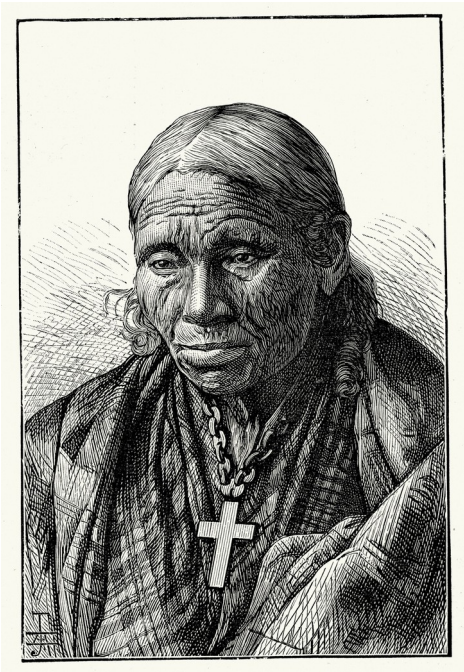
Pioneer Quilt

the adventures of a quilt down through the generations



Ruby

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Prologue

"Girls!" Mary called out as she grabbed two coats off the wall hooks. "Come downstairs. It's time to go."

Six year old, blonde-haired Sarah followed her seven-year-old sister Jamie, still combing her long dark hair, clomped down the steps, her knees bouncing her flared skirt. Mary slipped their coats on and rushed them out the door.

The girls scooted into the back seat of their fifty-five Oldsmobile. Mary slammed the door, got in the driver's seat, backed out, and headed to Granny's. The old car looked like a tank compared to the sleek modern cars on the freeway, but Mary found comfort in Granny's old car. It was nostalgic; it felt like home.

Granny's house was the only thing left of the farm. The rest had been sold to build condos. It was the only house in the neighborhood with a large lot, which had surrounding trees and plenty of room for children. It looked like a Swiss chalet. The monster car pulled up into the drive and the girls were out and running through the front door.

"Look at my picture I drew, Granny," Sarah yelled as she held up the crayon covered paper that depicted the farm as it once was.

"See my picture, Granny," Jamie said gleefully, holding up her picture of the family as it used to be when Grandpa was still alive.

“My, my,” Granny said as she sat down in her huge green velvet recliner chair. “Let me see these. Oh, my. They are just beautiful. You both have such talent.”

The girls beamed, clasped their hands, and jumped on their tiptoes.

“Hello, Mother,” Mary said, bending down to kiss her mother-in-law on the cheek. “Rad is still in Texas looking for a house. His new job is paying well. He’s a good foreman.” She took the girl’s coats and her own and hung them in the hall closet. Then she retired to the kitchen to make dinner with the groceries she brought.

Sarah and Jamie sat on the arms of the recliner and got hugs from their grandma. “I wish my girls didn’t have to move.” She rose from the chair. “Come over here and let me show you the quilt again.”

“Is that the one painted by the Indian?” Sarah asked, sitting next to Granny. Jamie sat on her other side. “Yes, Granny. Show us.”

Granny, struggled to reach around Sarah and take the folded quilt off the top of the couch. She put it onto her wide lap and unfolded it, laying it across both girls and herself. She flipped it from the edge and smoothed it out so it covered three sets of feet.

“First, I want you to look at the signatures. See how they were written in ink and then sewed over with thread.”

Each girl took turns at pointing and asking, “Who is this one?” or “Who is that?” Granny read the list of names and told who they were in relation to her. “This is my great-grandmother, Mary Rucker. This is my great-great-grandfather, Henry

Wasson. This is Edward Rutledge, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was from South Carolina. This one, John Penn, was from North Carolina." Then she had to tell them about the Revolutionary War and tell what the Declaration of Independence was. After a half hour, they wanted Granny to turn the quilt over so they could see the painting.

Granny carefully turned the quilt over to show an amalgam of figures in the middle, fighting close to a covered wagon with trees painted all around, and more figures walking about funny looking houses that looked like brown igloos. Granny said, "No, they are not igloos. They were called wigwams." Most of the people depicted were Indians, but the ones that had blood on them and were lying on the ground looked white. Also, there were two white girls among the village Indians to the right, and to the left, along a trail, was a white girl bending down, putting a package next to the road.

"Granny," the girls asked, "Tell us the story."

"Okay. Let's start with Ruby." Granny looked to her left and right to see the smiles on her grandchildren. She wouldn't see them again for a long time. "She is the one that painted this picture. Her Indian name was Brave Woman.

"Ruby was six years old, just like you, Mary, and had long dark hair. Her sister, Myrtle, was the same age as Jamie, here, one year younger, but her hair was blonde, and it matched her blue, blue eyes. Whenever the Indians looked at her, they were in

awe and thought she was a spirit. They always treated her special. She wasn't rebellious like Ruby and got along with everyone.

Myrtle died young. She never married, and it was a heartbreak to Ruby. She got married and had children, but didn't hand down the quilt to them. She believed the quilt belong to her sister, so after painting it, gave it to another white family going to Alabama. It just happened that they were related, but Ruby never found out. It was only later when that family read the names that they knew they were their own family names. They handed it down to my grandmother and that's how I got a hold of it. She gave it to me before she died. Her name was also Mary." Then under her breath, she said, "There are a lot of Mary's in this family."

Chapter One

Ruby looked at the one room log cabin from her seat in the back of the Conestoga wagon. That cabin had been her home since birth. Now, they were leaving it behind. How many times had she gone in and out of that heavy wooden door? How many times had she run around her log home chased by her sister and the old yeller dog that now lay buried in the back? She remembered years of helping Mama in the garden to the side of the cabin.

Ruby sighed, and just happened to glance at the window where her rag doll, Annie looked out at her. At the same moment she heard her papa say “Giddy up!” and slap the horses with the reins, she called back to him, “Wait! Wait! I forgot Annie! I'll be right back!” As her father halted the horses, she hopped down from the back of the wagon and rushed to the cabin door, pushing it open with all her might.

It was strange. The cabin lay empty. Gone was the cradle she lay in as a baby. Gone was the beautifully lacquered bed of her parents. She looked wistfully up into the loft where her sister's and her bed had been. She could hear echos of laughter, as if the pillow fights were ongoing. She imagined she smelled mother baking bread and stirring the venison stew at the brick-lined fireplace.

“Ruby!” she heard her mama call, waking her from her reminiscing.

“Coming!” she called back.

Ruby rushed to the window and grabbed her doll. She had put her there last night for her to see the coming of the last dawn, the last sunrise from their home, and

the wagon taking them away into the western country. She ran out the door, not shutting it, thinking *what for?*, and ran to catch up to the covered wagon.

“Come on Ruby!” her sister Myrtle called out from the back of the wagon. “Give me yer hand. I'll lift ye up.”

“Mommy!” Ruby yelled, running towards the front of the wagon, “did ye get Grandma's quilt?”

“Yes, Ruby,” she called back. “Now get in the wagon!”

Ruby obeyed her mama. As she let the wagon pass by, she thought it was beautiful. It was right new. Papa had saved up money for years to be able to buy one, and then he had to help build the darn thing. The ribbed sides flanged out and then ballooned up into a canvas saddle that fitted over the willow hoops. The wheels were huge and as tall as she. In between the front and back wheels were the water and flour barrels. She was sure she could smell bacon in one of them.

Ruby remembered with sadness the time that old Willie had contributed that bacon. Mama had explained where the bacon came from that she loved so much, and she became very confused. She cried all that day and sulked, not feeling like talking to anyone or eating any more bacon.

As the wagon passed, she grabbed her sister's hand and a rope handle with which she lifted herself up to secure her foot within a metal stirrup that hung from the bottom of the wagon. She climbed in and peered out the back at her home getting smaller and smaller.

Ruby sighed again and looked at the surrounding landscape. An adventure was at hand, and everything became fresh. The woods looked new and green, the air smelled fresher, the birds sang happier, and the nearby brook was laughing with joy. She looked back trying to see her home, but the trees got in the way, barring her view of the little clearing that was their farm, the only home she ever knew. She would miss her grandma and aunts and uncles and cousins and the neighbors. She would miss Jamie and Matthew, Jethro, Mary, and Hinkle, and all the kids at church. But she turned her mind to the new adventure and the plantation that was waiting for them and her other cousins that had gone ahead of them a couple of years before. She was told Uncle Billy and Aunt Nancy were waiting for them in Boonesborough.

After a while it began to rain. Ruby and Myrtle curled up under Grandma's quilt and stared out into the gray rain. Ruby ran her hand over the signatures and the samples on the quilt. She felt that somehow they were very important. Grandma had given the quilt to them the other day as a going away present. She had talked all about it and the different people that had worked on it and the people that had signed it. As she held the quilt close, it comforted her in her longing for the life they were leaving.

Myrtle asked, “Tell me about the different squares. Who are they? Read the names.”

Ruby smoothed out the blanket and felt the sewn-in signatures with her fingertips. “This one is Mama. Her name be Nancy Cain. This one is Papa’s. His name be Joshua Wasson. There is Grandma's. Her name be Mary Rucker. There is Grandpa’s. His name be Henry Wasson. Then there is Cousin Red. His name be

Columbia Reddy. This one is Aunt Sis. She be Myrtle Rucker. That be yer name. Ye were named after her. Here be my name, Auntie Ruby Kettle.”

Ruby continued down the list, visiting each sacred square. Myrtle soon fell asleep before she heard all the names. Ruby lay her head next to her sister’s, breathed the sweetness of her neck and hair and dozed off.

Caleb stood by his mama's grave. He didn't want to leave her there. Caleb's dad put his hand on his shoulder and said, “It's time to go, son.” Caleb wiped a tear from his eye, looked up at his dad and knew the pain was in his heart too. His dad patted his shoulder, and they walked away from the grave. John lifted his son onto the wagon and hopped up after him. He told the horses to “gie-ha!” as he slapped their backs with the reins. He heard laughter in the back and raised his voice a little to say, “Hector! Sally! Behave. Don't be messing about.”

The year was 1798, and two families headed out from the Upper Piedmont of North Carolina. They headed for the Cumberland Gap and better lives. The Wassons were on their way to Kentucky and Daniel Boone's settlement. That was Ruby's family. They were comfortable and well equipped for the journey. They expected to meet the Singletons, who were heading for Alabama and the War of 1812, at the ford above Fort Patrick Henry. The Singletons would go by way of the Tennessee River once they found it. After the Cumberland Gap they would turn west onto Weston Walker's trail along the Cumberland River. That would lead them to Knox Camp. From there they hoped to find directions to Alabama.

The Wassons, on the other hand, were coming from the vicinity of Morganton near the headwaters of the Catawba River. They would make their way over the Blue Ridge Mountains to Fort Watauga along the Watauga River, on up to Fort Patrick Henry and the Block House near the ford. After crossing the Holston River, the next stop would be the Cumberland Gap. The two families would separate at Walker's Cabin and the Wassons would head north along the Wilderness Trail to Boonesborough.

When Ruby awakened, it was night. There were campfires around a stockade. The place smelled like pinewood smoke, bacon, and coffee. The night air was cold. Myrtle was missing, so she pulled the quilt closer around her neck.

Mama came around to the back of the wagon, stuck her head in and said, “See yer awake. Get down and have some supper with the rest of us.”

Ruby cuddled up to the quilt and said, “No.”

Her mother responded with, “Bring the quilt with ye. Need some vittles. Been sleepin’ all day.”

As she hopped down, Ruby asked, “Are we there yet?”

“Land a mercy, no, chil’. We got another week of travelin’ yet.’”

“I’m tired o’ travelin’!” Ruby tried to keep the quilt out of the mud as she walked around the wagon.

Mama put her arm around her daughter. “It’s the best we can do.”

Ruby yawned and stretched. “Where are we then?”

“This be Fort Patrick Henry.”

Mama sat Ruby next to Myrtle on a log and made her share the quilt with her. She dished up plates for each girl, consisting of cornbread and bacon along with small cups of coffee.

“Daddy said this here’s a fort,” Myrtle said, pointing to the palisade.

“That’s what Mama said.” Ruby pointed to some men carrying muskets.“Lookie yonder. Them’s is Injuns.”

“Yeah,” Myrtle responded, holding the quilt closer around her one shoulder. “Spooky, ain’t it.”

“You know they traded all the time with Papa,” Ruby chided. “You seen them all the time.”

“But they be spooky at *night*!” Myrtle asserted.

Ruby woke up the next morning and found she was in the wagon again. Myrtle was staring at her.

“Stop that, girl!” Ruby complained.

“There be men outside.” Myrtle pointed with her nose as she twisted to see out the back.

They heard a lot of talking. Ruby climbed over Myrtle, stuck her head out and saw another wagon parked along side. Myrtle put her head out and yawned. The girls heard a familiar voice coming from the side of the wagon, a neighbor man they recognized from home.

He was saying, “From this point on you carry yer musket on yer lap loaded and ready.”

Ruby heard her father say, “You show the Cherokee a gun and they think yer against them. I have traded with them ever since I came up here onto the Piedmont. They are becoming very civilized.”

“They're still savages, Josh.” Ruby heard the neighbor man call her father's name. “As long as they're not Christian, you can't trust them. Now I've given my warning and I won't mention it again. Glad to have you along up to Walker's.”

“I'll miss you, John, when we go our ways.” Ruby's papa's voice warmed her heart. He was such a kind and gentle man. “Glad you joined us. Hope you find yer brother.”

“I will. He wrote me a letter. Told me about the good land down in the Alabama. Best land for growing cotton. Give it a try, we will. Can't be so bad living near the Spanish. He said they're good neighbors.”

Ruby wondered if Caleb was in the wagon. Then she saw Sally and Hector pop their heads out the back of their wagon. They waved and said, “Hey, Ruby.” They were twins and were always together. Sometimes they said things at the same time.

“Hey, Hector, Sally,” Ruby said. “Where's Caleb?”

“He's up front,” they said.

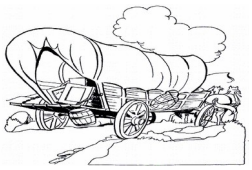
“Oh,” she said.

“Okay!” They heard the neighbor man say. Then Ruby’s wagon started up. The other wagon remained still until it could pull up behind.

Ruby watched the horses turn and the Singleton's wagon turn up behind them, then she noticed Caleb come into view. She felt the blood rush into her face. Caleb

smiled. Ruby and Myrtle squealed and hid their faces in their Grandma's quilt. They giggled for several miles.

The fording of the rivers proved to be a cinch. Even though the current was swift, the water was shallow this high up. At Fort Patrick Henry they had crossed the Watauga River which emptied into the Holstein which had been deeper to ford, but they had no trouble. From there they entered the Wilderness road. It was smoother traveling. Before, they had to follow Indian trails or no trails at all, having to follow stream beds and shallow valleys filled with grass. John said there was a settlement up north a few days travel. The name of the place was Brandon’s Mill. There the road would start towards the Cumberland Gap and Boonesborough.



Cumberland Gap was just that, a gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was breathtaking to the beholders. The road led to a hill top where Nature had scraped a gash into the forest green. The road widened by means of the gap and lack of foliage. Out beyond the gap was rolling grasslands and more forested hills and mountains beyond. The two wagons parked on top of the hill and looked out into the future lives of the hopeful. John pulled his wagon up even with Josh's wagon, and the Wasson girls and the Singleton twins stuck their heads out of the backs of the wagons and jabbered away. John spoke up as soon as he stopped his horses.

“I'll go with you as far as Walker's Cabin. We will rest there for the night. It shouldn't be but a just a few hour's ride from here.”

“Sure looks pretty from up here,” said Nancy, Ruby’s mama, speaking to the air. “Doesn't it?”

“Nice farm land,” said John.

“It stirs the soul, John,” said Josh.

“I can see this whole place covered with farms and little towns. Others will follow us and civilize this whole country. Room enough for everyone for generations to come. I understand that there is another ocean somewhere out there beyond the Mississippi.”

“Yes,” said Josh, “this land will change the lives of a lot of people. It's just breathtaking. Daniel Boone reported Kentucky is vast, just ready to plant. Good land, good climate, and the Indians are friendly.”

“Bought out and subdued more likely,” said John. “My brother wrote back that the Spanish are paying the people to settle the Alabama. They're not only giving land away, but they're actually paying the people come down there.” John took a deep breath of dreams and said, “Well, we'd better be heading out, need to get there before dark.”

“Yeah,” said Josh, filling his eyes with visions of the future, looking around at the land, “We'll follow you this time. You can take the lead for awhile. Walker knows you. We want to stay here another minute and just look at the new land.”

“Okay, Josh,” John said as he slapped the backs of his horses, “see ya there.”

