

## **Sterling Bridge: An Opening Excerpt**

Our rooster's shrill morning call jolted me awake to the reality of 1926. I squinted at a timepiece set off the side of my bed, grabbed it, and blinked through sunrays let in by wooden shutters. I tucked my head underneath the covering layer of my afghan, my hand still hanging from the bed holding the time—6:10 A.M. Holes of light permeated through the woven yarns, illuminating patches of my face. In disgust, I slid the handheld clock across the dark, dirt-worn wood floor, far away from me; it scraped loudly to a stop. I rolled over, shielding myself from the window's sunlight and then dug for sheets clinging at my waist; these I pulled over my head.

"Joe," Mother's voice called sharply from outside the bedroom door. "Get up! You need to be hoofing it by 7 o'clock. I don't want you riding the train!" The door creaked open slightly. I rubbed open one eye, momentarily, but she hadn't entered. With my nose exposed, I breathed deeply. "Breakfast," I mumbled, staring gloomily at the bedroom door and stretching my arms. Then I stared up at the ceiling, looked back at the door and buried my nose and eyes underneath the safety of my down pillow. I dozed off.

Firm, warm hands squeezed my cold toes free of their covering. I squirmed and kicked, but the grip remained. I rubbed my eyes and looked at the easy grin of my father. "Good morning, bright eyes," he said. "It's a beautiful day!" He tossed my timepiece onto the bed next to me.

I moaned and looked away. "Maybe for you. Do I really have to go to school there? None of the other outsiders do." I stared at the wall beyond him.

Dad put a hand on my shoulder. "Come now, you don't want to be late for your first day. Blend in. Make some friends. It will all work out. You'll see!" My parents figured the younger the better, considering grades six through twelve were combined in the establishment of Tooele. The idea was that maybe the other students might not notice if I started school a few years before I really had no choice, but I knew better. No outsider would go unnoticed in Oldtown.

I bolted upright. "Why me? You never had to!" I jumped to the floor, walked to the window, and stared out at our front yard—a gas station. My countenance softened. "Dad, who's that?"