

# REBELLION'S DAUGHTER

Judi Coburn



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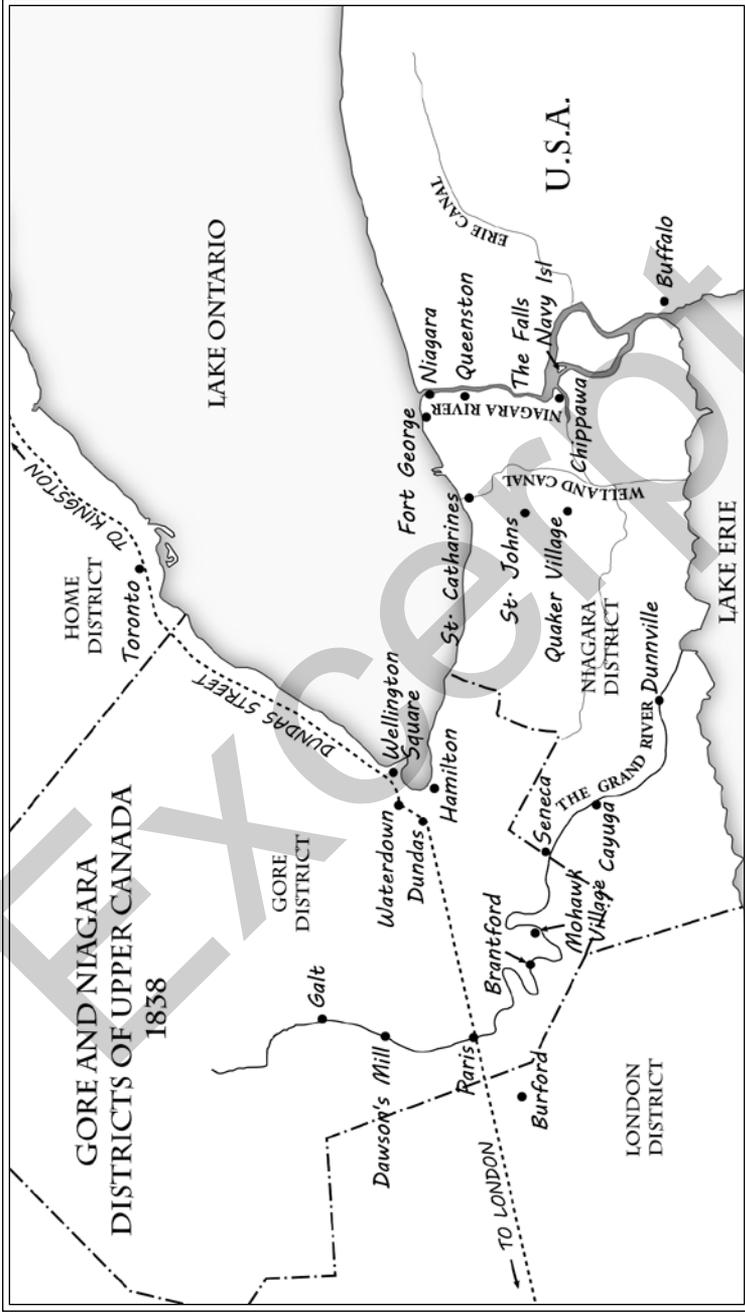
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# PROLOGUE

1842 – LONDON, ENGLAND

DICKENS CIRCLED THE TOP of his glass with his finger, seeing again the anger in the girl's hazel eyes, before answering. "A chatty old matron pointed her out, 'That pretty one—she was one of the rebels, she and her lover.' You remember the political furor here over the rebellions in both provinces of Canada?"

John contemplated his young friend. "Ah yes, the colonial revolts. The passion for democracy carries with it such impatience." He drew noisily on his cigar and waved to the barmaid.

Dickens took the bait. "Impatience was reasonable. The colony was ruled by a small elite ..."

"Yes, yes, but the girl, your letter indicated more than a passing interest."

Dickens waved away the smoke. "I see the state of the empire holds much less interest for you than a story with a pretty face and romantic liaisons. Is this what publishing has done to you?"

A swaying customer jostled John, and cigar ash speckled his portly front. He brushed it off as Dickens began.

"Her name was Eunice, Eunice Whiting, and she came and sat across from me. Lovely pale face framed by dark hair tucked into

her cap, cat-like hazel eyes, which inspected me pretty carefully, indeed seemed quite taken by my waistcoat.” The woman arrived with their drinks, and Dickens clinked several coins onto her tray.

“She answered my questions without shyness. ‘My family didn’t ride about in carriages, if that’s what yer asking, not like those got handed properties on silver trays.’ When I asked how she came to be associated with men wanting to overthrow the government, she said that the government was run by the rich, for the rich, so when the rebels needed messages delivered, she had offered. She said that she’d had to dress as a boy but could govern any horse a man could ride.” Dickens smiled into his drink.