John's wagon moved on down the trail and headed north up to Walker's Cabin. The Wassons watched as their neighbor's wagon rolled its wheels down the hillside and onto the continuing road. There were ruts already in the mud from other wagons that had passed this way. They made the wagon sway back and forth as they rolled over the older ruts. The girls crawled back under the quilt as their father got their wagon rolling again. They dreamed of days past at their grandma's house. They dreamed of the quilt and how they had loved it when she had given it to them. There were parts of their aunts and uncles and neighbors in it and the South Carolina patriots. They had all signed it. There were the signatures of Edward Rutledge and Thomas Heyward among the signatures of her aunts and grandmother who had worked on the quilt.

Grandma Wasson had lived in a great white house just outside of Greenville. She and Grandpa had a plantation and grew a lot of cotton. They had a lot of black slaves they used to plant and harvest the crops. Grandpa died in the war with the British, so the plantation and slaves had to be sold, but after that, everyone moved to Morganton in North Carolina. Grandma had a sister there. Ruby remembered the new house where Aunt Genny and Grandma lived. It had a big yard that was always green. There was a stable in back where they used to have lots of horses before Uncle Mat died. It was white also and so was the fence. Everything was whitewashed. Even the walls inside the house were white. There was no porch on the front of the house. It was a simple two story building with red brick chimneys on each side. There were stairs to the right of the front door that led to the bedrooms on the second story. The

floors were dark wood as well as the top of the stair rail. Throw rugs made of rags braided together covered most of the floor. Underneath the stairs sat the library, and over to the right was the parlor. Across the hall was the dinning room and down the hall and outside in the back was the kitchen where the maids worked. Grandma and Aunt Genny had two colored maids left to take care of them. In the entrance hall there were paintings of great grandparents and ancestors. The colors were pretty dark. Paintings of the immediate family were in the parlor, and they were of lighter colors. Ruby was proud of the painting where she was standing next to her Grandma. Myrtle was in it too, but she had been a baby then. There was grand furniture from France and a harpsichord. Ruby just loved the harpsichord. She loved to run her fingers over its keys, and Grandma would not scold her, but would teach her little tunes she could play. It was in this room that the quilt was presented to Mama.

Grandma and Aunt Genny would sit for hours working on that quilt and told Ruby about each square. Grandma would caress one square and say, “This blue one is from yer mother, from one of her gingham gowns.” She would caress another square and say, “This here pink one is from yer Aunt Nancy Cain. She was my older sister. I had to sign her name because she is passed away now.”

“Here his yer papa’s signature. It’s on a piece of a white shirt of his.”

“Of course, here is mine; Mary Rucker, it says. I used a piece of pink curtain material from the old house in Charleston where we started out. That’s where yer grandpa and I were married.”

Aunt Genny held up a square. “This be yer name, Ruby. Auntie Ruby Kettle. She was yer pa’s sister. She got scalped by the Injuns when she was young, movin’ out into the wilderness with her husband Jed. Here’s another one for him.”

Ruby had become rigid at the thought of being scalped. Then she saw one she recognized right off, having seen him sign documents in his parlor. “That’s Granpa’s. It says Henry Wasson.”

“That’s right, Ruby,” Grandma said. She smoothed out the quilt and caressed her late husband’s name. Then running her hand over another square, she asked Ruby, “Who does this one belong to?”

“That’s Cousin Red.” Ruby rubbed her finger over his signature. “Co – lum – bia Reddy.” She smiled really big, having been able to read his name. “And here’s Aunt Sis.” She pointed to the flower print in the corner.

“That’s right. Myrtle Rucker,” Grandma said, returning Ruby’s smile.

“She’s got my sisters’ name.”

And so the afternoon passed with Grandma and Aunt Genny running down memory lane, talking about all the people in the family. There were funny events such as Jimmy Danders bending over to pick up a pail of milk and being rammed in the behind by the family goat, spilling the milk all over himself, among the tragedies and solemnities of the grave site of George Pesterfield who accidentally shot himself with his own musket.

Even with tea and cakes, the afternoon had gone too fast for Ruby. She had all these memories tucked into a corner of her heart as she had tucked herself and Myrtle under the quilt.

Ruby and Myrtle didn't sleep long, maybe an hour or so. They got out of the wagon and walked with their neighbors Sally and Hector. They played along like children do, playing tag, talking about what their new lives would be like and looking at their new surroundings. They imagined spooky Indians hiding in the woods, and they weren't too far from right. They had been watched ever since they left the gap.

About sundown they came to Walker's Cabin, a way station and store for travelers, traders, and trappers. It included a bar which served corn liqueur and rye whisky. There were Indians with red painted on their foreheads as well as 'coon-skinned capped frontiersmen loitering around the place. The children oohed and awed as they saw the red men. They had seen them before trading with their father, living out in the Piedmont, but it had always been with a drought of imagination. They had never seen them painted up before, and now what they had imagined had come true. Some of the frontiersmen were dressed as Indians with their leather leggings. The pioneers and the frontiersmen eyed each other with curiosity and speculation. Some of the Indians were dressed as white men, so you couldn't tell them apart except for the caps on the white men and the red paint on the bald heads of the Indians. Ruby's father had to explain to the girl's later that they weren't bald but that they shaved their heads like he shaved his face. That made for more oohing and awing.

John took Josh into the trading store and introduced him to Walker. They did a lot of talking and drinking, after which they got down to dickering for a few supplies. Josh took the near empty water barrels out back and filled them up at the spring. John brought out some bacon and cornmeal and shared it with the Wassons. He also brought out a jug of whiskey, which he knew Nancy wouldn't approve of, so they didn't share that.

Night was spent in the wagons camped near the cabin. A fire was blazing outside with the menfolk talking and Nancy just sitting on a log listening. The fire filled the night sky with heat and pine smoke with crackling noises and sparks flying out of the fire. Ruby and Myrtle cuddled up under the quilt and listened until they fell asleep.

Chapter Two

Ruby and Myrtle woke to a sunny day. The other wagon had headed south on its own to follow the Alabama River. They were all alone now, traveling north on a road that was nothing more than a trail through the woods worn wide by other wagons that had gone before them. The girls enjoyed a breakfast of ham and beans and cornbread that had been cooked two days before. They had plenty of spring water to wash it all down, as dry as it was, and to little girls jostled by a wagon on a rough road, they had to make frequent stops to go into the bushes.

At the last stop, their mother called out, “Don’t be too long, girls, and don’t go far. Stay close by the wagon.”

“Okay, Ma,” they called back.

It was a chilly morning, so Myrtle had the blanket wrapped around her.

“Be careful, girl,” warned Ruby. “Don’t drag it on the ground.”

After the girls did their business they headed back. Indians appeared, surrounding the wagon. They were painted with red and white zig-zag lines on their chests and arms and had red on their foreheads as they had seen at Walker’s Cabin. In fact, Josh recognized one of them from the day before. He raised his hand and asked, “Do you speak English?”

The large, muscular Indian with a prominent nose shook his spear at Josh. “You pay toll.”

One of the men, almost white, grabbed a horse by the halter and said, “We take horse.”

Ruby and Myrtle watched from the bushes. Ruby shushed Myrtle who began to whimper, and then they scooted back through the bushes farther into the woods.

“We cannot give you the horse,” Josh said, raising his voice. “We need him to pull the wagon.”

The large Indian went over to the horse on the right and petted its neck. “Strong horse. He pull wagon.”

Upon that pronouncement, Josh did something stupid. He let fear take over and slapped the reins. The horses raised up and came down in a gallop. The large Indian immediately jumped on the horse he was next to, grabbed the reins and attempted to pull the horses to a stop. Mary grabbed Josh’s musket, cocked it, and shot the Indian. He fell underneath the horse’s feet and was trampled. She didn’t realize there were already two Indians inside the wagon and others holding onto the sides, trying to climb under the tarp. One Indian grabbed Josh from behind, trying to wrestle the reins from him. Mary clubbed the Indian with the musket, but the second took out his ax and laid it into the side of her head, spilling her blood over the seat, the baggage, the horses, and Josh who cried, “Mary!” He grabbed hold of his wife and wept. The first Indian who had wrestled Josh pulled on the reins and stopped the wagon, whereupon the second Indian took out his knife and stabbed Josh in the neck and several times in the back. He quivered, the couple slumped over, and they pushed the bodies out of the wagon.

Mary, in one last breath raised up and cried out, “Run, children! Hide, for they have killed us.” She then fell back to the ground and expelled her spirit.

Ruby and Myrtle, in tears, grabbed the quilt and ran. But fearing they would be found, jumped underneath some low lying bushes, covered themselves with the blanket and held their breath. After a long while, when they had returned to breathing, they heard a man’s voice.

“Children,” it said in a falsetto voice. “Children.”

They heard soft footsteps coming closer.

“Children?” The voice was lilting. “I will not hurt you. You may come out now. I will take you back to the wagon and to yer parents.”

The man sat cross-legged in front of the bush. Ruby pushed her nose out from under and peeked. She saw an old Indian in beaded buckskins, and long white braided hair, smiling at her. “You have a big nose,” she said. He offered his hand. She scooted back and covered up with the quilt again, holding Myrtle tightly.

The man didn’t give up and go away. He sat there until Ruby again peeked out like a little chick from under the wing of its mother. Somehow she felt a peace come over her. She came out and sat by the man.

“Are you a grandpa?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, nodding his head. “Many many grandchildren.”

Myrtle whimpered from under the bush.

“It is all right, Myrtle,” Ruby called out gently. “I feel this man is kind.”

Myrtle with her quilt scooted out from under the bush and rushed to Ruby's side, holding her sister with the quilt between them as tight as she could while staring at the smiling man. She gave two short sighs as if she were going to cry, but she held it back.

"Come," the man said as he stood. He reached out his hand. Ruby took it as he said, "I will take you back to the wagon."

The wagon was in shambles. All the bedding and clothes were strewn everywhere. The trunks had been thrown out and opened. Things were missing from them. The horses were gone.

"Where's mommy?" Myrtle asked.

The old man pointed to a pile of old clothes that lay in a muddled and bloody heap on the ground near the front of the wagon.

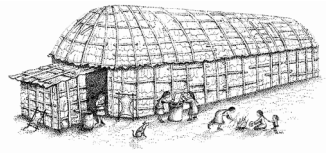
"What?" Ruby asked.

The old man again pointed to the pile of clothes near the wagon.

Ruby blinked. It seemed she could not focus on the clothes. The pile seemed to have faces and hands, but she couldn't comprehend it. She yawned. "It is such a mess. Can I clean it up later? I am so very tired. Can we go now?"

"Mommy. Mommy," Myrtle called. She looked around as though she couldn't see her parents, but there they lay.

The children looked at their father and mother, but they refused to believe what they saw and allowed themselves to be led away by the old man, Ruby holding Myrtle close, and Myrtle holding the quilt, letting it drag behind her on the ground.



The village was laid out in a clearing in the woods. It had been there for generations. Some of the cabins were still made of bark over branches to make an arched roof, but the newcomers to the village preferred the log cabins of the whiteman. Only the people living in the wigwams cooked their food outside near the entrance, and most of them had iron kettles resting on coals or hanging from metal tripods. Even though each meal was cooked separately, everyone brought what they cooked to the long house to share with their neighbors.

As the girls were ushered into the village, roasted venison and corn and venison stew wafted through the air. Their mouths watered.

Myrtle cried out, “I’m hungry.”

“Hush, girl,” Ruby chided. “Wait until you are asked.”

“I am still hungry!” Myrtle crossed her arms and pouted. She licked her lips when she spied a woman bent over a pot, stirring some stew. The woman smiled.

Suddenly, a little Indian girl ran up and grabbed the quilt out of Myrtle’s hands, and Myrtle let out a scream and then started bawling. The old man simultaneously caught the Indian girl by the arm and popped Myrtle in the mouth just hard enough for her to be surprised and come to her senses. He brought the two together, kneeled down and said, “You two are sisters now. We don’t treat each other this way by grabbing

things out of each other's hands, and we do not cry out unless there is danger to the village."

Because of the cry, people had gathered around, and the old man introduced the two little white girls. "These two are new sisters of the tribe. Their parents died. We can talk of that later. They have brought their own blanket. It is theirs. No one is to take it from them. They will live with me and Little Doe."

The women who looked on talked to the girls in a language foreign to them, but they were all smiling and waving their hands in greeting. Myrtle wiped her eyes and waved. Ruby stood there without emotion and stared.

The girls were led to the longhouse where they enjoyed some stew poured over cornmeal mush. They sat on the floor among the same group of women and children who had walked with them and who talked and talked. They didn't have spoons, so they followed the examples of the group and ate with their hands. At the end of the meal, the old man lifted them onto his shoulders and carried them to his cabin, as they had slumped to the ground and fallen asleep.

Chapter Three

Morning started early with the old woman, Little Doe, shaking the girls. They woke up to a strange language. Myrtle cried, “I want my Mommy!” Little Doe raised her hand to slap the girl, but Ruby reached over, covered Myrtle’s mouth and hushed her with, “We don’t cry now.”

“You go with Funny Weasel and get some wood,” Little Doe said, but the white girls did not understand.

An older girl, in a leather dress and pointed nose, looking like a weasel, motioned to the girls with her hand, saying, “Come,” and led them out of the log cabin.

Myrtle tried to take their quilt with them, but Little Doe yanked it from her hands. Ruby had to cover Myrtle’s mouth again and hush her with soft words.

The old man came up and said, “Do not worry. It will be here when you return. You go with Funny Weasel. Little Doe needs firewood.”

Myrtle walked away, wiping tears from her eyes and holding tightly to Ruby’s hand.

Funny Weasel led the girls into the forest and loaded their arms full of dry branches which they took back to the cabin. It was not long before Little Doe had a pot of corn meal mush for them to eat. She gave each one a bowl of mush sprinkled with crushed ashes for salt. Afterwards, they were surprised at what the old woman had them do. She wanted them to chew on deer skin.

“Do like this,” Little Doe said. She chewed the middle of the skin when the girls were trying to chew the edge.

Not ten minutes passed before the girls got tired of chewing. They put the leather on the ground and held their jaws and moaned. Little Doe took a thin branch to them, hitting them over the head, saying strange things to them in an angry voice. They covered their heads with their hands and ducked. Even Funny Weasel couldn’t get them to continue by pleading with them, so she pleaded with Little Doe who thought of something else. Myrtle and Ruby wound up sitting in front of a wooden frame with a fresh deerskin stretched over it. The old woman showed them how to scrape the skin with obsidian knives to get all the fat off one side and all the hair off the other. But their arms got tired quickly. They received another whipping on their backs, so they tried harder. By noon, Little Doe came by to check their progress, and found them fast asleep. She shook her head, saying, “These girls are worthless. How can I get any work done?” She sat down beside them, petting them, wiping their heads and backs gently with her hand, singing softly,

“Little waifs, little waifs,

Sleep now and dream a moment.

Sleep now and dream of omens.

The dreams speak to you,

The dreams leak to you,

Many important things.”

Little Doe got up, smiled, and moved away softly so as not to wake them. She found Funny Weasel who was doing nothing but enjoying a breeze and staring off into space while leaning against a tree. The old woman took her arm and shook her, saying, “Go kick those girls and wake them up. I need more wood.”

Funny Weasel found the white girls and nudged them with her foot. Then she stooped down, took them by the arms and shook them, cussing at them in the strange language.

After the girls gave Little Doe several armfuls of wood, the old woman handed them bowls of a cool drink made of berries, mint, and honey. They thanked her, and then she said, “Get back to work.”

By the end of the day, and after having another supper of venison stew with cornmeal mush, they were ready for bed. They cuddled on a bear skin on the floor of the cabin under their mother’s quilt, and as they were falling asleep, Ruby remembered a prayer and whispered,

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul …” and fell asleep.

Chapter Four

In six years Ruby and Myrtle grew into young women, learning the language of the Cherokee. They learned to make their clothes out of deer skin, make a good fire, preserve meat and cook it, grow and harvest corn, squash, and beans, pulverize cornmeal and cook that, harvest forest roots and herbs to make a good stew, weave beads into belts and vests, build wigwams, and dress people's hair. They also learned the stories of the people.

The girls received new names. Ruby was called Brave Woman, and Myrtle, Bird Chaser, referring to the shaking of her quilt into the air and scaring the birds away. She had the habit of doing this every morning to keep it clean.

Ruby's new name came at a high cost. There were jealousies that grew up between her and the other girls of the village. They blamed her if something was lost or if they didn't marry the boy they loved, or someone became angry with them because they were too lazy to do their work. They didn't accuse her of witchcraft exactly, just that if anything unlucky happened to them, it was Ruby's fault. Maybe the cornmeal mush was burned, or the meat got spoiled, or the hunt went bad, and they didn't get any meat that night.

