



# *Charlotte's Elope*

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Romance

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There once lived two boys in a village; one was named Josiah and the other was called Conrad. They were the best of friends; they walked to school every morning together, they sat together in school, and after school they would play together by the lake, or in the meadows beyond their village. They grew up happily, and were each other's best men at their weddings.

Josiah and Conrad bought one farm together, and split it in half. They each had one half of the farm, but both were so close that they could take a short walk to visit each other whenever they felt like it. Both men spent many seasons tending their farms, and enjoyed it. Holidays were always spent together (for their brides had also become friends with each other, just nothing as intimate as the relationship of Josiah and Conrad). The two of them had such a close relationship that they both promised each other that if one of them ever moved away from his farm, the other surely would, too.

One day, Josiah went over to visit Conrad one morning, with very exciting news to tell, and ran into Conrad on the way, who had been headed to Josiah's house to tell HIS news.

"You go first," Conrad told Josiah.

"My wife is pregnant!" blurted out Josiah.

"My wife is with a child, too!" said Conrad, who was amazed by him and his friend's good fortune.

Their fortune only increased when the summer came, and one night Conrad and his wife (her name was Victoria) went and visited Josiah and his wife (whose name was Esther.) Esther had just given birth to a

strapping baby boy with soft yellow fuzz on top of his round head, and he was named Henry.

Only a week later, Victoria gave birth to her own child; who was a little girl, named Charlotte.

As the years passed by, the two children grew, and Charlotte even had a little brother and a little sister who kept her company, though Henry remained an only child. Charlotte was generally a very shy girl, and she and Henry never knew each other much, despite their parent's intimate relationships with each other.

In the blink of an eye, Henry was a tall, lean, suntanned boy of sixteen years, and Charlotte was a slim, pretty girl who wore her dark hair up and her skirts long. Josiah and Conrad were getting to be old, but they both still loved their farms. Yet, one day, the two of them met in one of Josiah's pastures, for he had news to tell his friend.

"I hate to be the bearer of ill information," Josiah said, gravely, "but my wife's health is failing, as is mine. Neither of us can keep up our farm anymore, and Esther is insisting on our Henry going off to school, so HE won't be here to keep up the farm for us, come this September. Esther wants him to 'get some education, and find a girl.' So... we have decided to sell out."

Conrad begged his friend to stay; for he loved his farm and his friend, as did his family, and he did not want to move away. "I will help take care of the farm, I'll do anything you need," he said desperately. "Garland may only be thirteen, but he can greatly help, too!"

"May I remind you of that solemn oath that we made, almost twenty three years ago?" Asked Josiah, as sternly as one might talk to a naughty puppy.

Conrad sighed heavily. Suddenly, his eyes lit up, as though he had an idea. "What if..." he began, slowly. "I give Henry my Charlotte as a bride, if you'll stay. Like I said, my son Garland and I can help around here however we can!"

One look at his friend revealed that Josiah was intrigued with this idea, but then he shook his head. "How can Henry get an education, if he stays here and marries your daughter?"

"May I remind you that my wife Victoria had been a school teacher before she settled down and married me? She can surely educate your son!"

And so, the two men shook hands on it, and each went home to tell their families of this news.

Henry had been excited for college. He was an ambitious young man, and imagined himself leading his classes and sweeping up scholarships left and right. He also hoped to find his ideal woman; an adorable, positive blonde, he felt, was just right. Henry had, in fact, just been reviewing some latin exercises when his grey-haired father entered, and announced that Henry was to marry Charlotte.

Charlotte, in Henry's eyes, had always been a dark, shy girl who never opened her mouth to say a word to him, which probably had resulted in the afore said 'ideal woman' that had taken firm root in his mind. And now, he had to marry Charlotte, out of all things! Just to keep his father happy! It angered Henry so that he did not leave his room for a week.

Charlotte was equally unhappy when she heard of the betrothal. She loved her father, of course, but was this not taking it too far? Marrying a young man that she scarcely knew? And they were so different, the two of them, like the sun and the moon! Henry was always talking and being so cheerful that Charlotte felt as though he were faking it, and she was very reserved, and really knew no one outside of her own family.

The sixteen year old young lady lay down on her bed and wept solidly for a week.

The wedding was announced to take place, after the harvest season was over and done.