“I noted that she must have faced considerable danger, and she told a tale of how she and another rebel had been caught in the crossfire between the rebels on an island in the Niagara River and the militia on the banks. ‘We were in a canoe,’ she said, ‘in a current hell bent to drag us over the falls.’”

“Very dramatic. I’d say a pretty girl winks at you and off you go, down her fanciful road.”

“Maybe, but her story rang with an anger about injustice, aimed not only at the rich but men in general, who, she complained, had so much more freedom. When I observed that she sounded resentful about returning to her female identity, she said sometimes, but that she’d found men’s swagger damned tiresome.”

“That does suggest a certain perceptiveness. Did she know who you were?”

“Ah well, the pompous fellow who arranged the interview chose to inform her that I was a famous English writer. I must say she seemed unimpressed.”

“Good God, perhaps she hasn’t yet read *Pickwick Papers*. I’m afraid I must interrupt you, Charles, to obey the call of nature but I do want to hear the end of this.”

Dickens swirled his brandy after his friend left, remembering, regretting the turn his interview with the girl had taken. She had asked, “What kind of things do you write?” and he had tried to explain he wrote stories about people who have faced adversity.

“So, you find my story interesting?” she had asked.

“Well, yes. I am drawn to people who’ve led unusual lives.”

She had arched an eyebrow. “You make me sound like I’m about to be rolled into my grave.”

In fact, she was twenty, only ten years younger than he, only sixteen at the time of the rebellion. He had asked what kind of men these rebels were.

“They believed a better world was possible.” She had looked down. “Some paid dearly.”

Stupidly he had pressed her, saying he’d heard of a romantic attachment with one of the rebel leaders, and he hoped it was not one of these unfortunate men. Dickens watched the tobacco smoke curl towards the hearth. The girl had looked up at him, her green eyes hard. “You don’t give a damn that men died; you just want a story. Well, you’re not going to get it.”

His friend eased his girth back into his seat. “Where were we? Ah, your pretty adventurer was not so impressed with her famous visitor.”

“Yes, quite. She appeared offended by my questions and demanded that I not write a word of her story. Then she said that she had a lot of work to finish, as if I had become a great bother.”

“How awkward. So, no manuscript with rebels and redcoats and backwoods’ beauties? A shame.”

But Dickens could not stop thinking about her. Clearly, he’d been seduced by a comely face and fanciful tale, but he was more than a little curious to know the real story behind Eunice Whiting.

# CHAPTER 1

1834 – GORE DISTRICT, UPPER CANADA

**D**AMN YOU, BESS, MOVE yer fat old ass.” Eunice panted as she pushed against the wooden shafts of the plough. The blade clanked loudly against stone and the horse stopped with a shudder, startling a flock of crows that flapped up, cawing raucously, then resettled to peck in the newly turned earth.

Perched on a stump at the edge of the field, her brother Clay looked skyward. “Lord forgive Nissy’s foul mouth and rough ways.” His sister’s skirt was pulled up and tucked into her waistband, exposing thick black woolen stockings. Dark hair had come loose from her braid, and her bonnet had slipped down onto her grey blouse. She stuck out her tongue at him. “Pa’s going to be back soon. You’d better skedaddle.”

Gripping the wooden shafts, she pushed with all her might. The blade lurched forward, and as it did, she lost her footing in the slick clay and fell to her knees. Her hand slid in the mud and her head collided with rock. Reaching for the shafts of the plow, she pulled herself up. Her brother’s laughter stopped when he saw her swipe at a trickle of blood on her cheek, and he sprinted over. “Hey, are you alright?” He pushed her hair back and wiped the muck off with his hand.

Over his shoulder she spotted her father's short stout form, floppy felt hat and red beard, skirting a pile of stones just below them. He was followed by her little brother, Luke, brown shirt flapping around his skinny frame. "I'm fine but here comes Pa." She quickly tugged her skirt down.

With an axe over one shoulder, a coil of rope over the other, Pa's scowl was made more severe by his one drooping eyelid. Reaching them, he pulled the axe off his shoulder and leaned his belly against it, wheezing from the climb. He frowned at Clay and pointed his chin toward the field. "Still not half finished, I see." He turned to squint at Eunice. "And what're you doing here? You was to help your ma."

"I did, but I finished and thought I'd give Clay a hand."

"I just saw your ma. She said you disappeared. You're to go help with the washing. Luke will take yer place on that plow while Clay and I tackle that root. Now git." He turned his back.

Eunice was cut by her dismissal. He knew that Luke was too puny to be much use with the plow. Why wouldn't he let her help as she used to?