After Ruby became a woman she had the right to challenge the other girls in the village. It was not combat; women didn't become warriors. She would go through the gauntlet.

The day she was to be tested, girls passing by during her regular duties, taunted her.

“I am going to beat you, Ruby!” one would say.

“I am going to tear yer flesh, white-woman!” another would spout.

Ruby wouldn’t give them any notice. She walked by with her nose in the air.

“Don’t put yer nose up at me,” the chief’s daughter said. “I will have ter head.”

Ruby laughed in her heart, for she knew she could outrun anyone in the village. Maybe that was why all the girls were jealous of her. She was the fastest runner. It came natural, because she grew up being a slave to everyone. She had to gather wood for anyone who asked her or carry heavy loads for them such as cordwood, shingles, baskets of rocks for chimneys, baskets full of corn or pumpkins, and when she decided she had enough and would try to rest, she got things thrown at her. They would throw anything but an ax. They threw bowls, rocks, sticks, bones, utensils, etc. She would run away, and they chased her.

During the games, she could race anyone and win.

One day when she was running away, she ran into Little Doe. It wouldn’t have been such a shock, not knowing how the old woman got there, standing in her way, except that the old woman had been dead five years.

“Stop,” Little Doe said. “You are acting silly. Everyone has to do their part in life. Everyone is to work for the village, or it starves. We are all one family.”

“I wouldn't mind being a part of the family if they would let me,” Ruby complained. “They treat me like a slave, not as one of them.”

“Do yer work without complaint,” Little Doe advised. “Then they will accept you.”

But that advice didn’t seem to work. Ruby stopped complaining, but the work load didn’t shrink. She took up her rebellion again and kept running away. She would always come back, though, warning everyone that someday she would run off for good.

“You do that,” was the response.

The old man could barely walk. He had to use a staff to help him. He came into the cabin to get Ruby. He led her by the hand as though she were a child again until she passed the doorway, then he walked in front of her. She followed him to the place of trial, another clearing near the brook that ran by the village. She was to run uphill through a line of all the girls in the village.

Each girl lined up along the brook. They all looked at Ruby gleefully, holding up a club or switch, cocking their head so they could see her. Bird Chaser was in the gauntlet, giggling and waving at her sister. She had fit in with the other girls. They treated her with respect because of her blonde hair and blue eyes. Ruby did not believe their superstition, thinking she was a spirit.

It was a holiday. Everyone was having fun. All the village was there, talking, laughing, and singing. Some danced to the sound of drums.

The old man presented his adopted daughter to the people. There was a roar of voices. He stood between Ruby and the girls and dropped a gourd wrapped in a cloth

decorated with feathers. When it hit the ground, Ruby, as she had been instructed, started running.

Ruby was determined to not get distracted as she ran up the slope. She thought she could run fast enough to escape the blows, but that first club to the head hurt. Most of the blows were to her back because she did run faster than she had ever run, and she could hear a whisper, “Run, girl, run!” as if it had been the wind. As she neared the end of the gauntlet, her sight became blurry. She could barely see the end. She heard her sister as she swat her on the behind say, “Run faster. You are almost done.” Somehow she summoned all the strength she had and ran like the wind on her back. She felt like she had wings.

After she stopped running, she found that she was near the top of the hill. The only thing that had impeded her was a rocky bluff. She stood there next to a waterfall feeling exhilarated, but panting. She bent over, resting her hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath. Then she saw the blood on her hands and streaming down her arms. She laughed. She survived. The challenge had been won.

She wasn’t altogether startled when she saw all the girls, her sister in the lead, running up the hill after her. She thought of running away, but there was no recourse but to jump down a cliff into the stream. But the girls were laughing and cheering. Behind them strode the old man for whom she felt great love.

After being surrounded by the happy girls who patted and petted her, the old man, who’s name was Big Bear, came up and embraced her. “Brave Woman,” he said, taking hold of her shoulders. “That is yer name now. Brave Woman. yer sister, Bird

Chaser will take you now, wash you and give you a new dress. She will give you yer new name." Big Bear placed Ruby's hand into her sister's. "Go. Take yer sister. Perform the rites."

After that, Ruby, or Brave Woman, was a respected woman and sister within the village. She had many suitors. That made her feel proud.

Chapter Five

Big Bear was the only one that had been kind to Ruby. He had always rescued her, shooing away girls who were pestering her or kidding her. He took a branch of leaves to them and whisked them away as though he were sweeping the air free of cobwebs. He tried his best to keep the peace in the village. Even though everyone respected him, when he wasn't around, they forgot his influence. He would gather people around the campfires at night and tell the stories of his people, usually to give a lesson to the youth.

"Corn Girl came by her name by the lesson she learned," Big Bear began. "One day she was with her mother in the corn field to harvest the corn. She complained that the work was too hard, for she was a small girl and remained a baby for many years. One year a blight came upon the corn and no one had corn for bread or mush or for the marvelous venison stew the women of the tribe made." Big Bear licked his lips, and the children laughed. "The mother blamed her little daughter who didn't grow up and take on the responsibility for helping bring food to the people. All the tribe suffered, and the little girl knew it was her fault, so she left the tribe and sought out Corn Man whose daughters were the three sisters, Corn, Bean, and Squash. He would know what to do about the blight.

"She looked high and low and could not find him. She became very hungry and would have eaten the bark off the trees as do the deer. Then, as she sat beside a brook of sparkling water, she saw her reflection. Yellow lumps covered her face, and her hair

was like the yellow hair on the corn. Now she understood why the other girls of the village made fun of her. She looked like a head of corn, and she could have eaten herself. But as she reached her hand down to the water, she saw the reflection of a man. Being startled, she turned and was handed a ear of corn.

“As she put it to her mouth to eat it, the man stopped her. He said it was not for her, but was for the tribe. If planted near her village, it would kill the blight and grow good corn for everyone.

“The girl struggled to get back to her village. She wanted so much to eat that corn, but she knew she must not. Maybe this would be her way of reconciling with her tribe.

“When she arrived at the village, she collapsed in the cornfield because she was so famished. The next day, someone found her. They aroused her mother who had been weeping for days because she couldn’t find her daughter. When they brought the mother to her daughter, she leaned over and found she was dead. Her empty hands lay beside her body open in a passive way.

“The mother looked up and beheld the Corn Man. She suddenly understood. She said, ‘Bury her here. She will bless us all.’”

One child said, “That is a sad story.”

“It turns out good,” Big Bear said. “This was in the time of planting. So they buried the girl and all the corn they had in the coffers. That harvest, the corn was bigger and healthier than at any other time.”

“So you see,” Big Bear said, holding up a finger, “Sacrifice is required to help the tribe. It is yer duty to labor for the welfare of the tribe, our village.”

Big Bear had been looking at Ruby as he said these last words. She had turned her head in shame, but she didn’t repent until after the gauntlet and was called Brave Woman.

The children would not go to bed and asked for one more story.

“There was at one time a lazy boy and a crippled boy. The lazy boy always taunted the crippled boy and would trip him and laugh. A wise man came into the village and told the two boys to go into the forest and bring back the antlers of a buck, wet with the blood of the animal. The lazy boy boasted that he could bring back the whole buck on his back. The crippled boy said I am crippled, but they both went.

“The lazy boy did not look far when he became tired and laid down upon a rock near a cool stream and went to sleep.

“The crippled boy knew he was crippled and knew he couldn’t bring down a buck. He did not have the strength to pull back a bow. So he took grass, weaved it into a rope and set a trap. He waited patiently in the bushes. Finally, a buck stumbled into his trap. He then approached the deer and apologized to him and said I need yer antlers for a wise man. The buck said if you let me live I will give you my antlers.

“When it was time for the two boys to come back with the antlers of a buck, the lazy boy had rubbed his moccasins on the rock until he made holes in them and came back empty-handed. The crippled boy came back with antlers dripping in blood. The

wise man showed the lazy boy what a crippled boy could do and banished him from the tribe."

Big Bear was a kindly, wise old man, respected of the tribe, loved by the children. But it had not always been that way. Big Bear had been a warrior and fought in George Washington's War, supporting the British. It cost his people lives and traditional lands in North and South Carolina and in Georgia. They had to retreat into Tennessee and northern Alabama. Some stayed in North Carolina and submitted to being civilized by the whites. They retained a semblance of autonomy, farmed, and traded with the whites. But Big Bear and others living in Tennessee still fought the whites, kidnapped their children, and harassed them whenever possible. It was seldom when a man could grow old and settle down, not with the encroachment of the white-man. Because so many of the Cherokee turned to farming, the peoples of North and South Carolina thought they didn't need their hunting grounds and pushed further west. Fighting continued and many died, so Big Bear, an old man, was an oddity in the village, and people looked up to him.

Little Ruby had come to love Big Bear. He became her father figure. She would look for the time he would return from the hunt and would be chided by Little Doe for the affection she showed him by running up to him and hugging him. Not being able to do that, she would still greet him with a great big smile and jump up and down whenever she saw him. Sometimes he offered her a little wrinkled smile from the corner of his mouth. She learned to accept what she could get, finding out that the Indians didn't show much affection.

Big Bear would give Ruby the tender parts of the meat or bring her a butterfly or make her a pretty beaded purse. His words were always kind.

One day she came into the cabin complaining about the girls teasing her and hitting her with sticks. “I will kill them!” she said with her fists in the air.

Big Bear was sitting in a willow chair. He looked at her and said, “Little Doe made walnut porridge with berries and honey. Would you like some?”

That took the fire right out of her. She loved pudding with nuts and berries. But before he would share it with her, he gazed into her eyes. It made her feel guilty. He said, “They are good girls. They are children like you. Someday, they will grow into fine women.” He gave her a bowl of the porridge. “You will too.” As they ate, he told her a story.

“There was a chicken one day that came across an ugly little bird. She saw he had just fallen out of a tree, but she didn’t mind when he joined her little ones. She taught the ugly bird how to scratch and peck at the ground along with her other little chicks to get grubs, worms and bugs to eat.

“One day a rabbit came along and said, ‘Oh, what an ugly little chick. He must have come from a bad egg.’ Another time a mouse came racing by. He was being chased by an owl, but he stopped to see such an ugly little bird. He also said ‘What an ugly little bird.’ Just for that, the owl swooped him up and ate him.

“Later, when the ugly bird had grown, a hunter came along and saw this beautiful eagle scratching and pecking at the ground trying like a chicken to find something to eat. He asked it, ‘What are you doing acting like a chicken?’ The eagle

said, ‘I am a chicken.’ Then the hunter spread his arms in wonder and said, ‘You are an eagle. You should be up in the sky searching the lakes and streams for fish.’ The eagle looked at the man and said, “Leave me alone. I am hungry. I am always hungry and have to continue scratching and pecking to find food.” The hunter laughed and went his way.

“Later that day the eagle found himself at the edge of a lake and saw two other eagles dive down and catch fish feeding at the surface of the lake on the water bugs. He told himself that what they were doing was much more fun than scratching and scrapping for his food. The more he watched the other two eagles the more he got excited, and the more he got excited, the more he wanted to flap his wings until he flapped so much that he found himself up in the air with the others of his kind.

“So it will be yer fate in life, Ruby, to fly someday above the little people who find so much fault.”

It was true that Ruby, now Brave Woman, commanded the respect of the other women of the tribe as well as the young men. They found her beautiful, but inaccessible. The young braves had to fight over her, trying among themselves who was the bravest and the toughest. They would wrestle each other, have races to show who was the fastest, have contests to see who could send his arrow to the center of the mark. Some would bring her venison stew to win her over with their cooking, but no one was perfect in all these things. What she looked for was someone who was handsome, kind, and helpful, as well as being a good provider, someone like Big Bear. Then there was someone like Crazy Leg who walked with a limp. He could say the

most inspiring of things and bring her flowers of the most exquisite color or little animals in cages to show her. He was a nice friend, but she didn’t think he could be a good provider or protector, no matter how much he was in love with her.

One day she was carrying a load of branches for her fire so she could feed an ailing old man whom she considered her father. She came upon Crazy Leg painting decorations, lines, zigzags, boxed-in steps, etc. on some pottery he had fired. She stopped and admired his work. She saw that he had many little pots filled with paint. It reminded her of when she was a little girl at her Grammy's who let her paint pictures on paper. An idea formed in her head. She didn’t know how to write a letter, but she could paint a picture.

Crazy Leg looked up and saw her staring at him. He smiled and said, “Come. Sit by me. I will show you what I am doing.”

“I have to go feed my father, Big Bear,” she said matter-of-factly. “Can I come back later?”

“Yes. I will wait for you.” Crazy Leg watched her leave, holding his paintbrush in the air, smiling.

Brave Woman attended her father lovingly, feeding him his stew and porridge with a spoon she had carved herself. He lay in his bed smiling at her. His strength had left him. He was very old. No one knew how old he was, but he was soon to leave this earth and go to the happy hunting grounds.

When he wasn’t looking, Brave Woman wiped the tears from her eyes. He was all the family she had left. She-who-scares-the-birds, what Myrtle’s name had

morphed to, was already married and had two little ones, a boy and a girl. She had plenty to take care of. They didn't talk much anymore. Sometimes she felt lonely except for taking care of her father, whom she loved dearly, but when he fell asleep, she left to find Crazy Leg.

He was still at the side of his family's lodging, forming pots, firing them and decorating them with his paints.

Brave Woman sat down with grace beside the cripple. She was enamored at what he was doing. "Show me how," she asked.

When he showed her how to paint zigzags on a pot, she said, "No. I mean the whole thing. Show me how to make the clay, make the pots, and make the paint."

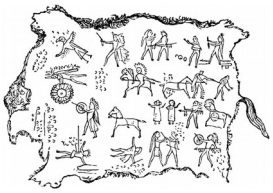
Crazy Leg's smile showed he was delighted she took interest in his art. No one else did. They treated his pots as something to use, not to be admired. That day was the beginning of an important education of Brave Woman and also the beginning of a long friendship.

Chapter Six

When She-who-scares-the-birds married, she left her quilt behind for Brave Woman to care for. But Brave Woman had different plans for it. She thought about her life as an Indian and where she came from, all those family names on the quilt, and the killing of her parents. The more she thought about her parents, the more she felt guilty for being an Indian. She could not reconcile the two experiences of being a white baby and an Indian woman. She didn't feel worthy of caring for the blanket. Who would she pass it on to? Indian children? No. They wouldn't understand. It belongs to white children. She would, though, write a letter of explanation on the back of the quilt, in other words, paint a picture on the back to explain what had happened to her and her sister, and that the blanket should go to some worthy white children. That's what she needed Crazy Leg for. He could teach her to make the paint and the paint brushes.

She had been influenced by a brave she watched one day, mounting a deer skin on a frame and painting a battle scene on it. She would do that with the quilt. She had noticed that the paint brushes were made of bone with marrow on the ends which would soak up the paint made of clay and water with perhaps herbs or roots for color.

Crazy Leg showed her how to do this. They went to the stream where she had run the gauntlet. There were several colors of clay, striations within the clay bed on the bank. He took samples of each kind and placed them in the little pots Brave Woman carried in a basket. It had been made of the tall grasses which grew along the stream.



“You see this color of red?” Crazy Leg asked, pointing to the design on one of the pots.

“Yes,” Brave Woman answered.

“This comes from a certain mushroom found in the forest. Come. I will show you.”

Taking the basket of clay samples with her, Brave Woman followed Crazy Leg into the forest. It seemed a magical place with spots of light, shimmering along the trail and upon all the bushes. It was like walking upon a spirit leopard. Stooping down, Crazy Leg showed Brave Woman some redcap mushrooms growing underneath sorrel and Indian potato. They were small and succulent.

“Hand me a little pot,” Crazy Leg instructed.

Brave Woman stooped down, handed him the pot, and watched intently as her mentor said a little prayer before digging up the mushrooms and ladling them into the pot with a flat stick.

“We will gather a few more plants while we are out,” Crazy Leg said as he hobbled on, deeper into the forest.

The day was spent gathering goldenrod, madder, knotweed, eyedrops, indigo, alkanet, root suckers from different trees, elm bark, butternut, elderberries and other purple and red berries. The list went on. Coming back they came down by the cliffs of

the village stream and collected different colored lichens. There were blue, red, copper, brown, and black.

Crazy Leg never took more than he needed. He never uprooted a plant and was always careful where he stepped. He treated the forest as a sacred place.

Brave Woman thrilled at this new knowledge. She thought of all the things she could dye: baskets, cloth she got by trading with the whites, leather belts and headdresses, ropes and twine for decorating hair. But she didn't see that others had much use for dyed goods except for pots and drawings.

