

SUMMER *of*
SUSPENSE

BAKER FAMILY ADVENTURES

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SUSPENSE

C. R. HEDGCOCK



Third Printing
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Grace & Truth Books
815 Exchange Ave., Ste. 101
Conway, AR 72032
www.graceandtruthbooks.com
918.245.1500

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Cover design and typography by Justin Turley

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-1-930133-67-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Word from the Author	1
Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	13
Chapter 3	21
Chapter 4	31
Chapter 5	39
Chapter 6	45
Chapter 7	55
Chapter 8	65
Chapter 9	75

Chapter 10.....	83
Chapter 11.....	91
Chapter 12.....	97
Chapter 13.....	105
Chapter 14.....	113
Chapter 15.....	127
Chapter 16.....	141
Chapter 17.....	151
Chapter 18.....	159
Chapter 19.....	165
Chapter 20.....	175
Chapter 21.....	189
Scripture References.....	199

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

I would like to thank those who made this book a reality. Firstly I thank my Heavenly Father, Who gave me the time and opportunity to do what I've wanted to do for years—write a book! I thank Him for His consistent help when I was stuck, for the enjoyment I could get out of this project, and for the love of writing He has given me.

A huge thank you goes to my parents. Without their suggestions and encouragement, the book you hold in your hands would have long ago joined the ranks of my unfinished projects. Their advice has greatly enhanced the story. Dad, your exceptionally creative ideas and advice helped me out of many corners. You encouraged me to persevere when I felt like giving up. Mom, this story has greatly benefited from your practical wisdom and frequent reminders to keep Biblical principles at the centre. Without you, I would've spent another year on this story and finally given up on it.

Nicki and Christie, my two dear sisters, you were invaluable sounding-boards. Thank you both for your suggestions and constructive criticisms. Your advice, insights, and creative ideas have been of incredible help.

Christie, you made sure I was always only a Skype chat away from fresh ideas, and I knew I could ask your opinion about anything. I greatly appreciate your constant enthusiasm for the project, reading every single one of my drafts to your sons, sometimes more than once! Hearing what they thought of the story was very encouraging.

To my brother Jonathan, thank you for being an eager listener as Dad and Mom read the story aloud after supper for many evenings. I was grateful to see your reactions and enjoyment of the story.

Mrs. Jackie Meyer and Mr. Josh Lamprecht, your willingness to proofread the story and your knowledgeable suggestions have been of great help. Many thanks!

Finally, to readers, thank you for taking an interest in this book! I hope you enjoy it immensely and find it to contain a story worth reading.

Soli Deo Gloria!
C. R. Hedgcock

CHAPTER 1

Everybody had heard of the Drake family. Clive and Susan Drake, and their thirteen year-old daughter, Mildred, lived in the most fashionable side of the upper-class area—not too close to town and not too far away from it. To put it bluntly, the Drakes were extremely wealthy.

Years before, Susan Drake had inherited a large sum of money. Clive had invested it in buying a diamond mine, and over the two decades the Drakes had owned it, they had become one of the most prosperous families in the area. Clive and Susan always had full wallets and enviable bank accounts.

Susan and their daughter Mildred were very creative, and always came up with new ways to spend their abundant supply of money.

The Drakes lived in England in a large house, with five double bedrooms, a newly refurbished kitchen, a huge library of books that none of them were likely to read, an indoor swimming pool, a front and back garden, a garage in which were parked five classy cars, and, last but not least, a farm. The Drakes owned a few pedigree horses, which were to be found either in their well-kept stables or on the lush, rolling hills. There were a few arenas to ride in, as well as the forest beyond, which provided an idyllic trail ride.

The Drakes were usually served breakfast in bed, or in the breakfast room, and there was a variety of foods to choose from. Mildred, Millie for short, went to an expensive all-girls school that the chauffeur dropped her off at and picked her up from every weekday.

Lunch was served in the dining room, and sometimes Millie's mother was there to join her, but most of the time she wasn't. After all, Susan Drake was an important local figure, and was always attending ladies' meetings and arranging functions.