In front of their log home, her older sister, Rachel, the sleeves of her grey cotton blouse rolled up and her apron damp from the steaming water she was pouring into the metal laundry tub, looked up at Eunice. Rachel's freckled face was fixed in complaint as Eunice dipped her hands into the soapy water and tried to splash her face clean.

"You shouldn't take off like that, Eunice. It annoys Ma no end, and Pa looked daggers when he saw you out there. And what have you done to yourself?"

"It's nothing. What a fuss. I wasn't gone that long." They stood together at the bench, Rachel forcing the large wooden spatula back and forth through the sudsy mass, while Eunice bent over the washboard, scrubbing each piece of clothing up and down, up and down. Hauling up a dripping pair of trousers, she pulled the waistband out to its limit and scrunched up her face like their disapproving pa, winning a snort of laughter from Rachel before she

took the other end and they twisted the cloth, squeezing out the water from three pairs of homespun trousers, three shirts, three women's blouses, three cotton shifts, six tube stockings and two coarse towels. In the field behind them, Eunice could see Luke struggling behind the plow.

Suddenly, her mother's hands circled her from behind with an apron, which she tied none too gently, and then repositioned Eunice's bonnet, which had slipped down onto her back. "I can't turn my back but you disappear, and I see you've muddied yourself."

Looking at her mother's weary face, Eunice wondered when she had last seen her smile. Maybe not since her sister Annie had died of diphtheria two years ago—little Annie, whose happy sing-song voice and sticky hugs had once brightened the cabin. Ma had never stopped grieving for her youngest. The marriage and departure of her eldest daughter, Urana, added to her grim mood. Ma had once admitted there were days she would give anything to go back to her family in New York State.

At the clothesline, the wind pressed against the three women's long skirts, aprons and bonnets as they struggled to pin the laundry on twine that stretched from the cabin to a nearby tree.

"For God's sake, look at the mess you're making, Eunice. Those clothes will never dry in those clumps. Just look at yours compared to Rachel's. Pay attention to what you're doing." Pinning a clothespeg over a woolen stocking, Ma added, "I need you two to pull out the remaining potatoes from the cold cellar. Many have turned black, but I think we can find enough for this week, and we'll cut out the eyes for this year's planting.

Eunice groaned. She had been looking forward to climbing on Midnight and riding off behind her brother on Bess, racing him to the far field. Clay had taken up the role of teacher to his younger sister, and she loved these times. He had taught her to load and fire a musket. When she pulled down her first partridge, he'd said he couldn't have done better himself. She'd flushed with pleasure when a neighbour commented on how alike she and her brother were.

Her mother looked sharply at her as she picked up the empty

basket, "You're not slipping off again, Eunice. Galloping about, hair flying every which way; it's hardly attractive. Now that you're becoming a young woman, you should be learning at my side if you're ever going to find a husband."

It was true that she often swapped her kitchen chores for Rachel's share of the milking and much preferred mucking out manure from the barn to kneading dough. Last fall she had been released from the steamy business of putting up fruit preserves to join Clay and Pa for several crisp golden days of forking the mown hay up onto the hay rack and following that to go with them into the bush to pull out timber for their winter firewood. Her mother's face had tightened with disapproval, but as usual, Pa got his way. But that was last fall. If Pa spoke at all to her now, it was with some accusation.

She complained to her sister Rachel that night as they climbed into their bed under the low roof of the loft. It was stifling hot, mosquitoes whined at the muslin cloth over the small window, and both girls had stripped to their sleeveless shifts. Clay and Luke were passed out on the bed opposite. Rachel eyed Eunice in the candlelight while pulling her dark hair down from its coiled braid and responded, "Take a look at yourself. He used to forget you were a girl, but he sure can't do that anymore." She turned away. "I warn you. Keep out of Pa's way now you've got the start of a woman's figure. I've had to dodge away from him when he gets that nasty look in his eye and so will you."

Eunice blew out the candle wondering what on earth Rachel was talking about, but her sister was not going to explain unless asked and darned if she would give her that satisfaction. Sometimes Rachel's superior manner drove her around the bend. "He's just angry that we haven't been able to clear as much land as he wanted. We all know his bad tempers."

As they lay side by side in the dark, Rachel sighed. "You never listen, Eunice. When Pa gets to drinking in the barn, he turns into someone else. You think you know Pa. Well, I'm telling you, you don't."

Eunice sure didn't feel like she knew him anymore. She thought he was pleased at her work in the fields. The changes in her body seemed to go along with all his new rules. She ran her hand over her swelling breasts and bit her lip. Why should they make any difference? She was the same person.

A few days later she was leaning on the split rail fence with Clay, watching Midnight kick up his heels in a little frenzy of spring fever and had giggled at the horse's extended penis. Pa came out of the barn and barked at her, "Go help yer ma."

"Dinner's all ready."