Brave Woman's plans were interrupted. She was called to the side of Big Bear. He wasn't expected to live, and the village had gathered around his cabin to chant the death songs and dance with the rhythm of the drums. Brave Woman moved through the dancers towards the door of the cabin. Crazy Leg remained outside the crowd.

Brave Woman paused at the door a moment, trying to get the courage to face death, and then upon entering, her slender fingers staying behind on the door sill for a second, then caught up to her stride. Kneeling down by her adopted father's pallet, she wept.

He looked up at her. "I will miss my brave girl."

"I love you," she said, clasping his left hand.

He put his other hand on top of hers. "I will be gone only a brief time. You will see that life is short and we will be brought together."

"I don't want you to leave," she sobbed, the tears running down her face.

"We will have none of that now." He reached up and wiped her cheek.

"You cannot stop my grief," she said defiantly, but softly.

"I am tired," Big Bear said, looking away to the small window above him.

He closed his eyes and expelled his breath. Brave Woman covered her mouth to prevent herself from crying out.

After an hour, she washed her face from a bowl of water on the chest of drawers, wiped herself with the towel that lay beside the bowl and pitcher and went to the door.

"He is gone," she said matter-of-factly and left with Crazy Leg.

The funeral was a long drawn out process presided over by the medicine man. He made sure all the rules were kept. First, round smooth stones had to be collected for the grave, while She-who-scares-the-birds washed and dressed Big Bear in his most decorated suit. She then braided his hair and adorned his braids with beads, attaching a lone feather to the crown of his head. He was carried on a bier by the oldest braves, veterans of lost wars, up to the top of the hill overlooking the village. There, as the villagers chanted his death song, he was placed on a clean spot of ground. All the while, the medicine man sang blessings for the site, the body, and the people. Everyone in the village took turns placing a stone on the old man until he was covered with a circular mound five feet high.

Brave Woman had been closest to him, so she stayed outside the compound for her seven days of mourning. After that, She-who-scares-the-birds took her to the sacred stream and washed her, giving her a new set of clothing. Then the two sisters walked back to the village. Crazy Leg was the first to greet them. He hugged Brave

Woman, and then she had to go through a crowd where everyone welcomed her back, patting her shoulder or touching her head or arm. Some grabbed her hand and smiled.

Chapter Seven

Brave Woman now had more incentive to paint her life story up to that point on the quilt. The very day she was allowed back into the village she set up a frame for the quilt. There was a ledge below the quilt on which her little pots of dye sat all in a row. First, she took her bone with its marrow tip, dipped it into a thick madder and painted the road the wagon had traveled, placing it at an angle through the center of the quilt. Then she painted the surrounding forest, leaving a large empty space for the village.

Crazy Leg hobbled by and asked, “How is it progressing?”

She hesitated answering as she finished the longhouse. “It is just like when I was a little girl at my grandmother’s.”

Crazy Leg sat on a log stool next to her. “Do you remember yer grandmother?”

Brave Woman looked intensely at a figure she was painting. “That,” she said as she dabbed a small detail on its dress, “is me.”

She looked back at Crazy Leg. “I don’t remember much. I know she was pretty and allowed me to paint. She had a big house with the white man’s couches, chairs and beds. The house had many pictures of people in them. I and She-who-scares-the-birds were in one of those pictures.”

“What was she like?”

“I don’t know.” With an irritated look on her face, she turned around and said, “If you come to talk, please leave me alone. I am painting.” She continued dabbing paint on her canvas, putting a dwelling here, a person there with her friend watching.

After finishing the village, she painted another road leading off to the left of the main road. She painted herself as a grown woman placing the quilt onto the road and added more trees underneath.

“What is that scene?” Crazy Leg asked, pointing to the extra road. “It has not happened yet, has it?”

“Go away.” Brave Woman furrowed her brow in concentration.

Crazy Leg got up to leave.

After dabbing and smearing a little more to make sure people would know it was a quilt, she said, “I am going to give the quilt to the white-man.” She turned to look behind her, but Crazy Leg was gone. She shrugged and went back to work.

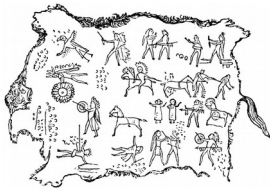
There was one scene she left for last, and that was the heartbreaking death of her parents. She wasn’t supposed to cry, and she made a determined effort, but as she painted her parents laying by their wagon, the tears came. She turned her head to see if anyone saw. There was no one, so she wiped her eyes and continued working until everything was said she wanted to say.

Crazy Leg wanted to go with her to give the quilt to the white-man.

“It will not be safe for you to go alone,” he said.

“I must do this myself,” she argued as she folded the quilt. “Please don’t follow me.”

Crazy Leg did follow her, but stayed a league behind, just enough so she couldn’t see or hear him.



Brave Woman heard of another road that went west, following the Tennessee River. It was south of the village, about four days walk, and wasn't next to the river, so she never saw it. She only sensed it. She could smell the water.

She took a backpack filled with enough food, Johnny cakes, mostly with a little dried venison and rabbit. She camped by the side of the road and waited for a wagon. Before she left, she pleaded with the village to let this one wagon pass. Then she was told, "That is not our road. You are wasting yer breath. Leave it to the Great Spirit. He will guide you."

The medicine man gave her a pouch of sacred relics consisting of … to protect her on her travels. He was sure his blessing would help. She also prayed to her Christian God the only way she knew how, repeating the Shepherd's Psalm she had memorized as a little girl.

The third day of waiting passed. She had run out of food. She sat in the dust and surrounding bushes, wondering how long she would have to fast before a wagon came, when she heard the rolling of wheels and the clomping of hooves from a long distance. She smiled and stood, holding the blanket in front of her. She practiced what she would say, not remembering very many English words.

"Please, please," she said. "Take! My family. My story."

As Brave Woman waited for the wagon to approach, she felt like she didn't deserve her name. Her heart was racing. Anything could happen, but she was determined to give that quilt to someone, hoping it would mean something to them.

She stood alongside the road in the way of the wagon. She noticed two other wagons behind. She held out the quilt. As the wagon came alongside her, she said, "Please, please. Take! My family. My story."

The woman up on the seat said to her husband, "She wants to trade, but that quilt is not Indian. What is it, Abner?"

"Sorry," he told the Indian woman. "We don't have anything to trade."

"No, no," Brave Woman cried. "No trade. Take. My family."

One of the men from the wagon behind came up to Brave Woman.

"What is this?"

"She wants to trade," said the woman of the first wagon.

"No, no," Brave Woman insisted. "Take." She handed it to the man.

"Look at those tears," said the woman in the wagon. "David. Take the quilt. Let me see it."

The man took the quilt and handed it up to the woman. When he turned around, the Indian was gone.

"She was white, Eliza," David said. "White. God bless her."

The woman in the wagon looked at the quilt. She looked at the picture on the one side and the names on the other.

“You want me to go after her?” Asked David with his hands on his hips. “She’s a white girl. She must have been captured by the Injuns.”

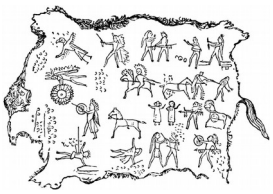
Eliza looked at the picture again. It told all. The girl’s parents had been killed. She had been raised by the savages. “No, David. She’s wild now. It seems she was little when they took her.”

The woman looked at the names again. “God bless! Abner, lookie here. Thems is our names. Lookie. Here’s Aunt Bessie and Uncle John. Here’s my cousin Mary Rucker. Here’s signers of the Declaration of Independence. They’re from the Carolinas. Them’s is our names, Abner, our names.”

By this time, a small crowd was at the first wagon wanting to know what was going on.

Eliza Wasson looked on them all. “She was our kin. And she’s been raised by the Injuns.” She peered at the woods. “Now, she is a savage.”

Crazy Leg waited at the top of the hill and watched Brave Woman. If they took her or hurt her, there wasn’t much he could do. Help was several days away. There was another village nearby, but he would be cautious in approaching them. It would have been too much of a ceremony to get help from them. Even though they were also Cherokee, it was what the white-man called politics, and if he were to go through all that, it would have been too late. But if she survived, he would walk back with her. He also had food to share.



Brave Woman raced through the woods and ran right into her friend. She was startled, cried out, and started beating on his chest. When she saw who it was, she blushed and turned aside. She didn't want to look at him.

"What are you doing here?" Brave Woman turned her head shyly. "You scared me!"

Crazy Leg took her by the arms. "I wanted to protect you. The woods are dangerous."

"I smell food. I have fasted many days."

"Here. Sit down. We will eat before we go back to the village."

Chapter Eight

Eliza threw the quilt into the back of the wagon. Little three year old Mary, half asleep, grabbed it, used it as a pillow, holding it close to her.

Eliza smiled. Her little girl was comfortable. “Mary got the quilt. I guess it’s goin’ ta be hers. She claimed it.”

The little wagon train, consisting of only four wagons continued on their way, everyone talking about the Indian girl.

“She wasn’t that white,” one said.

“She looked a bit mulatto to me,” one of the women answered.

David said, “She looked a bit lost and hungry. I bet she wanted some food.”

“Why didn’t ya giv’er some?”

“Her dress was pretty,” said one of the girls who kept her eyes out for anything and everything. “It was covered with beads and designs of all the colors in the rainbow.”

“How do you know what a rainbow looks like, Sarah?” A boy called out. “ya run ta the house ever time it rains.” He laughed.

“If’n ya were in this here wagon, Sam, ya would lose yer scalp. I wouldn’t hesitate in takin’ it.”

“You kids calm down, now.” the granny cried out. “We have miles ta go afore we get to the Alabam.”

The kids all loved their granny. They said in unison, “Yes, Granny,” and started talking of other things.

“My toe hurts,” a little boy called out. “Them shoes down at the end of my legs ‘er too small, I say.”

“ya should be glad ya have shoes a’tall,” his ma called back.

The little wagon train tottered on, winding its way along the bottom land of the Tennessee River, camping every evening when it got too dark to travel. Then they were up at dawn and on their way again. On an average day, they traveled twenty miles, but when they had to go through the mud, it was good to get ten miles. On those days, tempers could rise as a fever, and the Indians would laugh at them behind the bushes.

“Good for nothin’!” was the worst curse words they could come up with, lashing out at the horses or oxen who pulled hard in front while they pushed from behind to keep the wagons moving. They were generally a good Christian folk, but they had their weaknesses. They would get angry and blame each other for their hardships, but in the evening, all was forgiven and forgotten as they settled down around the campfire. Well, almost.

“I would have put my fist in yer face today,” David said to Mark Johnston who had married his sister Margaret. “If it hadn’t been for ya gettin’ in my way, we could have had that wheel free in two seconds.” David took a swig of hot coffee and wiped his mouth on his coat sleeve.

Mark countered with, “You were a doin’ it all wrong. All we needed was a proper leever.”

“And broken the spokes,” David said, lighting his pipe with a taper from the fire.

Granny interrupted. “Now I taught you all to be good Christians.”

“Awe, Granny,” Mark complained. “We were jesting.”

“You mind yer tongue, just the same.” David lit Granny’s pipe with the same spill.

Granny had a settling effect upon the souls of her family, like a flask of whiskey making its rounds. After everyone said their goodnights to her, they went to bed, either by the fire or under the wagons. The children slept in the wagons.

As Eliza cuddled up to her husband Abner, having made their bed under their wagon, asked, “What was that you did puttin’ mud on Mary’s quilt? I thought that was odd. Very cruel. It troubled me deeply.”

“Don’t you worry, Ab,” she said softly. “There was a particular scene of bloodshed I did not want that little one to see.”

“Oh?” Abner asked, pulling her closer to him.

“It must have been that Injun girl’s parents,” Eliza said, touching her finger to his nose. “It appears the Injuns killed them and took her and her sister to raise in their heathen ways.”

“I see, but ...”

“She didn’t get dirty. I turned the quilt around so the good side warmed her body.”

Overhead, within the wagon, Mary wondered about the mud on her quilt, feeling its dry cracks daintily with her fingertips. “Mean Mommy,” she said to herself as she fell asleep.

Outside, a warm breeze blew across the camp. An owl asked “Who? Who?” An orchestra of summer crickets played their nocturne.

Camp after camp took the family closer to Alabama and Lawrence county. The Indians, called the Tennessee, watched them closely, hoping they would keep on trekking, not stopping on their ground to take up housekeeping. They had a discussion among themselves as to whether they should charge them for traveling through. After all, the road belonged to them.

“Make them pay the toll,” one said, shaking his spear.

An older man said, “We should use caution. We do not have the backing of the whole village.”

After their quarreling, they decided to visit the camp. Not everyone wanted to go at night. The spirits of the dead walked then, but the younger ones went.

The Wasson family was surprised and grabbed their muskets which they had loaded and ready for just such an occurrence.

One of the Indians raised his hand. “We come in peace. We want a pow wow, smoke the peace-pipe.” He took a long pipe from his vest, packed it with tobacco, and asked, “May I have fire?”

David gave him a spill from the fire which he would have used for his own pipe.

The men and Indians sat in a circle about the fire.

Abner asked, “Do you want to trade?”

The lead Indian, bedecked in beaded vest and necklaces, said, “You travel on our road, on our land. It has long been occupied by our people.”

“We made a treaty with yer people,” David said, “that allows us to travel along the river.”

“We allow you to travel in the river, freely,” he said, passing the pipe along to David. “We want payment. It is yer custom to pay a toll to travel the highways. We expect you to respect yer own custom.”

Abner took the peace-pipe, took a puff, and said, “What will satisfy you. We have no money, and all we have are the supplies to live on and the clothes on our backs.”

A young buck spoke up. “We want gifts.”

He was referring to the custom of the white man giving gifts whenever they went into Indian territory.

David stood. The Indians followed him, standing with tense expressions on their faces. When he reached for his knife, they reached for theirs, getting ready to fight. But David handed his knife, handle first, to the Indian next to him. “It is fine steel.”

The Indian took it, examined it, and slipped it into his belt. Then the other Indians spoke up.

“I want gift.”

“I want iron pot.”

“Give me musket.”

“Give me knife too.”

All the talking must have woken Mary because there she was all of a sudden standing in front of the Indians, sucking her thumb and holding onto her quilt.

“What is this?” One of the thinner Indians asked. He took the blanket with Mary’s hand still holding on.

The Indian scraped the mud off the back of the quilt. The expression on his face was one of surprise. He carefully handed the quilt back to the little girl. “Take good care of it.”

He spoke to the other Indians in his own tongue. They argued for a minute, sighed, and left, the one Indian returning the knife to David. They did not look back but disappeared into the darkness. The one that had looked at the quilt walked with a limp.

“Imagine that?” Abner exclaimed.

“What you got there kid?” Samuel, the older son of Granny, asked. He took a corner of the quilt and lifted it up. “Isn’t this that quilt that Indian girl was trying to give us.”

Eliza lifted Mary into her arms. “I gave it to Mary. She was cold. Look at it Sam. It has our family names on it.”

Samuel was more interested in the picture, but with a muffled groan, Mary pulled it out of his hands. “Superstitious Indjuns.”

“They must be,” Eliza said. “The first sight of this quilt and they ran off.”

Abner said, “It must have meant *something* to them.”

“Yeah,” said David. “Well, mornin’ comes early. Better git ta bed.”

Chapter Nine

Mary was six years old when she started noticing neighbors dropping in and how big the farm was. She thought if she went off by herself she would get lost in the woods, or that was what her mother kept telling her. The only thing her daddy teased her about was her red hair. He would say with a smile, “Yer no daughter o’ mine. No ma’am. No one in our family ever had red hair.” Sometimes she couldn’t tell if he was teasing or not, and it got her to wondering as she twisted it and put in in her mouth to suck on. She happened to like the color of her hair. No one else had it. She liked being different.

One day she was standing in the doorway, wrapped in her quilt and sucking on her hair, staring into space, when her mother pushed her out of the way. “Mary. I’m going over ta Sissy Howell’s ta help with the bakin’.” She pulled Mary’s hair out of her mouth. “Such a bad habit!” She took Mary by the shoulder. “Mary. Look at me. I’m goin’ ta be gone now. And take that quilt off or I’ll give it to Baby Sally. You take care of that quilt. It’s special. And take care of Sally while I’m gone or I’ll paddle ya good. You know I can do it.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Mary walked over to the cradle as her mother left, slamming the door behind her. Sally was cooing and shaking her hands and feet. “Yer never gonna get my blanket, ya varmit.” Mary spit on the baby. “I’ll take care o’ ya, but ya gotta behave.”

Mary raised her hand above the baby's face. "Now, if'n I slap yer face, and ya cry out, I'll slap it again."

Just then, Eliza came back in and Mary took her hand down fast.