After lunch, Millie was free to do pretty much as she liked. She had horse-riding lessons as often or as seldom as she wished, and when she did ride, it was with a lot of rein-yanking which her horse had learned to patiently endure.

The four-course supper was served in the dining room, and the Drakes invited guests to dine with them three times a week. After the meal, Millie's parents and the guests would retire to the library, and once again, Millie was free to do as she pleased. Of course, in the Drake household, a set bedtime was unheard of.

Hundreds of miles away, on a hill overlooking beautiful pastures, twelve-year-old Abigail Baker began her morning walk to the field. Abby had long, brown hair tied loosely in a braid, hazel eyes, and a few freckles.

The air smelled crisp and fresh, and birds sang joyfully. The grass seemed greener than usual, and was scattered with white daisies. The trees stood motionless in the still air, as though they were dozing in the lovely warmth of the morning sunshine.

As she neared the field, a horse whinnied. Abby smiled. It was her horse, Arrow. She walked to the wooden fence and stroked his black face.

"Good morning, boy," she said. "I've got a carrot for you—but don't tell the others." She gave him a final pat and a kiss on the nose before striding over to the gate.

The other horses crowded around the gate at the sight of her. She lifted the latch and swung the gate open, and the horses rushed past to get to their breakfast. Abby and her twin brother Andy had already set out the food for them in their stables. Once the horses were eating, the twins closed the stable doors.

The two children then walked back up to the house, and the delicious smell of pancakes made them feel even hungrier than they already were. They went upstairs, got changed, and came back down again for family breakfast.

Everybody eagerly sat down around the table, and after saying grace, tucked into the pancakes. Mr. and Mrs. Baker, Abby, Andy, and Thomas, the five-year old, chattered happily about the latest events on the farm.

When the pancakes were almost finished, Mr. Baker said, “Andy and Abby, I know that you are both quite good at horse-riding already, but I think you should set yourselves some goals for improvement. I’ve heard there is going to be a horse-show in August, and I would like you both to enter.”

“That sounds exciting,” Andy said.

“Oh yes!” Abby chimed in.

Mr. Baker smiled, and then continued, “I’ve been corresponding with your Uncle Clive. He’s got an idea for new mining equipment. He’s asked me to go and inspect the mine, and then design something based on his idea. He would like me to visit at the beginning of August.”

“Is he the uncle that lives in a mansion on a farm?” Abby asked.

“And owns a diamond mine?” Andy added.

Mr. Baker nodded. “Yes, he is.”

“Can we come too?” Tom asked excitedly.

“Tom, unfortunately not. We can’t expect Uncle Clive to pay for the flights to England for all of us. Anyway, who will look after the farm if we all leave?”

Tom looked crestfallen, and gave his pancake a disappointed look.

“Don’t worry, dear. We’ll have fun while Father’s away,” Mrs. Baker said.

“Really?” Tom asked sadly.

“Yes. Phil will be back from the conference at the beginning of August. Won’t it be exciting to see him again?”

Tom’s face immediately brightened up. Philip was the children’s older brother. He had saved up money and gone to an entrepreneurial conference. All the children loved their brother very much, and looked forward to seeing him again.

“Oh that’s very exciting news! I can’t wait!” Tom bubbled.

A thought suddenly struck Abby. "Father, what about the horse show? Will you be back in time for it?"

"Yes, I'll only be away for about two weeks. You and Andy can continue practising, even though I won't be here to give you lessons for that short while. Maybe Phil can teach you some things and help you practice; he's a very good rider."

The children helped clear up after breakfast, and then everybody returned to the table for morning family devotions.

Afterwards, Mr. Baker said, "Andy and Abby, please turn the horses into the field and fill the water trough. Then tack up your horses for your riding lesson."

Heels down, back straight, chin up, Abby thought to herself as she rode Arrow around the arena, warming him up. It was ten minutes later, and the twins were just starting their riding lesson. Their father, Mr. Baker, was an excellent rider. He was mounted on his horse Pronto so he could show techniques to the twins, if necessary.

"Elbows in, Abby," her father said. "Right, now both of you trot. Andy, your reins are too loose; take them in a bit."