"When I say march, I mean it." He took her roughly by the arm.

"Why are you always at me these days?"

"I wouldn't be if you weren't always carrying on so, flouncing and flirting."

"Flirting?" She wasn't sure what this meant other than it had something to do with young women who her mother sniffed at in town. Angrily, she jerked her arm free from his tight hold. "What's the matter with you?"

His open palm slammed into her face. She stumbled and would have fallen had she not grabbed the fence rail. "Get inside with ya. There'll be no supper for you tonight."

She held her cheek, stunned. What had she done? Clay just shrugged helplessly.

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Rachel examined Eunice's bruise when they got into bed together and tisked sympathetically. "Pa's always scared me," she said. "I stay as far away as I can, and you should do the same. And for God's sake, don't provoke him."

All night she tossed restlessly. It wasn't fair. Rachel finally demanded that if she couldn't lie still, she should sleep on the floor.

The following morning, washing the porridge bowls in a tub on the plank table, Eunice watched resentfully as Clay sauntered out to the barn.

"I don't know what you did, Eunice, to so rile up your father." Her mother was kneading bread dough on the table beside her. "I

figure you talked back to him. I don't want to hear any excuses. Just try to be more agreeable when you're asked to do something." Wincing, her mother stopped to rub her lower back with both hands. She glanced at Eunice and shook her head. "And why must you always look like you just got out of bed. Rachel, bless her, she's not favoured with your pretty face, but at least she braids her hair neatly. Stand still while I set this right." Ma's fingers pulled her hair painfully back from her temples as she deftly reworked the braid.

"Done, now take your bonnet and help Rachel with the trellises in the garden."

Sullenly she opened the cabin door and stepped out into the sunshine. She was surprised to see Clay coming towards her with the metal pry rod and a big grin.

"I pointed out to Pa that we couldn't start seeding until more rocks were dug out and it was going to be a hell of a lot faster to pry them out if I had your help." She grinned back and pulled her apron over her head just as Ma appeared in the doorway, scowling at Clay.

Out in the field, as the sun beat down on her shoulders, she and Clay struggled over a large boulder, she levering with the rod and Clay pulling at the embedded rock. Eunice pushed down on the rod with all her might, and the rock raised slightly, allowing Clay to heave it back and forth. She said, "What's with Pa? He used to want me to help. Now he's angry when I try. He's always angry it seems."

"He's hard to please, that's for sure, and he picks fights when he's been dipping into his home brew." Clay shifted his position in order to get a better grip on the boulder. "You know he can't stand being challenged, and you're ... well, you're ..."

"I'm what?"

"Well, you can be a bit bold, Nissy."

"What do you mean, bold?"

"Well, you talk to him a bit brash. He needs to be boss. And now would you please lean into the job."

She had expected Clay to be more sympathetic. As she pressed

her weight against the metal bar, she swore at the unfairness of it all.

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Very early one morning, after seeding was done, her ma banged the kettle with a spoon at the bottom of the stairs and called up, “You all need to get down here lickity-split. We’re all going for a ride. Pa’s almost finished the milking, and Mr. Ferguson has agreed to do the evening chores.” Eunice and Rachel looked at each other. What was going on? Their mother seemed excited.

The porridge was already poured into their bowls, and they ate quickly in the misty dawn light, then piled into the back of the wagon along with an assortment of crocks and a basket that their ma had packed. They rattled off down the road, Luke and Clay braced against one side of the wagon and she and Rachel against the other, the sacks of straw beneath them doing little to cushion the bone-jarring ride as the wooden wheels bounced over the deep ruts that coursed across the road.

Rachel spoke over the creaking wheels and clopping hooves, “Ma’s fortieth is coming up. I’ll bet we’re off to the fair in Ancaster.”

Clay called back, “More likely we’re going to visit Pa’s sister. We haven’t seen them for over a year.”

Ma turned her head, “You’re both wrong. I’m not going to tell, but I promise you’re going to like it.”

Eunice was grateful when they reached Dundas Road for the province’s main east-west highway was much less painful on her bottom. The forest parted more frequently, and they passed some fine farms, freshly painted two-and-a-half-storey clapboard homes with wide verandas and handsome stables. These houses cast their own log cabin in a poor light. Her aunt’s farmhouse was certainly more substantial, with its two proper floors instead of a sloped loft like their own, but she now saw that their main room, dominated by stone hearth and plank table, and Ma and Pa’s small adjoining bedroom, was half the size of some people’s stables. She stared at the prosperous farms, where large fields, neat sunlit squares of green, successfully pressed back the forest that crowded in dark

and close on all sides of their own land. Occasionally they passed farms much like their own, low log cabins in a clearing with ugly blackened stumps scattered among rows of new sprouts and smudges of smoke rising from piles of burning brush. The contrast was stark.

