to Emma's week. She looked forward to being part of the fun the two young ladies brought with them everywhere they went. It was no wonder their flower shop was successful. They seemed to be social magnets and brought cheer to everyone they met.

Emma went back to the kitchen to prepare her lunch. She was thankful she decided so many years ago to buy a home that could accommodate her small bookkeeping business in the front and provide her a living area in the back. It was also a great perk that she was located on a main street in town for her customer's easy access. Another day of eating alone; how she wished her son lived closer. It just never seemed like she and Stephen had much to say to one another. They just didn't seem to have a lot in common, she guessed.

Emma thought about her grandson, Braden. He would be attending the local college in the fall. Perhaps he could be persuaded with an occasional home-cooked meal and visit her. Oh how she would love spending time with him.

She did have her business. Nevertheless, there were still a lot of lonely times; television and crossword puzzles just wasn't enough to fill her mind or her heart. She thought she would dream about a vacation, maybe a cruise. She shook her head and laughed to herself thinking about the girls' story, hot biscuits. She knew she wanted an adventure! Maybe some type of Club Med for seniors. Perhaps she would just take on another client or two; she could certainly use the money. For some reason, she just didn't feel settled. She wanted something more, but she just didn't know what that something was.



**Sharons Cross Market**

Janie and Julie each pushed a shopping cart and Joe McDougal pushed a third. He laughed at the two ladies and their three carts. How did they ever seem to eat so much?

“Hey did you remember the dip?”

“Yeah, I think it’s in one of these bags.”

“Would you like for me to help you find it, then you’d know you have everything you need?”

Joe enjoyed being able to help others.

“I don’t think I got the dip mix; in fact I know I didn’t.”

“I’ll go back in the store and get what you need, just wait here.”

“That would be great, Joe.”

Janie gave Joe instructions on what she needed.

Julie looked at Janie with a sly gleam in her eye as they watched Joe go and get the needed ingredient.

“Are you thinkin’ what I’m thinkin’?”

“Maybe, what are you thinkin’?”

“I’m thinkin’ that Joe is such a sweet man.”

“He certainly is. He’s always kind – always thinkin’ of others. He’s quite the prayer warrior too.”

“No not any of that, can’t you see it?”

Janie and Julie as well as all the other customers of the local supermarket enjoyed Joe McDougal’s warm, welcoming attitude. He greeted everyone with a hearty smile, handshake, or bear hug. He always seemed to remember doctor’s appointments and would inquire about the results. He was mindful to ask about the outcome of the latest game the children played. He often would show up at the local ballpark to watch and cheer from the sidelines. Often customers searched for Joe in the store to update him on specific events because they knew he often prayed for their needs. It was well known that he would be in prayer for many who were struggling with illnesses or problems. He worked at the supermarket bagging groceries and taking purchases out to customers’ cars, not because he needed the money; he had a good savings and pension from the phone company, but because he loved people. Oh he had investments too. His son, Ethan, always took care of his financial matters.

He also enjoyed his many friends. It was important to him they share parts of their lives with him. He had had several opportunities to share the Gospel with many of them. He would lift each of the needs up to the Lord in prayer each evening. His little job and his prayer evenings filled his life completely, so he thought.

“See what?”

“It’s obvious, who are the two cutest people we know?” Julie answers Janie who stares blankly back.

“I mean Joe and Emma.”

“Joe and Emma?” Yeah, why haven’t we seen this before, they would make the cutest couple.”

“How do you think we should set this up?”

After a long discussion while delivering their orders, the two sisters decide to host a dinner party and invite both friends to attend and then of course excuse themselves so Emma and Joe can get to know each other better. The plan was simple.



“Hello, Emma? Hi, this is Janie. Julie and I are planning a dinner party and would be honored if you’d come.”

“You would, that would be great, I’ll send you a card in the mail as a reminder for your calendar. We’ll see you soon.”

“I got my end set up, how’d you do?”

“Joe said he doesn’t go out much at night, but he’d look forward to our dinner party.”

“Great then it’s all going to work out beautifully.”

“What shall we make for the main course?”

“I’m not sure, I think we’ll need to make a list and go shop.”