Both of the children were good at trotting, and after a while Mr. Baker called out, "Now sitting trot." Abby preferred rising trot to sitting trot, because whenever she tried to sit still in the saddle, she bounced all over the place.

"Abby, it's called sitting trot for a reason," her father said with a smile. "You're supposed to sit in the saddle. Lean back a bit more, and watch how Andy does it."

Abby watched as Andy effortlessly sat the trot, hardly bouncing at all.

"Abby," Mr. Baker called out, "your first goal is to improve your sitting trot. Now, both of you do some cantering."

Abby tried to remember all that she had been taught about going from a trot to a canter. *Gather the reins, sit the trot, lean back, and put gentle pressure on the horse's sides*, Abby said to herself.

Arrow knew what she was asking him for, and eagerly broke into a canter.

Abby sat a few strides, and then, without trying to, began to lean forward. Arrow seemed to speed up. Abby pulled on the reins, and Arrow slowed to a trot. Abby sighed in disappointment, wondering if she would ever be able to canter well.

Andy was having no trouble cantering on Sergeant. In fact, he was urging Sergeant to go faster and faster, until they were almost galloping around the arena. Mr. Baker looked at both of his children. The one disliked cantering, and the other was bored of it.

“I see that this is something you can both improve on. Andy, you can go as fast as you want when out on the open fields or when entertaining yourself, but not when you’re supposed to be cantering in the show-ring. Practice sitting correctly while cantering, and try not to look bored. Abby, don’t lean forward. Make a mental note to lean back and relax in the saddle. Watch how I do it.”

Mr. Baker took Pronto around the arena at a rising trot. Then he sat in the saddle, leant back, and asked Pronto to canter by gently nudging the mare with his heels. She broke into an easy canter, and Abby noticed how relaxed her father looked. When he came back to the centre of the arena, Mr. Baker said, “Improving on cantering is the second goal for both of you. You can try it again, Andy.”

Then Mr. Baker turned to Abby and said, “Arrow enjoys cantering. Lean back, and let him have some more rein. If you let him have his head, he’ll look after himself—just concentrate on riding correctly.”

“Yes, Father. I don’t like cantering, though,” Abby blushed.

Mr. Baker looked kindly at his daughter and said, “Abby, you enjoy trotting because you’re used to it; if you get used to cantering, you’ll enjoy it too.”

“I’ll never be as good as Andy.”

“Does it matter? If you do your very best this year, I’ll be proud of you—even if you’re not as confident as Andy is.”

The rest of the lesson passed uneventfully. The twins practised jumping, going over trotting poles, and extending and collecting the trot. Then they cooled down the horses and turned them out into the field.

Abby glanced at her watch. It was nearly nine o’clock, time for “school” to

begin. She smiled to herself. Even though the children were home-educated, Mr. and Mrs. Baker were punctual when it came to starting the morning's work on schedule.

While Mr. Baker worked on farm implements he was planning to patent, Mrs. Baker home-schooled Tom. The twins did most of their schoolwork in their rooms, though Mr. Baker taught them science in his workshop. Everybody worked until ten o'clock, when they stopped for a snack and a short break. Then they continued working until lunchtime.

After lunch, the children went outside, and later the twins practised their instruments. Abby played the cello and Andy the trumpet, and both played the piano. Next, the children did their farm chores and had a bit of free time. Then came supper, Bible reading, and finally some well-deserved sleep.

CHAPTER 2

It was a few days later, at breakfast, when Mr. Baker said to the twins, “I told Uncle Clive about the horse-show that you two are practising for, and he thinks it sounds marvellous. I’ve spoken to your mother, and we’ve decided to invite his daughter Mildred to visit us, so she can enter too.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely!” Abby exclaimed.

“Yes,” Mrs. Baker said, “but dears, please don’t call her Mildred. She prefers to be called Millie.”

Mr. Baker nodded. “She will travel with Phil on the way here. Uncle Clive will send her horse over for the show.”

Andy’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Uncle Clive is sending Millie’s horse here, just because of the show? Why can’t Millie borrow one of our horses?”