Over the noise of clopping hoofs and jingling harness, her ma was tut-tutting, "Oh my, would you look at that." They were passing a green lawn and a drive lined with peonies, where a fine carriage stood waiting. As they passed a pair of glossy roans grazing in a field, Eunice whistled.

Her father grumbled, "You got to have friends in high places to have animals like them. And then you get dealt the best land, on a decent road, and a comfy little commission to boot. Postmaster, now that's a damned soft job, but how about sheriff? What do you think Evie?" He looked at their mother. "Sheriff Whiting—it's got a solid ring to it." Beside him, their ma's straw bonnet bobbed as she laughed.

"Evie?" The four young passengers exchanged looks. Since Annie's death Ma rarely smiled, and Pa had become more and more testy, but today they were acting silly, like her older sister had before her marriage. It crossed her mind that her parents must have been newlyweds once, but all the same, it was embarrassing.

The sun was high overhead when they arrived at the edge of a deep valley. Below them, nestled in the fork of two rivers, lay a small mill town. When Pa announced over his shoulder that they would all have to speak French now, Eunice asked, "What's he talking about?"

Her mother replied, "Just Pa's little joke. This is Paris, not the Paris of Napoleon, but the Paris of plaster. That's gypsum being mined down there."

From the height they looked down at mill races running off two merging rivers and small buildings stretched out along their banks. Cabins squatted on the flats, and high above, the chimneys and roof of a fine brick home poked above the trees.

They turned off Dundas Road and lurched along a road that

took them alongside the Grand River through dark forest until finally a church spire was visible above the blue green wash of the river. Soon they were stalled behind a line of vehicles and knots of pedestrians all headed in the same direction.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this here is Galt,” Pa announced grandly. Clay stood up to have a look. “Holy crow.”

They all stood. On the flat beside the river stood a large white tent with Burgess’s Menagerie emblazoned on the roof. It was surrounded by a maze of wagons and fancy carriages.

Their ma exclaimed, “Oh my goodness gracious!” and added, “I saw a menagerie once in New York State, and I always wanted to see another.” Her eyes sparkled, and there were blotches of colour in her cheeks.

When they arrived, the four children jumped down and stood for a moment taking in the the noisy throng of people on the move or gathered around carts and stalls where hawkers called out their wares. At home they could go weeks seeing no one except perhaps a wagon passing at the end of their lane. Their crossroads village—a cluster of cabins, a store and a blacksmith—was nothing like this.

“C’mon,” cried Clay, bolting ahead, and they followed him, gawking left and right, dodging piles of manure and clusters of people. A man in a bulging bright blue jacket and a tall crumpled hat stood on a cart in front of an array of bottles, and they stopped to listen to his Irish patter on the miraculous powers of his potion.

“Back pain, ah ’tis the curse of the hardworking man, but this here, I guarantee you, this here will send that pain packin’ and fix a contented smile on the face of even the most tormented.”

Clay nudged Eunice. “Let’s get a whole case of that stuff for Pa.”

Nearby, a shrivelled old fellow sat on a stool, a tray hung around his neck displaying small rolls wrapped in coloured paper. His cloudy sightless eyes stared into the distance as he chanted over and over, “Toffee, sticky toffee, sticky toffee.”

Eunice pulled on Clay’s arm. “Let’s buy some.” Clay took out the pennies their father had given him and exchanged them for a

few paper rolls. She popped one of the candies into her mouth and was surprised by the rich sweet mass of goo that stuck to her teeth. A bell started to clang, and the crowd began hurrying towards the tent.

Inside, the dim interior radiated with heat and nose-stinging manure smells. Eunice eyed the women in their layered white muslin dresses and fancy bonnets, who fanned themselves beside husbands in fine breeches and frock coats, probably the owners of those colourful sprung carriages they passed on the road. Clustered in other circles were couples dressed in the more familiar earth tones of their own homespun clothing. Animated voices in the strongly accented voices of Scottish, Irish, German and Yankee settlers vied to be heard, and children ran everywhere.

A trumpet fanfare sounded, and they squeezed onto the bench beside their parents and were soon open-mouthed in amazement as monkeys dressed in little suits tumbled about, followed by a camel draped in rich fabrics and tassels who circled the space, gazing haughtily at the crowd. Then cages with gigantic pacing cats inside were rolled out. There was a magnificent striped cat, then a long spotted one, and lastly, a glossy black beauty. One at a time the beasts were released, and as a young man cracked his whip, they snarled and bared their great fangs. Eunice gripped Clay's arm in alarm, but she couldn't take her eyes from the huge, beautiful animals. Even after the panther was back in its cage, she watched as it continued to pace and glower at the crowd. The trainer bowed to applause, and Eunice joined in, but her gaze was fixed on the caged fury. Why did it not strike back? It was so much more powerful than the silly young man.