"Mary, you scramble my brains so. I fergot ta tell ya to feed Baby Sally. Her bread an' milk is there on the table. I love ya dearly, child. Take care."

Yeah, take care 'er she'll whup me one more time.

Mary looked around. She found the bread and milk mush and took a spoon from the cupboard and tasted the baby's food. She stood over the crib and fed the baby one spoon, fed herself one spoon, and then the baby again until it was all gone. "Never enough," she said.

Mary picked up the quilt off the floor and shook it at the baby. "Never, never, never gettin' it." Then she ran outside with it.

Eliza came home. She had to duck to get in the front door. She was tall, skinny, and buxom. She kept her hair up in a bun and always wore a calico blue dress with a white pinafore. She heaved a sigh, looking at the house she had to clean up after helping the neighbor clean hers. *I thought it was just the bakin', but I couldn't let her live in filth, and she bein' so weak from the croup.* She squared her shoulders and started on her own dishes.

"Mary!" she called.

Mary was out helping her dad clean the barn. "Better go. Mama's callin' ya."

Mary skewed up her face."Awe! I want to stay here wif you."

“Better go. Mama needs yer help too.” Abner leaned on his shovel, and smiling, pointed to the open door.

Mary shrugged her shoulders and left.

When she entered the cabin, her mother said, “I see you put yer quilt away. Come and dry some dishes.

Mary’s face was towards the tub and the dishes her mother was handing her, but her eyes for a moment peered out the side of her head toward the door. The tip of her tongue stuck out between her lips in concentration. She put away her quilt all right … where no one would find it. She almost missed as her mother handed her a plate.

“Pay attention. You almost dropped it.”

That night, when Eliza went to tuck her oldest in, she noticed Mary was shivering, rolled up in a ball, trying to keep warm. “Where’s yer quilt, little one?”

“While ya were gone, a big injun came in an’ stole it.” Mary made a really sad face. “He grabbed it right outta my arms.”

“What?” Eliza thought a moment. “That is a completely unreasonable story, Mary. I don’t believe you. Where is your quilt?”

Mary looked up at her Mother with a pitiable face and shrugged her shoulders.

“Young lady, I have a mind to let you freeze. You tell me right now where that quilt is.”

“I lost it in the woods.”

Eliza was ready to pull her hair out. “Oh, you irresponsible child. We will just have to look for it in the mornin’” She looked around to see what to cover her child

with. She saw Mary's coat hanging on a peg on the wall. She grabbed it and covered her up. "That will have to do. Say yer prays, and good night."

She'll be the death o' me, yet. Redheads!

"Mean Mommy," Mary said to herself as she fell asleep.

Early next morning Eliza got up and started breakfast. She mixed up some corn bread and then remembered about the quilt. After pouring the batter into a pan and slipping it into the makeshift oven in the fireplace, she got Mary up.

"Mary," she said, wagging her finger, "you need ta go into the woods this mornin' an' find that quilt."

"Mommy," Mary said, yawning, "would ya help me? I don't know where to look." She had to pretend she lost it.

"I can do it after breakfast." Eliza cut up leftover pork and forked it into the vat of beans hanging in the fireplace. "Yer Daddy will be in fer breakfast in a minute or two. Maybe he can take ya."

When Abner came in, Eliza had set everything on the table, Mary sat in her chair, while Sally sucked on a nipple.

"How is ever thang this bright mornin'?" he said, sitting down in his self made pinewood chair.

"Mommy and I are goin' ta look fer my blanket," Mary said, holding a knife in one hand and a fork in the other, holding them upright on the table, "but she said you may take me." Mary beamed, smiling widely.

"If ya have tha time, Ab," Eliza said, putting the baby over her shoulder.

Sally burped loudly, making Mary laugh.

After Abner filled his plate with pork and beans and two rather large pieces of cornbread, he buttered his them and poured molasses over his whole plate. Eliza filled Mary's smaller plate and bid her "eat all yer vittles."

"I have ta go inta town right after breakfast, 'Liza. Gotta meet the supply wagons and see if that new plow come in."

"I guess it's you and me, Mary."

"Aw!" Mary leaned her head on the back of her chubby little hand and screwed up her face. She poked at her beans. *I don't like beans. I will eat my cornbread.*

After breakfast, Mary took Sally in her arms, and Mary followed her to the edge of the woods. It had rained during the night and the green pine forest smelled heavenly. Eliza smiled, and then looked at Mary.

"Now yer goin' ta tell me whare ya were playin'."

"I don' know," Mary said slowly. She poked along sticking a stick at every little bush. She didn't really want to go near the quilt.

"Which way did ya go?" Eliza's voice ended in a high note.

Mary shrugged her shoulders and then pointed, so they went that way. After twenty minutes of going around in circles, Eliza realized it was all a charade.

"Mary! How could you be so irresponsible?"

That's a big word.

Mary looked at how peeved her mother was getting and knew she was going to get whupped, so she suddenly pretended to brighten up and remember. "I know whare

it is!” She ran over to an old log, bent over it and reached inside a hole. Bringing it out, she shook the dirt off. “Here it be! I found it!” She smiled really big.

“Now git back to the house. Can’t stand out here all day.”

Mary ran back, yelling with glee, something only a child could do, pretending she had found her precious quilt, squealing with delight.

Chapter Ten

Mary sat on the edge of her bed combing her hair.

“Breakfast, Mary,” Sally called from the kitchen. “Mommy said, ‘Don’t be late for school.’”

“I know, Sally,” Mary called back. “I’ll be in there in a minute.”

Mary loved her new bedroom. She had to sit there and admire it. The purple window curtains, the striped bedspread that looked like Joseph’s coat of many colors, the chest-of-drawers with its beautiful white pitcher and bowl to wash from. The foot locker at the end of her bed where she kept her clothes gave a special place for her childhood quilt to cover the lid.

She didn’t use the quilt now. She was a grown woman of twelve years and was filling out fine.

Papa had been very successful as a farmer, and now as an owner of the town store. He and Mister Myers owned it together. They had moved into the new house just last week. It was finally finished. Mary heaved a sigh, looked up to the ceiling and said, “Thank you, God.” She stood another moment with her hand on the door casing to admire her step up in society.

When she entered the kitchen, Sally was feeding little Samuel his bread mush as he sat in his new highchair. Noah and Moses sat at the table already eating their bacon and flapjacks made of oats and pecans.

“Where’s Mama?” Mary sat down at her place where her flapjacks waited for her. She reached for the pitcher and covered her cakes with maple syrup.

“She’s been over at Mrs. Berry’s all night,” Sally said, flicking her blond hair out of her face. She finished turning her last flapjack, put it on her plate, and sat down with it. “Mrs. Berry should have her baby by now.”

“Better take the skillet off the stove. It’s startin’ to smoke.” Mary stuffed her mouthfull of flapjack and syrup and gulped down some milk.”

“You do it. I had to make all these flapjacks, and I’m still havin’ ta feed Sam here.”

“I’m goin’ ta be late.” Mary got up and whupped Sally on the top of her head with her fingers. She grabbed a towel from the handle on the front of the wood stove and moved the heavy skillet into the sink. The water in the sink sizzled and boiled.

After breakfast, the Wasson kids tromped through the snow, carrying their books on a strap, to the little schoolhouse at the edge of town. It wasn’t too far away, seeing that the town was new. It had the Wasson and Myers store, of course; the stables, run by Mr. Hobbs, the blacksmith; a small hotel, more like a boarding house, run by Mrs. Mickerspeak, and the meeting house or town hall, where Pastor Satterwhite held Sunday services, and Miss Somerset taught school during the week. Mayor Taylor used the office in back during the week and the preacher did on Sundays. There was no Sunday School, but a chapel was in the planning stage. Money was being gathered each Sabbath. And then there was Doc Patterson, who saw patients in his home next to the hotel.

The little one room school house / town hall was a single box structure with three windows on each side. It had pegs on the wall to hang coats on each side of the front door. A table supported a wandering podium, and benches facing the table and blackboard surrounded the pot-bellied stove in the center of the room.

Miss Somerset was a thin, tall woman in her twenties, her auburn hair gathered in a bun, and she wore a naturally red smile that matched her high cheeks. Her dress was a modest gray with a white ruffled jabot collar. The dress was long enough to cover her ankles and had tight sleeves that ended in ruffled wrist bands. One would think that, being so stylish, it may have come from France, but she would tell you she made it herself. She looked the type to live in a big city where she would own a boutique. But she was far too poor, and just educated enough to teach the children.

When most of the children were seated after she rapped the table with a baton, calling, “Children! Children! Children!” she greeted them with “Good morning, children.”

Everyone answered in unison, “Good morning, Miss Somerset.”

The fire raged in the stove, the children huddled over their books and slates in their laps while the teacher wrote on the board in strikingly white chalk. A cough was heard in the far back right corner of the room. Mary, distracted, glanced at Jane Chillecoate. She looked like someone the dog dragged in with her straggly hair and old dress. She was thin and gaunt with gray circles around her eyes. She didn’t look well at all. She kept coughing. It was disturbing to Mary. She couldn’t understand why

the girl had come. She wanted to tell her to go home. But that was Miss Somerset's responsibility.

At midday, that is what the teacher did. She went to the back of the room while others were eating lunch. She noticed that Jane had nothing to eat. She offered her a sandwich, which she ate ravenously.

"Jane," asked Miss Somerset. "Why are you here at school? You need to be home where your mother can care for you."

"Have no ma," she said between bites.

"Where is you father?"

"Pa, he's out huntin'. Don't know I'm here."

"Where do you live?"

"Two Corners, down in tha hollar."

Jane continued to cough and rub her runny nose on the back of her hand. Miss Somerset offered her a handkerchief, whereupon she ate with her left hand and wiped her nose with the other.

"I will send John Ashley to Mr. Hobbs and see if we can't get you home."

"No Ma'am," Jane coughed. "Please let me stay in tha warm."

Miss Somerset let Jane stay, but she instructed her, "You will have to stay home tomorrow, Jane, until you are better."

After school, Mary was going to offer to walk Jane home, but she ran to the teacher and begged to stay for the night. "I cannot let you stay here, Jane. You need to be home in bed."

The teacher was able to get a buggy from Mr. Hobbs at the livery and send Jane home. John Ashley, who was fourteen and able to drive, allowed Mary to accompany them so she could take care of the sick girl. She had no coat, but had brought the blanket from her bed. Mary made sure she was covered from head to toe.

“I have a special quilt at home,” Mary said. “I used to wear it everywhere I went. People made fun of me, but I didn’t care. John up there is the one who got me to let it go and wear a coat instead.”

“I don’t have a coat,” Jane said.

“The Indians often wear a blanket instead of a coat,” Mary said, to help Jane not to be ashamed. “It is their way.”

When the buggy went down into the valley, Jane pointed to the little cabin near the creek. They went there, lifted Jane down from the buggy, whereupon she threw up on Mary.

“Never mind,” Mary said. “Let’s get you inside and clean you up.”

They were able to get Jane into bed, and Mary used the same water found in a jug to wash herself clean of the throw-up. When she looked around at the mess she wished to clean up, John seemed to read her mind.

“Come on. We have ta go. I have ta get home and help Pa.”

Mary sighed and was reluctant to leave. “Let me pray over her first. It is what my mama would do.”

“Okay.”

Mary stood by the door with her hands clasped, and looking upward, she prayed, “Dear God, please bless this house and bless Jane to get better. Amen.”

Jane whimpered and covered her face.

John and Mary left, and John dropped Mary at her house just outside of town on the opposite side from where the school was taught.

“What is yer father goin’ ta do with his farm?” John said as Mary descended the buggy.

“He still works the farm,” Mary said, looking up at him, shading her eyes from the setting sun. “He just doesn’t do as much as he used to. Fruit trees, corn, pumpkins and squash.”

“Well, better git. See ya.” John slapped the horse with the reins, saying, “Git up.”

“See ya, John.” Mary waved, smiled and went inside.

Abner came home with the blizzard blowing him through the door, which he slammed. He took off his overcoat, shook the snow off, and hung it on the coat rack. Noah and Moses ran towards the front door, yelling, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” Both of them grabbed hold of him. He lifted them, one in each arm and twirled them around, setting them down, all three laughing. Then he herded them into the kitchen where their mother and sisters were waiting with dinner.

After the blessing and the serving of the food, and Abner stuffing his mouth full of meatloaf, potatoes and gravy, he said, “Heard that Jane Chillecoate, you know, the Chillecoates, down by the river? She died.”

Mary almost choked on her potatoes and gravy. “What?”

“Did you know her?” Abner asked, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

Mary looked downcast. “I should have visited her again.” She looked up and explained, telling her father about taking her home from school a few days ago.

“I see.” He stood, having wiped his plate clean. “How do you feel? Have you been feverish?”

“No, Papa.”

“Why do ya ask, Ab?” Eliza stared at Abner with a worried look on her face.

“The father is sick too, and Doc Patterson is worried that other people will be gettin’ sick.”

Mary grew pale as she thought about it. “She threw up on me.”

“I’d watch her, Liza.”

“I cleaned it off,” Mary said, defending herself.

Eliza bit her lip and said, “Maybe Mary and I will take a visit to Doc Patterson this afternoon.”

Then Sally spoke up. “I don’t want ta git sick.”

“Honey,” Abner called back as he left the kitchen. “Just ‘cause other people ‘er gittin’ sick don’t mean yer goin’ to.”

Chapter Eleven

Eliza met daughters, Mary and Sally, after school and walked with them to Doc Patterson's. There were several people in the waiting room. There was Mrs. Burkhill with her daughter, Annie, who had the sniffles. They were dressed in nice long gray coats that hugged their bodies. Jeffery Leander sat in the corner coughing. His hair was unkempt. He had a days' growth of beard, and was bundled up with a thick coat and scarf. There was Old Granny Durham holding a toddler on her knee. She was in all likelihood born in 1750, as she looked a hundred, and the boy's name must have been Johnny because she kept repeating it every time she bounced him or rocked him in her arms. He kept fussing and crying, trying to get away. His face was red and smeared with drainage from his nose.

Eliza and the girls found chairs near the door. Perhaps no one else wanted to sit there or Eliza wanted to keep as far away as possible from the other patients. There was no secretary or nurse to greet them. Doc Patterson stuck his head out every now and again to call someone. When he did so the next time, he said, "Hello, Mrs. Wasson, Sally, Mary. I will be with you directly. Jeffery, you may come in now."

A second before Jeffery stood, Mrs. Leonard stepped out of the examination room. Holding her hanky over her nose, she saluted Eliza. "I see you brought your girls, Eliza. I hope they are more well than we are."

"Oh, they are fine, Mrs. Leonard. We are just here for a checkup."

"That is good. We don't want them to catch the croup, now, do we?"

“We are hoping they do not.” Although she was a farmer’s daughter, Eliza copied the speech from the upper class just to be polite. At home, it didn’t matter much.

While they were waiting, the Bowlings, an older couple, walked in, bringing a chill with them. The air seemed to have gotten colder after they had been sitting there for an hour.

When Old Granny Durham, carrying her little grandson, opened the door again to leave, Sally asked, “Mommy, can’t we sit near the stove? I’m cold.”

“I’m sure it won’t be long now,” Eliza said, putting her arms around her girls. She turned her head and peered into each of their faces, trying to assure them.

Just then Doc Patterson stuck his head out and called, “Mrs. Wasson?”

The three girls stood and marched into the examination room. The doctor closed the door behind them. There was a table made up like a bed and two chairs. Eliza and Mary took the chairs. Sally stood by her mother.

Doc patted the table. “You can sit here, Sally.” He turned to Eliza. “And what can I do for you today?”

“I am afeared,” Eliza said, paused, then corrected herself, “afraid that Mary may be getting sick. You know that Chillecoate girl that died recently?”

“Yes,” the doc replied, lighting his pipe.

“She threw up on Mary when she took her home from school.”

Mary took a deep breath. She loved the smell of pipe tobacco.

“Well,” the doctor said as if making a decision, inhaling smoke from the pipe and letting it out in smoke rings. “Let me examine each of you in turn. Disease usually runs in the family, close approximation and all that.” He smiled and gave orders to take off their coats and unbutton their blouses.

Mary blushed as she followed the doctor’s orders because she was becoming a young woman. Sally didn’t hesitate.

As the doc examined Sally, Mary studied his sideburns which ran down to his chin, only to turn up and run into his mustache. He was also balding in front, giving him a high forehead. It made him look distinguished.

The doctor listened to their hearts and their lungs with a long metal horn, asking them to cough now and then, felt their pulses, looked down their throats as he held their tongues down with a wooden paddle, peered into their eyes and under their eyelids. He paused, thumped his hand with the wooden paddle after having examined Eliza.

“I wouldn’t worry any. Has anyone of you or anyone in your family taken up a fever?”