“I offered for her to borrow Snowdrop,” Mr. Baker replied slowly, “but I think Millie wants to ride a horse that she is used to.”

There were a few seconds of silence, and then Abby said, “That does make sense, I suppose. Well, it will be very interesting to see Millie again after all these years. I wonder how much she has changed since the last time we saw her. How long will she be staying?”

“Millie will arrive with Phil, and leave a few days after the horse show. That makes her visit ten days long,” Mrs. Baker replied.

Time passed quickly. The twins practiced diligently for the horse show and improved noticeably. Abby and her mother spent many afternoons clearing up the spare room, making it as pleasant as they could for Millie's stay, while Andy and Tom did a few things to liven up Philip's room for his return. Before they knew it, the time had come for Mr. Baker to leave for the Drake's house, and for Millie to board her flight for the Baker farm.

Abby awoke, very excited to find that the big day had arrived. It was the first day of home-school holidays, and it was the day that Philip and Millie were arriving. Abby put on prettier clothes than usual, tied her hair up neatly, and went about her chores more energetically than usual. As the day progressed, she felt butterflies in her stomach. She hoped that she and Millie would get on well together.

"Phil's here!" Tom cried shrilly around 2 o'clock that afternoon. He had been looking out his bedroom window and spotted his big brother. He raced down the stairs as fast as his little legs could take him. Mrs. Baker, Abby, and Andy stopped what they had been doing and stepped outside, watching as the familiar figure came striding towards them.

Tom could not contain himself. He let out a whoop of joy and ran to give Phil a hug. Abby and Andy were not far behind. Mrs. Baker chuckled to herself and began walking down the driveway to welcome her eldest son.

Phil was delighted to be welcomed home, and was as happy to see his family members as they were to see him. His siblings beamed with joy at the return of their good-humoured, big brother, and Abby couldn't help noticing how much he looked like Mr. Baker, with his sandy-coloured hair and his blue eyes that sparkled.

Questions came flooding in from all directions as everybody wanted to know about his trip and what he had learnt at the conference. Two questions out of the multitude came to the fore, and soon everybody wanted to know the answers to them.

"Where is your luggage, Phil?" Tom asked.

"Surely you didn't forget it?" Andy teased.

"And where is Millie?" Abby asked, rather anxiously. "Surely you didn't

forget *her*?”

Phil laughed. “No, no. I didn’t forget anything. Millie and the luggage are by the shed, waiting for me to get the truck to give them a lift.”

“Why are Millie and the luggage waiting?” Tom asked. “You walked.”

“Yes, why didn’t Millie walk here,” Abby continued, “and both of you share the load of the luggage?”

Phil hesitated. “She said her ankle was too sore because she bumped it.”

Abby raised her eyebrows, not quite sure what to say. “That’s a shame. Do you think it might be sprained or twisted, Phil?”

He chose his words carefully. “Don’t you worry, Abs. I think it will be just fine.”

Abby asked if she could come along in the truck to fetch Millie and the luggage. Phil agreed.

Hopefully she’ll settle in easily, Abby thought. She’s probably tired after the trip and a little shy. I’ll have to be especially welcoming.

As the truck neared the shed, Abby caught sight of Millie. She was a girl with short blonde hair, which had been cut in the latest fashion and was dyed black at the tips. She stood leaning against the shed doing something on an iPhone and did not look up when the truck stopped. As Abby got out, she noticed that Millie’s eyes were dark with eye shadow. The girl only looked up when Phil cleared his throat loudly.

“Um, hello Millie,” Abby said. She stepped forward to give her cousin a hug, smiling as welcomingly as she could. “It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?” she laughed nervously.

Millie squinted at Abby critically and reluctantly returned her hug. Then, turning to Phil and placing one hand on her hip, she said, “I’ve been waiting for ages, and was about to phone Daddy to say you had forgotten about me.”

Phil pressed his lips together, thought for a second, and then decided not to answer.