The heat inside the tent was oppressive, clothing stuck to backs in large wet patches, and at intermission a lineup of red-faced adults and children quickly formed, waiting their turn to dip their containers into a large barrel of water, cooled by great chunks of ice. Pa headed off by himself, while Ma, Luke and Rachel went to wait for water, and Clay slipped outside, Eunice following close behind.

Getting a wave from a boy, Clay headed towards a group of lads drinking from a crock behind a wagon. Eunice stood so close to Clay that finally he introduced her, and she felt their appraising stares. One of them offered her the crock and she gamely raised it to her mouth. Her bonnet slid off and the boys guffawed when she recoiled coughing. Determined, she lifted the crock again and swallowed two large gulps until Clay took it from her.

Returning to the tent, he said, "It might be wise to act less ... coarse."

"Coarse?" she snorted. "Who do you think you are, Pa?"

He looked startled, then said angrily, "I am not like Pa." She shrugged.

They got back just in time for the last act. A long drum roll announced Timour. Huge and wrinkly, his vast girth swayed as he lowered himself onto a mammoth rump, raised up two legs, waved his trunk and bellowed. There were shrieks from the audience. As the pink end of his long trunk searched the young trainer's shirt, Eunice, still a little giddy from the drink, laughed out loud. When the young man looked over and winked at her, Pa shot her a warning look. She looked away. She wasn't going to let him spoil the fun.

At the end of the performance, in a shady glen on the bank of the Grand River, her mother spread out a blanket, and the family sat and ate the cold lunch she had packed. There was chicken, fresh bread and butter, cucumber pickles, strawberries, and to wash it down, a jug of water Ma had drawn from the keg at the circus and another crock containing the beer she had brought from home.

Pa lay down on the grass and, hat covering his face, started to snore softly, while the rest talked about what they had seen. Everyone had their favourites.

As Ma brushed crumbs from her skirt, she said, "That camel was the strangest looking thing I've ever laid eyes on, like a cross between a starving horse and a ..."

"And Aunt Lorretta," Clay offered to laughter and a rebuke from Ma. Their auntie was a stern hunchbacked woman, not a favourite with the children.

Luke spoke around a mouthful of chicken, "I liked the elephant. He'd be great pulling a plow."

Ma said, "Ah but imagine having to muck out his stall."

When Eunice said she thought she'd never seen anything so beautiful as the black panther, Clay teased, "I don't think it was the panther you were admiring but his handsome trainer."

She snorted. "Him? He thought way too much of himself. I was hoping one of those cats would give him a good swat." Her mother shook her head but for once good naturedly. Clay chuckled and pulled on her braid and she was pleased. After his complaint about her behaviour with the boys, she wanted his approval back.

Rachel poured herself a mug of beer, saying she had spit out the nasty tasting water in the tent and was dying of thirst. Finding the beer gone, Clay hoisted up the water jug and let it gush into his mouth and down the front of his shirt. "Good thing that's water, not beer," Ma said.

As the family resumed their positions in the wagon and set out for home, they continued to talk about the circus, and there was much giggling as Clay imagined the circus animals prancing along this road, with elephants, camels and monkeys all running amok. Finally, Eunice fell into a lurching sleep between Clay and Rachel, the four of them like spoons on the straw, rocking under the stars.

The next day Clay complained of stomach cramps. They worsened throughout the day, and the summer night was ugly with the sounds of vomiting. In the morning, her mother, looking pale and frightened, took Eunice aside as soon as she came down from the loft and told her urgently that she must hook up Bess to the wagon and take Rachel and Luke off to their pa's sister right away. "Your pa's gone to see if he can fetch the doctor from Ancaster; it'll take a while. You're the only one I can count on to do this."

She drew in her breath when she saw Clay lying on the cot in the kitchen. His eyes were closed, his skin was ghastly grey and his lips blue. She stepped towards him, but her ma put out her hand.

"Don't go any closer; we don't want it passed on." She squeezed Eunice's hand tightly. "Please take the others away now." Eunice

shook her head vehemently. "I need you, Eunice, I need you to do this for me and I need you to do it quickly."

She hitched up the horse in a daze, and the three of them drove away, leaving their mother standing in the yard, waving. The only sounds were the jingling harness, the creaking wagon, the clopping hoofs and the call of birds. Vivid images of their little sister coughing and gasping for breath came back to her, and she knew they were also in Luke and Rachel's heads, but no one spoke. There were so many differences, she kept telling herself.

Finally, she said, "It's clearly not what Annie had. She couldn't catch her breath. This is some stomach thing. He'll throw it all up and get better. You'll see."

Rachel nodded but Eunice saw the doubt written on her worried face. Luke's head remained sunk on his chest.