“No, Doctor,” Eliza said as she buttoned her blouse. “Everyone has been doing fine. We just thought …”

“That’s good. I would rather catch the symptoms before you have to be in bed. It shows you are conscientious and are caring for your family. Most of the time, as you can see out in the foyer, they all wait until they are completely sick, when they could have done something sooner to prevent the disease from overtaking them.”

“Is there anything we can do, Doctor?” Eliza asked, putting her coat back on.

“Keep out of the cold as much as possible, eat a good hearty broth every night, and if you all are feeling tired, take it easy. Don’t over do it. A lot of people keep on working when they need to rest and it overtaxes their bodies, and there they are, lying in bed with a fever.”

As the three were about to leave the office, Doctor Patterson gave them one more warning. “At any sign of weariness, get some rest, or it will overtake you.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Eliza said politely as they left. She turned to her daughters as they walked across the foyer. “Now you heard what the doctor said. Tell me if you feel the least depressed.”

“Yes, Mama,” the girls said in unison as they went back out into the snow and the cold.

Mary tried with some difficulty not to cough. Her throat tickled. She didn’t want to get sick, so she tried to hold back the cough. She was stirring the stew at the stove with a large wooden spoon. Her mother worked nearby, and she knew that if she coughed, her mother would be all over her, doctoring her and sending her to bed. She didn’t feel sick, but there it was, creeping up into her throat. She swallowed, held her breath, but the damned thing was getting stronger. Mary grimaced. She coughed.

“Mary?” asked Eliza. “Did you cough?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Mary looked at her mother sheepishly. “I tried not to. But it got the better of me.”

“Let me look at yer throat.”

Mary walked over to her mother who was at the bread board slicing a freshly baked loaf. Mary opened her mouth. She was near the window, so Eliza could peer down into it easily enough.

Eliza grinned and Mary closed her mouth. “You had better get some honey. I’ll get yer father’s whiskey.”

Eliza made a syrup from the whiskey, spooned some into Mary’s mouth. It burned on the way down. Eliza sent her to bed.

“But I’m not feeling tired, and the doctor said I didn’t have to go to bed until I felt tired.”

“Nevertheless, young woman …” Eliza hesitated, and that let Mary in.

“But, Ma, can’t I at least eat some of this stew? My mouth is watering so distressfully.”

“Well, just a little. Don’t gorge yourself.” Eliza placed the slices of bread on the table already set.

Mary spooned herself some of the stew, sat down and folded her hands. When Eliza saw her not eating, she said, “Well, go ahead,” waving her hand as if she were directing her to go through a door.

“Can’t I stay and eat with Pa and the boys?”

Just then, Abner and his two sons, Noah and Moses, entered the door, having been out doing chores at the farm. They stomped their feet to get the snow off and shook their jackets, hanging them on the coat rack.

“I guess you can, for here they are.” Eliza started spooning up the stew for the rest of them. “But after this, young lady, you go directly to bed.”

Sally, watching the whole affair, dished up her own bowl also.

When Abner saw Mary and Sally already eating, he asked, “What is this? When did we start eating separately, not waiting for the whole family?”

“Mary has started coughing, Dear. I wanted to get her straight to bed, but she insisted on eating first. I can’t say as much for Sally.” She handed her husband his portion.

Mary demonstrated by coughing again. “I tried to hold it off, Papa, but it got hold of me.”

After the prayer, Abner said, “Yes, ya should go to bed. I’ll get ya some of my whiskey.” He started to get up, but Eliza gently pushed him back into his seat.

“I’ve already done that, Ab.”

“Oh, I see. Had some fer yerself?” He peered up at her as she sat beside him.

“I had a little swig, just in case.” Eliza winked and settled herself in her chair and started in on her portion.

“Daddy?” asked Sally, “can I have some whiskey?”

“Eat yer supper.”

It seemed now that Mary’s permanent residence was in her bed. Her cough became more frequent. At least she got out of having to do her chores. Then it only took two days for the fever to show. When Eliza came in the morning to look after her, she felt Mary’s forehead with the back of her hand.

“Girl, yer burnin’ up. I’d better get Doc Patterson.”

When the doc came, he slipped some calomel into her mouth. She grimaced and coughed. “It’ll cure ya or kill ya, but it’s the best I can give.”

The doc turned to Eliza. “It’s influenza. Everybody is gettin’ it.” He gave Eliza a moment to let it soak in.

She turned her head to grieve.

“Ya got a small bottle with a stopper?” He asked, lightly shaking the bottle he held.

Eliza wiped her nose with her hanky. “I got an old whiskey bottle.”

“That’ll do. Let me pour a few drops of this here into it. Got a lot of patients using this stuff. Have to make it go around. Got some more bottles at home, but I don’t know how long they’ll last. Had another one die last night.”

“That’s sad indeed,” Eliza commented.

Eliza gave the doctor the whiskey bottle. He poured some calomel into it and handed it back to her. “Keep yer eye on her and keep her washed and cool. She’s been healthy all her life. I have good hopes for her.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

Eliza walked him to the door. He turned to her before stepping out into the cold wind. “Keep ever one out of her room … just in case.”

“Just in case,” Eliza echoed.

The door closed and the wind outside howled like a banshee come to get her daughter.

John Ashley knocked on the door the next day. Sally answered. “Welcome, John.”

He was a tall, heavy weight boy, good mannered, taking his hat off when entering the door. He was all of fourteen, but worked like a man … was a man for all intents and purposes.

“May I see Mary?” He hung his hat. “She’s been missing school. Is she sick?”

“Down with a fever an’a cough.” Sally fidgeted with the dish towel she was holding. “If you want to, John.”

Sally called into the kitchen. “Ma, John is here to see Mary. I’ll take him in.”

“All right,” Eliza called back. “But don’t get close. Stay by the door.”

When Mary noticed that John stood in the doorway, she reached her left hand out. “John,” she said softly. She had recently been given the calomel, so wasn’t coughing. She seemed very sleepy.

John approached her and took her hand. Sally warned, “Yer not supposed to get close!”

“It’s all right, Sally. I’ve had the sickness a’fore. Can’t hurt me now.”

John held Mary’s hand. “Hope ta see ya back at school, Mary. We all miss ya.” He wiped a tear from his cheek with his right hand.

“I miss you, John.”

“Can’t stay long. Shouldn’t anyway. I’ll come again tomorry.”

Mary wanted him to kiss her. Maybe she would never be kissed now. She wanted to hold him in her arms, but she was too tired and let go of his hand. Her arm dropped to her side. Her eyelids became heavy. “Have to go to sleep now.”

John put her arm back under the covers and kissed Mary on the forehead. She smiled after she closed her eyes.

John left the bedroom with Sally following. “You can come back tomorrow, John. Maybe she will be better then.” She still held onto the dishtowel, tying it into knots as John said goodbye and disappeared back into the white storm.

Sally sighed and went back into the kitchen to help dry the dishes.

Mary passed away in the night. Eliza had sat up with her for a time and had fallen asleep. When she woke up about four o’clock, she reached over with the back of her hand to check her temperature. Mary was stone cold. A chill ran through the mother’s spine, and then the tears flowed.

The family gathered around after Abner heard his sweetheart sobbing. He gathered Sally and the boys into Mary’s bedroom. They all knelt around the bed and said family prayer.

Sally’s hand rested on the quilt that had all the names on it and the painting on the back. She sucked in air at the realization that Mary was leaving her quilt behind. She couldn’t pay attention to the prayers, and when it was her turn to pray, she couldn’t concentrate and gave a very short prayer, but she did ask God to be with her sister. After she said Amen, her head turned slowly and looked at the quilt, which her hand had gobbled up, holding onto it with all her might. She stared at what she was

doing and let go quickly before anyone noticed. She let out her breath slowly. “Thou shalt not covet, Sally!” she said under her breath. She rose along with the rest of the family. She looked at her dead sister. She appeared as though she were sleeping, but when her mother took up the candle, Mary’s face looked macabre. Sally ran out of the room.

Eliza placed her hand on Abner’s shoulder as they left the room. “Did I give her too much medicine?”

“I’m no doctor, Eliza, but maybe more wouldn’t hurt. God knows.” Abner heaved a sigh. “My little girl.”

“The angels have her now.” Eliza started sobbing again, wiping her eyes with her hanky.

They walked into the kitchen, sat down at the table, but no one felt like eating except the for the boys who would eat as often as they were allowed.

Noah and Moses both moaned, “I’m hungry.”

Eliza rose slowly to fix them some breakfast, but Abner caught her hand.

“Sit back down, Honey.” He turned his head to Sally. “Will you make the boys some flapjacks?”

Sally rose silently and hypnotically, whipped up some flapjacks for the boys, and after serving them, sat back down, feeling numb.

Chapter Twelve

Mary lay in state at the home she so dearly loved. Her mother had washed and dressed her in the most pretty pink dress with ruffles all over, the most expensive she could afford. Neighbors came to pay their respects and commented on such a handsome “Little Briar Rose.” Few words were said, and there was not a dry eye that left the house. Because of the deep reverence, the living room had become a sanctuary. Sally, Noah, and Moses sat opposite the open coffin. The room was decorated almost like Christmas with pine branches tied with black ribbon above the windows and doors and holly wreathes above and to each side of Mary.

The line of passersby walked slowly around the room to the coffin with hankys to their noses or wiping their eyes. Then they came to Abner and Eliza who stood next to the seated children and said, “She was a bright spot in our lives,” or “She was always happy, laughing and singing.”

Pastor Satterwhite said, “When she was young, she would dance in the aisles at Church. Though I did not approve, somehow she lifted my heart.”

Miss Somerset commented, “Mary was my best student. She read all the books I had to give her.”

Doc Patterson simply said, “I am sorry for your loss.”

At a lull in the viewing, Eliza left, came back with the quilt folded into a square, and placed it on Mary’s stomach, covering her hands. She came back to stand beside Abner and noticed Sally’s face drenched in tears. Her lips and cheeks were red as

though she had been crying all this time. She could not stand there as though nothing was happening, so she knelt down to comfort her.

Sally grabbed her mother with both arms. “Oh, Mama!” she sobbed.

“There, there, now,” was all Eliza could think to say. She petted Sally’s head and patted her back.

“The qui-quilt,” Sally cried haltingly, “The qui-quilt.”

“Huh?” Eliza asked, puzzled. “The quilt? Yes, I thought she would want to take it with her.” Eliza withdrew the embrace to look at Sally. “She loved that quilt since she was a little baby.”

“But, but Mother,” Sally said most respectfully. “The, the names.”

“Yes, there were names sewn onto the quilt, Dear,” Eliza responded, still puzzled.

“We need to keep the names. And the picture on the back. We need to keep it.”

People started coming in again, letting in the frosty air.

Eliza stood to greet the newcomers and said, “She loved that quilt. You will understand someday. We will talk about it later.”

Eliza smiled at the neighbors, even though her heart was breaking.

Later that night, Sally snuck downstairs. She saw her mother and father standing by the coffin talking in low tones. They had their arms around each other as though to comfort the other.

“I will go to the basement and get the lid and nails,” Sally heard her father say. “You go to bed. I will take care of this.” They hugged each other and he said, “I want

to do this alone, to be with my little girl once more … alone. I will meet you in the bedroom later."

When her parents left, Sally went to the coffin and swiped the quilt. "It's mine now!" she whispered. Mary had an expression on her face as if she almost smiled.

Sally could hear her father coming up from the basement. She hugged the quilt to her and slipped into a dark corner of the room, hiding her face in the quilt.

Each time the hammer hit a nail it was like thunder in Sally's ears, but she would not give up the quilt. She went up to her room after her father left and hid the quilt. Her mother would think it went with Mary.

Spring thaw set in. The snow melted, causing many rivulets and new streams to flow down to the river which raced by, overflowing its banks. Some thought the flood would create a new disease. They had a hard winter, worse than any before, some said, for more than a hundred years. Forty nine bodies lay in coffins stored in Mr. Hobbs' barn awaiting burial. The ground had actually frozen, something the residents had never seen before.

Land was laid out by the town for a cemetery north of the New Hope Church. They had not needed one until now. People usually were buried in their family plots located on their farms. There was no stone cutter nearby, so all the headstones would be wooden. The town's name of Berry Creek, named after the little river that ran

through the hollows, would now be changed to New Hope because of the sermon Pastor Satterwhite gave to commemorate those who had died that winter. He said that a new hope had been given to those who grieved for their loved ones. It was true that the new cemetery was called New Hope because of the Church, but It was the pastor that suggested to change the name of the town.

Many people wanted the bodies to be buried all in one day because they started to stink, but that was impossible. Families wanted to have grave-side services, and that would take several days to accommodate everyone.

Mary's body was scheduled to be buried next Tuesday at three o'clock. If the weather kept up, it would be a beautiful day.

As Eliza and her family left the Church the Sunday before, she said, "The pastor gave a nice eulogy for all them that died." She took in a long breath through her nose. "The air smells so clean and flowery. Just the way Spring is supposed to smell."

"But Mama," Sally interjected. "Most folks here say the air stinks from all them bodies."

"The Lord's grace must be fillin' up my nose, Sally. The sermon I just heard has planted such hope in my heart, I guess I don't smell nothin' but the flowers."

"And the trees, Mama," little Noah added. "Don't forget the trees."

"Yes, Noah," Eliza said as he took her hand. "Those pines just fill my soul; they freshen the air so."

"What's fer dinner?" Moses asked, catching up to his mother. "I'm hungry."

“I know you are, Moses.” Eliza smiled. She swished her skirts and said, “Fried chicken, like always.”

“Fried chicken, again?” Sally complained.

“We always have fried chicken on Sundays.” Eliza caressed the top of Sally’s head. “Besides, I made yer favorite pie. I canned them cherries last Fall.” A solemn expression flashed across Eliza’s face as they approached the gate of their opulent home. “I only wish Mary was here to enjoy them.” But then, after passing through the gate, Eliza was her jolly self again.

By Tuesday, everyone was solemn again. It was just like Sunday all over. Everyone had to put on their Sunday best and comb their hair. Eliza spit on her fingers and wiped the dirt off her boys. When she went to do the same to Sally, Sally’s eyes widened, and she ran away.

“Sally, come back here,” Eliza called.

Sally grabbed her coat and sat in the buggy and waited for the rest of the family. Eliza climbed in and sat beside her with a damp cloth. She attempted to wash Sally’s face.

“Oh, Mama!” Sally complained. “I’m a grown girl now.”

“Then you should have washed yer face yerself.” When Sally covered her face with her hands, Eliza said, “I’ll not have my daughter disrespectful. You clean up when ya go ta Church or to a funeral, especially Mary’s.”

At the sound of Mary’s name, Sally put her hands down and let her mother wash her face.

Abner and the two boys followed Eliza and when they were in the buggy, they were off to the funeral as if they were in a race and arrived before Eliza was done with Sally's face.

Moses with his freckled face and cowlick had to ask, "Are we goin' ta have a picnic?"

The New Hope Cemetery was only two blocks away, but it seemed fitting to arrive in the new buggy. It had room for two benches, one in front and one in the back, and of course, it was all black, fitting for a funeral.

Abner wore a black suit with a black tie. Eliza's dress, jacket, and bonnet were all black as well as the boy's suits. Of course, Sally had to be herself and refuse to wear anything so drab. It was a solemn occasion, but her philosophy was to brighten things up a bit. She wore a simple dress with little pink and blue flowers covering every inch of her body, and her coat had to have ruffles. She also brought Mary's pink parasol. Eliza didn't have the stomach for a lot of arguing today, so she let her be.

They arrived at the graveside and met the rest of the Wassons. David had come up from Pretoria with his Anne and their little band of six children. David and Abner shook hands. Anne and Eliza embraced. Samuel slapped Abner on the back. Samuel's wife, Caroline, took her turn hugging Eliza. They also brought their six children. They had to leave the aging grandmother home. She was still clinging to life like the last

autumn leaf clinging to a dead branch. They said that she didn't do much but sit in her chair and stare out the window.

Most of the children wanted to run and play, and several of them got swatted on their behinds for it.

As prayers were said and Pastor Satterwhite said some words over the grave, Sally became sadder and sadder. She whimpered and blubbered, shedding all the tears that can come to a child in distress. All Eliza could do was sigh and hold onto Sally on one side and Abner on the other. Everyone's faces showed the heartache except for the little children, who didn't understand.

But Sally's distress was not over the loss of her sister, but the stealing of the quilt. Yet, she would cling to it and never give it up.

The family did have a picnic as little Moses wanted. And for the main course they had fried chicken … which Sally couldn't eat without gagging and throwing up. She tried, but it just wouldn't stay down. The many people dying and all the chickens being eaten over the past few months got confused in her mind. She felt just as bad for the chickens as she did for the people. If Eliza only knew about the quilt, she would have understood, but she thought Sally to be grieving, and also that she didn't like fried chicken.