Instead, he started packing the luggage into the truck. Abby helped with the lighter bags as Millie watched, still leaning against the shed. When the luggage was packed, Millie got into the truck and piled her backpack and

handbag on the spare seat that Abby was supposed to sit on. Phil opened his mouth to protest, but Abby quickly said, "Okay, I'll meet you up at the house. I may as well check on the horses now; don't worry about giving me a lift, Phil."

Out of the corner of her eye she noticed Millie return to her iPhone. Phil raised his eyebrows as if to ask "*Are you sure?*" But Abby nodded and walked away before Phil could insist on Millie moving her things.

Abby did not slacken her pace until the truck was well away. She reached the wooden fence of the paddock, leaned against it, and sighed. She needed a few moments for everything to sink in. *Wow. I wasn't expecting that*, she thought. *Lord, I pray that things with Millie will not be that awkward ever again.*

A horse named Daisy came over to where Abby stood. As Abby absent-mindedly reached out her hand and stroked the roan mare, she felt sure that the next ten days would be the longest of her life.

When Abby came back to the house, there was no sign of Millie. The jug of home-made lemonade was half-empty and stood on the table beside a few used glasses, and the joyful atmosphere was shattered, but otherwise there were no signs of Millie's presence.

Mrs. Baker was humming distractedly as she made a huge chicken pie for supper.

"Oh, you're back Abby," she said. "There's some lemonade left for you on the table, dear," and then she went back to her thoughts and her cooking. Tom was busy peeling potatoes and carrots.

"Tom, where's Millie?" Abby asked, sipping the lemonade she had made the day before in preparation for Millie's arrival.

"She's in her room. Oh, Abby, did you know that she can ride horses well? She should give you lessons for the horse-show. She'll probably win!" he said, forgetting all about the vegetables.

"Really? Who said so?" Abby asked.

"Millie told us. She can ride excellently, and won a very difficult horse-

show last time,” Tom said.

“Oh,” Abby said in a rather flat tone. She was becoming sceptical of anything Millie said.

“And she has a magnici- magnificent horse...”

“Magnificent, Tom, not *magnificent*,” Abby corrected.

“How do you know about her horse?” Tom asked, amazed.

Abby was about to explain that she was correcting his mistake, when Phil came into the kitchen looking frustrated. Mrs. Baker quickly said, “Tom, dear, please ask Andy if you can help him with the horses; Abby can finish peeling the vegetables for you.”

Tom, who couldn’t believe this change of task, gave a pleased, “Yes, Mother,” and skipped outside to find Andy. When Tom was out of earshot, Phil began, “Mother, what *are* we going to do? Things *can’t* go on like this for the next ten days.”

“Phil, won’t Millie hear us?” Abby whispered hurriedly.

“No, she’s got her earphones on, and it’s a wonder that she hasn’t already burst her eardrums by listening to music that loud.”

“I did notice, Phil, that she seemed rather ... irritable,” Mrs. Baker said, going back to the original subject.

“She’s been like that for the whole trip here. I thought she might get better when she met Abby, but no, she didn’t even try to be polite.”

“Really?” Mrs. Baker asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Yes. Abby didn’t come back with us because Millie had dumped her things on the spare seat. Abby checked on the horses instead of making things more awkward than they already were.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Baker said slowly. “I wondered why Abby did that just when a visitor had arrived. That wasn’t considerate of Millie, but my advice is to be kind and patient with her. Misunderstandings do happen easily.” She paused, and lowered her voice. “Millie’s parents are hardly around. She spends most of the time by herself or with her school-friends. Be gracious to her. She’s not used to our way of life, and it must be quite a shock for her.”

Phil sighed inwardly. It was a good thing that Abby had not come home in the truck with Millie. Abby had escaped hearing Millie's remark about their horses, her comment about Abby's lemonade, and the boastful things she had said about her own riding abilities. Abby had also missed Millie's expression when shown into the spare room. If Mrs. Baker had seen Millie's expressions or heard her remarks, she would be sharing in Phil's exasperation. As it was, he didn't want to tell her about those incidents with Abby around.

After a while, Abby said, "Mother, I don't think it was a misunderstanding, but I'll try my best to get along with Millie—even if she doesn't try her best to get along with me."