They arrived at Aunt Loretta's farm at dusk. Her father's eldest sister was a small, dour woman. Her own children had moved away, and she looked after her husband's bedridden mother as well as his very confused father.

The three of them were given a bed to share, and she and Rachel lay side by side, wide awake, miserable with fear about what was happening at home. At some point Luke started calling out loudly for his ma, and when Eunice put her hand out to quiet him, his skin was so hot she went to get her aunt. She came and carried Luke off to another room. Rachel burst into tears and Eunice put her arms around her and squeezed her tightly. "They'll get better Rach. It's going to be all right, you'll see," but her words sounded feeble.

She and Rachel were sitting wretchedly on the veranda the next day when a neighbour from home rode up, went directly into the house and came back out almost immediately and rode away. Their aunt came out on the verandah, her stern countenance crumpled, her eyes brimmed with tears. "I'm sorry," her voice stuck, "I have very bad news. Clay died yesterday, and your mother, early this morning. It was the cholera."

Rachel collapsed into a chair, and rocking back and forth, began

sobbing uncontrollably, great convulsive gasps, but all Eunice could do was stare blankly at her until her aunt shook her gently by the arm. "Eunice, I know this is all too terrible, but please take your sister upstairs and try to calm her down. There is a doctor on his way to look at Luke."

Numbly Eunice led Rachel up the stairs, clutching at the thought that there had been some huge mistake. Clay could not be gone. It just wasn't possible. Her mother would be kneading bread at the table when they got back.

But wishing didn't make it true.

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Somehow neither she nor Rachel nor their father had taken sick. Luke recovered enough to be carried out to the wagon for the silent trip home with their aunt and uncle four days later. With the summer heat and the fear of contagion, their father had to arrange the burials quickly, and they rode directly to the small log Methodist chapel, where a service was held over two mounds of fresh earth, two mounds close beside a third grave marked by a small wooden cross bearing the words: *IN LOVING MEMORY, ANNIE WHITING, 1827-1831.*

It was a small gathering, for their older sister, Urana, was too far away to make it. Aunt Loretta had brought some black ribbon for her and Rachel to wear around their blouse sleeves and a black frock jacket for their father. He and Rachel stood on either side of Luke, supporting him, and her aunt, in her rustling black dress, pressed in close beside Eunice.

Everything had come apart with such speed. Eunice still didn't believe that both Ma and Clay had vanished from her life. She couldn't cry; she felt completely hollowed out, empty. Life without Clay, without Ma—it was impossible to imagine. When the cheerful cascade of a wren from the woods beside them was repeated again and again, she desperately wanted to find a stone to shut it up.

After returning home, the small foursome tried to re-establish routines. From one day to the next, Eunice could not retain the fact

they were gone, and every morning when she opened her eyes, the knowledge sank in all over again, a heavy stone pressing down on her chest, making it hard to breathe. Every time she entered the barn, she half expected Clay to jump out and say, "Scared ya!" She found unbearable the idea that she would never see him again, nor he her. She had to wait for the sense of emptiness to pass.

A weepy, red-eyed Rachel told her that she had to help her more with the cooking.

Her father wouldn't look at her, even when he was handing out orders. His red beard was untrimmed, his droopy eyelid hung even lower, and his puffy face was always scowling. He spent all his time now with Luke, showing him how to hitch up the horses and handle the plough. At meals he had little to say to either of the girls, but it seemed to Eunice that he was particularly rude to her, and it made her angry.

Nights were long loops of memories, a laughing Clay pulling her braid, Clay kneeling beside her to show how to aim the gun, his look when she accused him of being like Pa. And Ma, Ma was a black hole where there had been an oak, a gaping emptiness that none of them knew what to do with.

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Summer turned into fall. Her father barked at her when she asked about the harvest. "That was last year, missy. This year you're not needed in the fields. You and Rachel will be plenty busy enough taking in the vegetables, that is, if we're all going to eat anything this winter. Luke will work with me."

And so she and her sister took in the garden, all thirty bushels of potatoes, seven bushels of Indian corn and forty odd of peas. Last fall there had been four of them bringing in the garden, Ma and Luke and she and Rachel, and her mother had set the pace. She could hear Ma's scolding voice, "You all must believe in fairies who will do your work while you sleep." She and Rachel had to begin at first light and didn't stop until the dark forced them to.

Late one afternoon, she paused from digging up potatoes and straightened up to stretch her aching back and to lift her braid

off her sweaty neck. In the next field, her pa and Luke were black silhouettes against the late afternoon sun, swinging the cradle scythes in large sweeping motions as they swathed the waist-high grain. Two neighbours followed behind, binding the wheat stalks into sheaves. Other families worked together at harvest, but she knew nothing would ever be as it used to be

Rachel often sniffled the whole evening long as they sat mending or working at the wheel, spinning the carded wool into yarn. Eunice felt her accusing looks. Rachel thought she was a cold-hearted person not to weep for Ma, for Clay. It was true, she didn't cry very often, but she thought about them a lot. She missed Clay most but sometimes she imagined her mother's hand on her shoulder, heard her voice correcting their work.