When he heard his daughter cry, "All those little chickens … those little chickens," Abner sat down beside her on the ground under a willow tree at the cemetery.

"Now why are ya laborin' over chickens?" he asked.

Sally embraced him and lay her head on his shoulder. “Oh Papa, I did a horrible thing.”

“It’s not about chickens then, is it?” Abner guessed.

“No. I stole somethin’.”

“What did ya steal?”

“Mary’s quilt.”

“Oh. So you saved it from being buried six feet under?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, I won’t whup ya this time.” He gave her a squeeze and kissed her head. “We can’t dig her up and give it back, now, can we?”

“No, S-sir.” Sally started sobbing.

“There there. We won’t have much of that.” He pulled Sally away from him so he could look her in the face. She shook her head to get her hair out of her face. “What’s done is done, and I expect what you saved is mighty fine. I thought we should’ve saved that quilt. I was about to take it myself.”

“Ya were?”

“I were.”

“Don’t understand.”

“Them names is our own names. Our family. I was goin’ ta take it myself, but when I saw it missin’ I knew whare it went. I just winked my eye an’ put the lid on. So ya did right, just the wrong way.” Abner hugged his daughter again. “Next time ya find somethin’ that is good, let’s do it together. Then maybe it won’t be so wrong.”

“Yes, Papa.” Sally hugged her father, laughed and said, “You are the best father”.

They rose, he slapped her behind and said, “Now go play with the kids.”

Chapter Thirteen

War had come to New Hope. Farmer's fields were trampled, bombed and burned. New Hope was occupied by the Grays and then by the Blues. The armies took turns taking over the town, and each time they came they took provisions from the stores and from people's houses, wherever they could find them, not caring for the citizens. The war was supposed to be about state's rights, but the soldiers forgot about that and were fighting for their lives. Neither side considered the rights of the common people.

The Confederate troops were just as bad for the people as the Union army. Both ravished the countryside and the town. When the Grays occupied, the Blues shelled the town. When the Blues occupied, the Grays shelled the town. Civilians were killed along with the soldiers. There was no place to hide, for if you ran into the forest, you were also shot. If you hid in the fields, you were either trampled on or blown up by the cannon. To keep from starving, most of the townsfolk fled to cities that had more protection or left to live with relatives. Those that stayed behind had to get used to black smoke and starvation.

Sally's parents, Abner and Eliza Wasson, were old and sick. There wasn't enough to feed them. She took turns eating. One day she would feed them cornbread and she would fast. The next day, she would eat cornbread, and they would starve and complain.

If Sally found a chicken or a raccoon she would hide it from the soldiers. Her stomach hurt most of the time. She had to drink river water because the wells were poisoned by the armies. More than a couple of times when she roasted a chicken soldiers would come in and divide it among themselves.

Sally's house was a shambles, but what was left of it, the Union army had taken and made it into a hospital and army headquarters. They moved her and Ma and Pa into a small back room without access to their own kitchen. They could use the back door and the outhouse. From there, she could see the corner of the house that was only black splinters and open to the air.

There were so many wounded they had to lay most of them on the ground out front and out back. Sally and a few of her friends volunteered to nurse the soldiers because the soldier would sometimes share their mess with the nurses. There was not much they could do but to clean their wounds and wash their faces with cool water to keep the fevers down. All the quilts, blankets and sheets went to the soldiers. Other homes were also violated to accommodate the troops. Anyone who had sheets had to tear them up for bandages to give the armies. Now no one had sheets or blankets. It was quite respectful of the armies to let them keep their coats.

None of the atrocities bothered Sally as much as when she found they had given her quilt to a soldier. She dare not take it off of him for fear of being shot. When she first saw it lying on top of the bloody man she went into shock … for a moment at

least, for she was a resilient woman. She was already exhausted by her day's service when new wounded were brought in. She had to wash and bandage them when she herself hadn't washed in several days. But when she saw Sister Higgby place her quilt on a soldier, after she had hidden it to protect it, it stirred up the humors inside her blood and put her into a fighting spirit. She grabbed a bottle of whiskey from a soldier, probably a general, she thought, took a swig, and slammed it into his chest. She sauntered over to the soldier who lay with her quilt and asked, "What's yer name soldier?"

"Private Wasson, Ma'am."

She was stunned. How could a Wasson, her own family name, be a Union soldier?

While she washed his wounds, he said, "You sure are purty. What's yer name?"

"Sally," she said, a little indignant. "Sally Wasson."

"Then this here be yer quilt?"

"Yes!" Sally exclaimed.

"Then I think we are cousins, as I looked at the names on this here quilt."

Private Wasson gritted his teeth while she bandaged him.

Sally sat back on her heels. "Where you from, soldier?"

"Illinois, Ma'am. Hancock County."

"You recognized these names?" She rinsed her rag in the bowl of water she had brought and squeezed it out. She patted his face again.

"They are my family. My great grands."

“Mine too.” Sally screwed up her face with emotion, wiped tears from her cheeks, and took the quilt in both hands. “It’s my quilt.”

“Oh,” Private Wasson said. “You take it. I don’t need it.”

“You wouldn’t survive, Sir, without it. Never you mind. I’ll retrieve it after you get well … or after you die … which I doubt. You look like a strong boy.”

“Well, I’ll have you know …!” Private Wasson started coughing.

“You’d better stop talking and rest. I’ll attend to you later. Sleep as much as you can.”

“I think I’ll do that.”

Private Wasson passed out, probably because of the pain in his left side. It was bleeding into the bandage.

Sally noticed the empty bed within her sister’s room. Soldiers, lying on the floor, made no effort to occupy the bed although it would hold three of them. She put her fingers to her chin as the gears in her brain started turning. The house had a couple of orderlies for moving bodies and cleaning up behind them. She found them out back.

“Hey, you soldiers,” she shouted as though she were an officer.

“Yes, Ma’am!” one of them answered, standing to attention.

“I need you two. Come with me. Bring your stretcher.”

The two privates followed Sally, carrying the stretcher between them. She took them around to the front yard where Private Wasson lay asleep even though the sun beat down upon him.

“Take him up and follow me into the house.” When they started to remove the quilt, she said, “Leave the quilt on him. It’s his family’s.” She thought that perhaps someone might take it for themselves, and she might lose it.

She brought them into Mary’s room.

“Lay him on the bed.” She stood by the doorway with her hands on her hips. “And put a couple of these others on the bed. They’re right here in front of the door.”

The soldiers did as she commanded. They were too used to following orders, she thought, but lucky for her.

Sally went to the kitchen, pumped some water into a clean bowl, grabbed a towel and some bandages, and took them back to Mary’s bedroom. Private Wasson lay there awake with his arms under his head.

“Now this is quite comfy.” He looked up to Sally. “Who put me on the bed?”

“I did. I want you where I can see you.” She put the water and bandages on the night stand and lifted up his shirt. “Time for a change.” Sally gingerly cut off the old bandages with the scissors she kept in her skirt pocket.

“If it’ yer blanket ya want …”

“It’s a quilt, and no,” she slipped the bandage off and scooted the fresh one behind his back. “It belongs here in my sister’s room. It was hers at one time.”

“Thought … ugh! … you said it was yer own? You take it?”

“Sorry. It would be easier if you weren’t laying down.” Sally finished tying the bandage and stood up, putting her hands on her hips again. “She died, and then I took it. She told me I could never have it. She had nothing to say about it after.”

“Got killed did she?”

“Naw, it was the flu.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“It took a good portion of the town. The war took the rest of them.”

The other men in the room were moaning so much Sally couldn’t rest until she had visited each one of them, straightening their pillows, their legs or arms, or giving them water. There were a couple of them who also needed bandages changed, so she tended to that.

One asked, “How did they warrant getting in the bed?”

“They were in the way. I had to move them.”

“Well, if that’ll be what’ll do it …” The soldier scooted towards the door.

“If you don’t get back over there,” Sally warned, “I’ll kick you in the ribs!” Her voice took a curve upward toward the soprano to let them all know she meant business. As she left, she said, “Yell if any of you need a nurse.” There were whoops and hollers, and she knew what *that* meant.

It took a couple of weeks before Billy Wasson, for she had found that was his name, could walk. At first, she would help him out of bed, and letting him lean on her shoulder, walked him about the house. When he was able to walk on his own he was put to work as another orderly, as the other two were picked up by a regiment that had marched through town.

Day after day Billy and Sally took long walks together. One day they found themselves at the Chillecoate place. All that remained was the foundation and a few splinters.

Billy had his arm around Sally's waist and kicked at part of a wall that lay on the floor. "What happened here? Looks like a shell hit it."

"Was the flood that hit, Billy," Sally responded. "Sometimes in yer life, things have a way of overwhelming you." She stopped and kissed his cheek, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Never thought I would fraternize with the enemy. Never in the world had I imagined war would bring me to this … to you." Billy embraced her and kissed her directly on the lips. "You're the most precious little filly a man could have."

"I'm not a horse," Sally whispered. "Did you raise horses?"

"My family were farmers. We had a few horses." They turned and started back up the hill. "The land around here is good for farming." Billy took a deep breath of fresh air. "It's a good place to settle down. I like it here."

"You like me?"

"I reckon I do." He squeezed her waist.

Sally wrested away from his grip and ran up the hill. When he ran after her, she screamed and laughed. When he caught her, she pulled him to the ground. "We used to picnic right here on this spot.

"Wish I had a blanket," he said, pulling her into his embrace.

"What would you do? Have a picnic?"

“Whenever I’m with you it is a picnic. But I wouldn’t lay the blanket on the ground. I would cover you up with it and make love to you.”

“Isn’t that what you are doing now?”

“Oh, I’m not doin’ half the things I would do to you if we were under a blanket.”

“You had better say them words first.”

“What words?”

“You know … *them* words.”

Billy put his finger on her nose and flipped it. “Oh, *them* words. Well, my dear. Would you marry me?”

“Better ask my pa.”

“I’ll ask him as soon as we get back.”

Sally and Billy continued making love. *Now I know I will have my quilt back,* she thought.

Chapter Fourteen

Billy Wasson just didn't have the right accent to be accepted by the people of New Hope. He was a damned Yankee, and to the carpetbaggers, he was a traitor to the nation. Selling his crops wasn't a problem, as the North was buying cotton now instead of England. The problem was the high tariffs on transporting across state lines. His father before him was a poor farmer. Billy didn't mind his lot in life. He had his wife and his daughter Lulu, and Sally was pregnant again. His family was growing. He hoped it would be a boy this time.

Sally stood by her vegetable garden wiping the sweat off her forehead with the back of her hand. She wore a scarf about her head to keep her hair out of her face. She took a drink of water out of a tin cup and put it back into the pail that hung on the wire fence. She started hoeing again, trying to get some weeds out, hoping she could keep the deer out with the new wire fence.

Sally spotted Lulu, six years old and feisty, with her curly hair, making one think the unthinkable, that there was black blood in her veins. She was coming out of the back door flapping something in the air. Then Sally realized it was the quilt she had hidden in an old trunk.

"Lulu! Come here. What have you got?"

Lulu approached her mother without fear, lifting the quilt into the air to keep it off the ground and to show her mother. "I found it."

Memories flooded into Sally's mind. "And so you have." She laughed, realizing that history had repeated itself. It was her sister Mary all over again. Mary found it, Sally coveted it, and then inherited it. Now, "Well, it is yours now, isn't it. Finders keepers, they say." She put her hoe down and stooped to look into her daughter's auburn eyes. "You didn't make a mess in my trunk, did you? You put everything back?"

Lulu said, "Mommy, tell me the story." She pointed to the painting on the back.

"You did make a mess, didn't you? Oh, Lulu! You try my patience. Come on." She took her daughter by the hand. "Now, don't drag the quilt. I will tell you the story as soon as we put everything back."

"And so she did. As soon as Sally and her daughter Lulu cleaned up the bedroom," said Granny to Sarah, Mary, and Jamie, "Sally lay on the bed, took up the quilt with Lulu lying beside her and started on the same story I just got through telling you."

"And was Lulu your grammy?" Mary asked, resting her head on Granny's shoulder.

"Yes. She was, Mary," Granny said, folding the quilt back into its square shape. "You remember the story from the last time I told you." She pinched Mary's nose. "You are the smart one."

"I remember everything." Mary grinned and hugged her granny's arm.

"Granny," Sarah spoke up, "tell us how Lulu got in trouble and how the blanket saved her."

“Okay,” Granny said, folding her hands over the quilt in her lap. “How did that go?”

“Gosselfinger!” Mary shouted, and all the girls laughed. “Mr. Gosselfinger. She was being chased by Old Man Gosselfinger.”

“That’s right, Mary.” Granny patted the quilt with both hands. “Lulu found a really nice apple tree on the other side of the fence. She stared and stared at those delicious red apples. The weather was getting cold, so she wrapped her quilt around her and took a deep breath of apples through her little nose.”

Mary laughed because she knew Granny was talking about her nose that she just pinched.

Lulu couldn’t stand it any longer. She had to have one of those apples. She looked this way and that way to see if Old Man Gosselfinger was about. The coast was clear, so she slid between the cross beams of the fence and ran over to the tree. There was a ladder leaning up into the tree. That was fortunate; there wasn’t a limb close enough to the ground to help her to climb up.

Lulu climbed the ladder and settled herself in a crotch of the tree, reached out and picked an apple. She wiped it with her hands, put it up to her nose, took a deep breath, and bit into it. It was apple heaven.

Having reached the core, she fell asleep. Her hand holding the core rested on a limb. Mr. Gosselfinger came by, and Lulu’s hand relaxed, letting go the apple core. It hit the man right on the head. (Mary, Sarah, and Jamie squealed and giggled.) He looked up and saw that Wasson girl up his tree!

“Girl! Girl!” he yelled, gesturing with his hand. “Come down out of that tree!”

Lulu woke with a jerk. She scampered down the ladder so fast, she forgot her quilt.

“Come here!” the old man demanded.

Lulu screamed and ran. She soon realized she didn’t have her quilt, so screaming again, she ran back to get it, but Old Man Gosselfinger was right behind her. She ran around the tree not knowing what to do, when all of a sudden, her quilt slid down off the supporting leaves and landed on Mr. Gosselfinger’s head. Cursing, he grabbed at the blanket and ran right into the trunk of the tree, hit his head and fell down cold. He lay stiff as a corpse.

Lulu tiptoed over to him and pulled the quilt from under his head which lifted up, and with the quilt free, slammed down on a rock. He groaned.

“Sorry, Mr. Gosselfinger,” Lulu said timidly. She ran over to the fence and slipped back onto her father’s property.

A visit to the Wassons was inevitable. Mr. Gosselfinger would not have his prized apple tree damaged by that young malefactor. He would talk to Mr. Wasson, the damned Yankee.

Mr. Gosselfinger did not go tramping across the Wasson’s property in an angry huff. No, he had to go by buggy around both properties, almost to town and back.

When he got to the Wasson's house, he had had time to calm down. He took a deep breath, climbed down and approached the door with an air of dignity. As soon as he raised his hand to knock, a girl, boy, and a dog, screaming, yelling, and barking collided into him. Mr. Gosselfinger almost fell over backward, but he caught hold of the screen door, a newfangled thing that kept the flies out.

Sally saw the whole thing. She came rushing to the front door frantically apologizing.

"Oh Mr. Gosselfinger. I am so sorry." She covered her mouth, and her face turned red. "Lulu!" she called. "You come right here and tell Mr. Gosselfinger you are sorry."

Lulu and her new friend Bobby came trudging up the steps to the porch with their heads hanging down.

"I'm sorry Mr. Gosselfinger," Lulu said as humbly as she could, gently curtsying while looking out of the corner of her eye at Bobby. One side of her mouth smiled. It was hard for her to keep from laughing.

Seeing that Lulu held the quilt in her arms, Sally said, very adult-like, "Lulu, go put that quilt back in yer bedroom. You're too old for that."

"Yes, Ma'am."

While Lulu was gone, Mr. Gosselfinger addressed Bobby.

"Bobby Beau!" Mr. Gosselfinger said indignantly. "My own grandchild. What have you to say to me, Mister?"

“Sorry Grandpa,” Bobby said, holding his straw hat in his hand, his unkempt head looking as yellow as the straw. “I didn’t know it were you.” He asked with puckered lips, “Can we go now?”

“Go on, git,” he said angrily. He then turned with a sweet countenance to Sally. “I came here to speak to Mrs. Wasson.” He held his derby hat in his hands, exposing his gray and balding head. His smile was temporary.