Charlotte went to the village with her mother on a shopping expedition one day, and it was here that her fortune changed. Charlotte and her mother had walked into a dressmaker's shop, and a girl with a rather striking appearance stood behind the counter. Charlotte felt herself shrinking in this girl's presence, and picked out her goods silently, never making eye contact with anyone.

A young man walked in next, and looked like a male version of the girl, and with much darker hair than the girl behind the counter. He looked at Charlotte and smiled, and, to her surprise, she found herself smiling back.

"Hey sister," said the young man to the girl behind the counter.

"Alonzo." The girl acknowledged. She then went back to cutting out some pretty pink fabric.

"I've never seen this maiden around here," the young man, presumably Alonzo, said, looking at Charlotte but speaking to his sister.

"She's an out-of-towner," Alonzo's sister drawled. "How was the drive?"

Alonzo groaned. "Lydia is a nice girl, but there is nothing more to her than that! I wish that I hadn't been set up with her."

Alonzo's sister sighed. "At least you have a beau. One is better than NONE."

Charlotte went back to leafing through fabrics. Her mother asked her the occasional question:

"Do you like this blue calico? Do you want your best dress to be black or that grey and white fabric? What do you think of this green color? Maybe for an afternoon dress?"

"Yes," Charlotte mumbled. Right behind her, she heard Alonzo's deep throaty voice say, "and what is your name?"

Charlotte felt her cheeks redden, and silently cursed herself. She managed to murmur her name. Alonzo smiled, and then left the room.

That night, Charlotte and her mother stayed in a hotel in the village. They were going home in the morning.

As Charlotte unbuttoned her dress and discarded it, she found herself remembering Alonzo's gentle gaze. She shook his image out of her mind, and slipped on her white nightgown. When Charlotte was brushing her dark mane of hair, his face crept back into her mind, and she again shook it away. And as she climbed into bed, Alonzo AGAIN slipped into her mind, and she gave up on shooing him away.

In the early morning, there was a soft rap on their hotel bedroom door. Charlotte slipped on her robe, and went to answer it. Never had she blushed so fiercely as then she saw it was Alonzo!

"H-how did you know we were here?" She stammered.

Alonzo laughed gently. "My sister said you weren't from the town, and it was late in the afternoon, so you couldn't have been going away yesterday, and I put two and two together and decided that you must have been spending the night. As there are no other hotels in town, I just came here and asked which room had a

'Charlotte' staying in it." Alonzo stopped and laughed. "There were two Charlottes, and I went to the other room first. It was an elderly woman, and she was VERY angry to have I, a male, see HER in her nightclothes!!"

Charlotte permitted a smile, after picturing the comical scene in her mind. "But why would you want to see me again?" She asked, her smile fading.

Alonzo said, suddenly a bit shy, "I wanted to know if you wanted to go on a walk?"

Charlotte found that she was saying yes, and then went back into her hotel room to dress.

The seventeen year old girl- her birthday had passed very recently- thoroughly enjoyed her walk, and realized something very startling. "I love him," she whispered. The words tasted strange on her tongue, but she said them again and found that they had more savor. "I love him!" She then made a decision. She took a piece of parchment, took up a pen, and wrote a letter that was left on her mother's hotel night-table.

Victoria, Charlotte's mother, awoke at about ten o'clock that morning, having stayed up very late the night before, not being able to fall asleep, due to some loud men talking in the room next over. She got out of bed and dressed. It was then she noticed her daughter was absent, and thought that she must have been visiting the ladies room. A moment later, Victoria saw the note, and it went as follows:

"Dear Mother, I have found my true love, and have left to be with him forever. I love you and Father, but this is my life that I am leading, and I don't want to marry Henry. I hope that he may find true love himself one day, and I happen to know of a girl who works in the Fabric store who may be of interest to him. Please send my brother Garland and my sister Ruby my love. I will forever remain,

Your Daughter, Charlotte."

Only two more things need to be known now. First, Charlotte and Alonzo married and bought a sweet little house and raised several children together. And Henry still had his education given to him by Victoria, and he married Alonzo's sister(Abigail, her name was) and so Josiah and Conrad's friendships were not broken, their farms never sold. When Charlotte knew of her family's happiness, she was glad, and said, "so there ARE fairytales with no magic after all.. ones where everyone involved can live Happily Ever After."

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