The winter would not end. Pa and Luke went by themselves out to the bush for wood. Milking the cows was no longer her escape from the others as her pa regularly came into the barn while she was there and would silently work away at fixing something. As she sat on the stool, her cheek resting against the warm hide, rhythmically pulling at the cow's teat, she felt his eyes on her.

One night, she had just finished milking and was covering the pails when Pa came over and suddenly pushed his belly up against her, his scratchy beard pressed against her forehead, his hot boozy breath filling her nose. Disgusted, she pushed him roughly away. He coughed noisily, spat a stream of phlegm and left without a word. He had tried to touch her, touch her in places she knew he shouldn't. It felt all wrong. Was this about becoming a woman? Was having breasts some kind of invitation for men to paw women? Rachel had warned her about keeping away from him. This is what she had been talking about. It made her feel dirty.

Since then, Pa had glowered at her whenever they crossed paths, as if she'd been the one who'd stepped out of line. She was relieved when the cows' milk dried up.

Outdoor chores at least offered the shock of cold air and sparkling snow drifts after the dark monotony of the kitchen. The yard between cabin and barn was crisscrossed by stamped down paths

through the snow, paths to the well to draw up pails of water, to the chicken coop to scatter feed and collect eggs, to the ash kettle, to the outhouse and to the woodpile. When no one was about, she would go there and pick up the axe, raise it high over her head and swing it down hard, splitting the log and cleaving the frosty air with her cries. "Why, why, why?" She railed against Luke and Ma for deserting her.

When the melt finally began, when black soil emerged from the snowbanks and the heady earthy smell of spring wafted through the open window, she felt none of her usual euphoria. One evening, at dusk, she noticed that the lower field was empty. She set off through the squelching mud, carefully skirting the stumps and outcrops of rock hiding in the shadows. The mournful howl of a wolf made her shiver and she remembered how Clay would howl back. When she got to the zig-zag fence, she saw that the sheep had butted a hole in the bottom and had wandered off. She returned, hoping to recruit Luke but seeing that he and Pa were hard at work sawing up lengths of wood with the two-man saw, she took Midnight and was busy until late finding the animals and leading them back.

Eunice was bent over digging a stone out of Midnight's hoof with a knife when her father came into the barn and stood for a minute before he moved in so close behind her she could smell the booze and hear his raspy breath. As she straightened up, he pushed her hard against the stall and pressed his body heavily against hers. He moved one hand down to pull at her skirt.

"Get away!" She wrestled with him but could not match his strength. She could feel his determination; he was not about to back down, not like the last time. She knew with a sudden clarity that he meant to force himself on her, and in a panic she brought up her knee as hard as she could in his crotch.

"You little ..." He doubled over, groaning.

"What kind of father are you?"

He wiped his mouth. "You can't act all innocent, bending over like that. And I told you, you is not to ride the horse."

“You try to have your way with me and then complain about me riding the horse? I took him because the damn sheep got through the fence.” She edged towards the open end of the stall, but he blocked her. His good eye was hard as nails. She saw his assumption that he could do whatever he pleased to her, his contempt for her, as if she was no longer his daughter, just a thing to be used. Her anger blazed like the sudden flare of grease in a pan. “Damn you!” The knife was in her hand and she thrust it at him. It stuck in the wall, inches from his neck. He looked at the knife and then at her in shocked disbelief. When he raised his hand to remove the knife, she shrank back in fear, but then he just turned away and left the barn. A moment later she heard the bang of the cabin door and the thud as the door’s inside bar was dropped into place.

For a moment she stood frozen as fear reverted to fury and then to an overwhelming tiredness. Breathing heavily and wrapped in a horse blanket, she tried to settle herself on a pile of hay, Clay’s jacket pressed close to her cheek, but sleep was impossible. Her life was no longer recognizable. She was no longer her parents’ dutiful daughter, no longer Clay’s hunting companion. Abandoned by both mother and brother, she’d been left to defend herself from a father who seemed more beast than human. Clay would have surely done something. He would have stood up to Pa. But he lay buried in the ground. Trying to imagine her mother’s fingers stroking her hair, as she had done when she was little, trying to imagine her tremulous voice singing a lullaby, what sounded in her ears was the bar of the cabin door being dropped into its slot.

Finally, she rose and pulled Clay’s satchel off the wall. She put his scarf and hat into it and saddled up Midnight. His warm hairy nose sought out her cheek, and her vision blurred as she climbed onto the rail fence, swung up on Midnight’s back and rode away from the farm.