“What is it, Mr. Gosselfinger?” She stood there with her crossed arms resting on the rotund tummy that held her third.

“I must speak to you about your daughter. She …”

“She was in your apple tree again.”

“Yes, Ma’am. It is my prized apples, you see. I don’t want her to get hurt.”

“You don’t want your apple tree to get hurt, Mr. Gosselfinger.” Sally sighed. “I will speak to Lulu about it today.” Under her breath, she said, “If I can catch her.”

“Withhold the rod, and spoil the child. That’s what I say, Mrs. Wasson. Withhold the rod and spoil the child.”

“I don’t need yer preaching, Mr. Gosselfinger. I said I will speak to her. Now good day, Mr. Gosselfinger.”

The man left saying, “Hump!” As his carriage passed Lulu and Bobby, he growled. (Mary, Sarah, and Jamie giggled.)

Lulu searched everywhere in her bedroom and couldn’t find the quilt. She fumed. It must have been her mother. She had had this trouble before.

Lulu went to the kitchen where her mother spent most of her time. Little Sarah was in her high chair making a mess of some bread and milk. Sally was at the table cutting up carrots and celery.

“Mama,” Lulu said, tilting her head slightly and putting her hands on her hips. “I can’t find my quilt.”

“You are too old to carry that old thing around.”

“What did you do? Hide it?”

Sally stared at her daughter.

“Maaaaa!” Lulu said in exasperation. She knew that in a battle of wills, her mother would win.

Sally went back to cutting up the vegetables for the stew she was making. “I hid it.”

Lulu stomped her foot.

“I will give it back when you are responsible.”

Lulu stormed out of the house. Sally went after her, caught her, pulled her into her lap as she sat on an overturned bucket and spanked her until she cried.

“You will not treat your mother this way,” she said, wrapping her arms around her sobbing daughter.

“But it’s my quilt,” Lulu cried.

Lulu’s father walked up. “What’s this? Is my favorite daughter crying?”

“Mama hid my quilt,” she complained.

Sally let her go as Lulu slid off her lap and into the arms of her father. Sally leaned her head on her hand and sighed. She remembered her mother saying, “She will be the death of me yet.” She felt like saying the same thing.

Billy stooped down. “Now you be kind to your mother. She has a hard time with you.”

Lulu looked down at the ground and kicked the dirt. “Yes, Papa.” She turned to her mother, embraced her and said, “I’m sorry, Mama. I’ll try to do better.”

“I love you, darling. I only do things because I want you to be good.” She dried Lulu’s eyes with her thumbs. The mother and daughter hugged again, and Lulu went off to play.

Billy took Sally by the hand and lifted her up.

“I didn’t know mothering was going to be so hard,” Sally sighed with some meditation. “Sometimes I think my poor mama is poking her head out of the grave and laughing at me.”

Chapter Fifteen

Sarah, Jamie, and Mary sat on the couch listening to the fascinating story of the quilt made two centuries ago in the late seventeen hundreds. Granny told them of the two little girls Ruby and Myrtle who were raised by the Indians in Tennessee. Ruby had painted a picture of her life on the back of the quilt and gave it to Eliza as she traveled to Northern Alabama along the Tennessee River. Her daughter Mary inherited it, and by the time of the Civil War, Mary's daughter Sally had it and gave it to her daughter Lulu who was Granny's grandmother.

"Tell us about Ruby again, Granny," Jamie asked, pulling Sarah out of the way so she could see the quilt better.

"Stop shoving and pulling me around," Sarah complained.

"I wasn't shoving, I was pulling."

"I said pulling."

"No you didn't."

"Girls, girls," Granny refereed. "If you don't behave, I will have to put the quilt away."

"No, no, Granny," Mary pleaded. "We will be still and listen." Mary frowned with furrowed eyebrows and looked sternly at the other girls.

"Yes, we will be still, Granny," Jamie said.

"Okay," Granny smiled, gathering the girls up into her arms. "I will tell you of the time Ruby came back."

The Civil War had passed, and Lulu had grown into a beautiful young lady. Her town was the only one she knew and had learned its prejudices, the hardships of Reconstruction, and the rewards of hard labor.

Colords had to be controlled, and any different race such as Indians were not welcome in town. When people saw an old Indian woman walking down the street, they gathered into little groups and whispered.

“As if I don’t know what they’re saying,” Ruby said to herself.

She wore an old pioneer bonnet that covered her face, but her clothes were definitely Indian. She wore a leather beaded vest over her calico blouse. A leather fringe covered her rather large waist. Her gray skirt was heavy and had a fringe around the bottom, but wasn’t leather. Her moccasins were heavily beaded to match her vest. Braids of gray hung down over her chest and had scarlet ribbons woven through and down to end up in bows.

She wouldn’t walk on the wooden sidewalks. The ground was where Indians walked. She almost got run over by a passing wagon. She called out some curses in Cherokee, shaking her fist. Her bottom lip hung down permanently, as if being ill-treated by whites was a bad habit. She didn’t expect anything else.

One ornery man road up to her on horseback and asked, “What brings you to town, squaw? Goin’ to do some tradin’?”

“Naw,” she said. “Lookin’ fer my quilt.” She covered her eyes with her withered hand and squinted as she tried to see who spoke to her.

“Lost your blanket, did you?,” asked Billy. “Haven’t seen you in town. Sure you left it here? Maybe it was another town. Don’t see Injuns around here.”

“Why you talkin’ to an old Injun woman?” Ruby asked.

“Nobody else to talk to.” Billy reached down to offer his hand. “They call me a dirty Yank.”

“They call me a dirty Injun,” Ruby replied, taking Billy’s hand. They both laughed.

“Gave my quilt to an old woman,” Ruby continued, “Eliza, long time, long time. Tracked her ta this town.” Ruby put her hands on her hips. “Never forgit ‘er name.”

Billy got down off his horse. “There be a lot of Elizas, but,” Billy thought a moment with his hand on his chin, rubbing his two day old beard. “I want to show you somebody. You remind me of her. She’s at the edge of town. Let’s walk back down there.”

Billy and Ruby walked together down to the cemetery with Billy leading his horse. When Ruby reached the metal archway reading New Hope Cemetery, she stopped. She looked up at the arch and then scanned the many tombstones ahead of her.

“It’s all right,” Billy said softly. “These people won’t bother ya.”

“Not afraid o’ live people.”

Billy put his hand around her shoulder softly, and she relaxed. They both moved ahead and wound up at two stone slabs that said, “Eliza Wasson, 1776 – 1864” and “Archibald Wasson, 1774 – 1865.”

“Didn’t know her very much. Cantankerous.” Billy paused and looked at the old Indian woman. “I brought you here because you look like her … and your mannerisms.” He looked into her eyes. He hadn’t seen them before because of the hood of her bonnet. But as she looked up at him, the sun caught her just right. “I’ll be damned if you don’t have the eyes of my old Nanny.”

Ruby put her hand atop the tombstone. “Do white ladies take their blankets with them?”

“Some do, but only the poor ones,” Billy sighed, “when they don’t have anything else to bury them in, but this one went with her most expensive dress from Paris.”

“Don’t guess I’ll ever see that quilt again.”

“Come. Maybe you will. I married Eliza’s daughter, Sally.”

Billy walked Ruby back down Center Street to the homestead in the middle of town. The house was set back a bit with a wrought iron fence painted black, looking like spears poking up from a brick foundation. It had a massive front yard a good sized garden would fit in. There was an imported maple tree on the left side of the walk and

an elm that had planted itself on the other side. Billy swung the gate of spears open and allowed Ruby to walk through. She looked at the ginger bread on the house with its glass windows and its wide veranda. There was a nice wicker chair on the porch she headed for even though she wanted go inside and visit. Her old tired body took her up the steps and plopped her down in that rounded high-topped wicker chair. Lemonade was on her mind.

“I will be right back.” Billy stepped through the cut glass door with its polished brass knob.

He found Sally in her favorite place, the kitchen. He imagined Eliza standing in front of that same sink with the cast iron stove to the right setting within a large fireplace. The same long heavy oak table lay between him and his wife.

“Guess what I found?” Billy asked as he approached her, kissing her on the neck.

“What did you find, impetuous man?” She turned with the dish towel in hand ready to swat him.

“An old Indian woman.” He place his hands on her hips.

“What?” She grabbed a plate and started wiping it. “We don’t see them Indians around her anymore.”

“Well, I saw her walking down town in the middle of the street. And guess what she said.”

“What was that?” Pulling away from Billy, she put the dried plate on a stack on the breadboard.

“Something really strange.” He put his arms around her waist as she passed, trying to get back to the sink. “She said she is looking for her quilt.”

Sally stopped and folded her arms. “Humph!” She paused. “Quilt. An old Indian woman looking for a quilt.” She turned to face Billy. “She say where she left it?”

“She said she gave it … now hear this … to an old woman named Eliza.”

Sally covered her mouth with her hand and swallowed. A tear came down one cheek. “Where is she? Where did you leave her? I must see her.”

“She’s out on the veranda now.”

“What?” Sally ran out to the porch.

Sally knelt down in front of the old woman, grabbing her hands. “What’s yer name? What’s yer name?”

“Brave Wom--, er Ruby Wasson.” Ruby’s heart pounded. She was looking at the spitting image of her sister Myrtle. “And what must be your name, youngin’?” Ruby grinned.

“I’m Sally, Eliza’s daughter. You come home.” Sally looked up to Billy. “Say she’s stayin’, Billy. Say she’s stayin’!”

“I guess she’s stayin’.” Billy had taken a tooth pick from the kitchen and started chewing on it, twisting it from one side of his mouth to the next. “She’s stayin’.”

Sally jumped up. “The quilt.”

“I come to see the quilt,” Ruby said, wondering what all the commotion was about.

“Lulu,” Sally said. “What did she do with that quilt?”

Sally raced inside and came back out again. “Where’s Lulu?”

“She’s at the church,” Billy answered. “Gettin’ ready fer the weddin’.”

“Go git her.” Sally clasped her hands and placed them on her heart. “I want her to meet Ruby. She *made* the quilt.”

Lulu first saw George at a church picnic. He was tall and lanky, stuffing a roll into his mouth, then a chicken leg and then a mouthful of potato salad, sampling everything on the table before he picked up a plate and then filled *it* up. She didn’t see how he could eat so much and still be so thin. When most of the food was gone and it was time to clean the table, she found him eating the crumbs off the plate that had held the cake. That was something her father would do, and that enamored her to him.

His name was George Rue. He had come to New Hope with his parents from Georgia. His grandparents were from South Carolina and were still there. His father had opened up a paint and glass store at the lumber yard, seeing there was a lot of building going on. Both he and his father had red hair.

George called on Lulu until she dropped her relationship with her childhood sweetheart, Bobby Beau. He didn’t like George coming around and tried several times to pick a fight with him, but George treated Bobby with kindness until he gave up the

idea. That was also like her dad. She had no power to say no when George asked her to marry him.

Billy found Lulu practicing patience as she tried following the cadence of the organ music, placing one foot in front of the other, something she found tiresome.

"Do I have to do this again," she complained. "Isn't once enough?"

The organist replied with, "You can't just prance up to the pulpit and say 'I do.'"

When she sensed someone behind her, she turned to see her father standing there with a grin from ear to ear. "Hello, Daddy."

"Hello, Darlin'." He took her and gave her a big hug. "You can take a break. Your mother wants you to come home. She has a surprise for you."

"Oh, Daddy, I love surprises. What is it?"

He took her by the arm and led her out of the chapel. "I can't tell you that. Wait till you get home."

"Hey!" the organist yelled. "That's the wrong direction."

Lulu almost ran home. It was hard for Billy to keep up with her. When she got to the gate, she stopped, seeing a dark figure sitting in her mother's wicker chair on the veranda.

"Who's that?" Lulu turned to her father.

"That's the surprise," he said. "Go on. Your mother wants you to meet her."

“I don’t know about this. She looks like an old Injun.” She passed through the gate reluctantly.

“Go on. You’ll find it’s important.”

Lulu stepped up to the porch slowly, holding onto her wide flat hat, as all of a sudden a strong breeze blew.

“The fawn is returning to its doe,” Ruby said, referring to the breeze, but Lulu thought she meant her.

“That’s a nice thing to say,” Lulu said.

“It will blow your hat off,” Ruby replied.

“Huh?”

“Lulu,” Sally interrupted. “Where is your quilt?”

“Why, its on the bed, unless you mean that old one,” she said, staring at the old Indian. “It’s in the bottom of my trunk.”

“Well, go get it, please.” Sally placed her hand on Lulu’s shoulder as she passed through the front door.

Lulu’s eyebrows drew together as she looked back at her mother.

“Go on. Get it.”

When Lulu returned with the quilt, Sally said, “Give it to her.”

“Ma?” Lulu slowly pushed the quilt towards the old woman. “But it’s mine.”

“Lulu,” Sally said, putting both hands on Lulu’s shoulders. “I want you to meet Ruby Wasson. The quilt is hers. She made it.”

When Lulu realized what was happening, tears came to her eyes, and she knelt down by the woman as she took the quilt. Lulu placed a hand on the old woman's arm, and started to cry.

Ruby unfolded the quilt and looked at it. "Ah, it's pretty old," but as she turned it around to look at the picture she had painted, she said, "Ahhh, it's different. The paint is different. What did you do to my quilt?"

"The paint had peeled off," Lulu explained. "but the dye remained, so I painted it over with oil paints."

Ruby patted Lulu's hand. "You did right. It's a pretty good job."

Sally apologized, her hands grasping her heart, "I thought you might not like it."

"No, no. It's all right. You did good. You did good." Ruby held the quilt close to her heart. "I'm a might thirsty, though."

"Oh! My manners! Of course," Sally exclaimed.

At that moment, a little boy poked his head out the front door, catching Sally's attention.

"Tommy. Go to the spring house in back. Fetch some cool water and four lemons."

Tommy left on his errand, and Sally asked Ruby, "You like lemonade?"

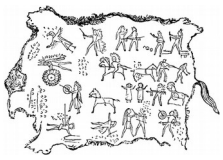
"Honey," Ruby answered, "I'm dying for lemonade."

While Sally was in the kitchen making the lemonade, Ruby had to tell everyone about her travels, losing her family in the plague, losing all her stuff, having to give it

back to the tribe, and having to leave to go off and die. But she didn't die. She went on walking, and the idea came to her.

"I told myself," she said as Sally handed her a glass of lemonade, took a drink, saying, "Yes, that is good!" Then continuing, "I told myself I would go and see if I could find my quilt."

"I'm glad you did." Sally smiled.

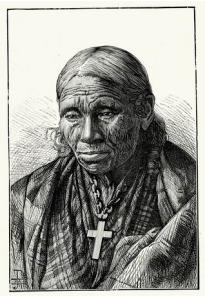


Granny smiled at each of her grands and said, "After my parents, Lulu and George Rue, got married, they moved to Abilene, Texas."

"Granny," Mary asked, "How did you get the quilt if they gave it back to Ruby?"

"That's the rest of the story."

Chapter Sixteen



Ruby set her lemonade on the little round table next to a vase that held one rose. It was the prettiest rose Lulu had seen as she had strolled through the garden earlier that morning, probably thinking of her up coming wedding.

Ruby clutched her quilt and closed her eyes.

Sally motioned to everyone to go indoors. “Let her sleep,” she whispered.

The afternoon passed, and Lulu helped Sally fix the evening meal.

Sally finished placing the last piece of fried chicken on the platter while Lulu dried the last plate and set it on the table when Sally asked, “Why don't you go out and invite Ruby in for supper.”

“Okay.”

Lulu went out to see about Ruby. She looked so peaceful Lulu didn't want to wake her, but she had been sleeping for an awful long time. Lulu stared at her. The old woman didn't seem to be breathing. She watched her for another minute. Nope. She wasn't breathing. Lulu touched her shoulder. It was stone cold. Lulu shrugged her shoulders and pressed her lips together in a wide grin. She reached down and took the quilt. *You won't be needing this anymore.*

Sally saw Lulu walk down the hallway, pass the kitchen, carrying the quilt. “Hon', what are you doing? Is Ruby coming in?”

“I'm putting the quilt away.”

“What? We gave that to Ruby.” Sally went out into the hallway and peeked into Lulu's bedroom. “Why did you take the quilt back?”

Lulu turned around, raised an eyebrow, and holding the quilt to her chest, said, “Ma, she won't need it now. She's dead.”

“Oh my!” Sally ran down the hall and out the door to see for herself.

Ruby sat there with eyes closed, hands still clutching the quilt that was not there.

“My goodness,” was all she could say with her hand placed upon her cheek.

Sally went back into the house shouting, “Billy Wasson!” He wasn't in the house, so she went through the back door and again shouted “Billy Wasson!”

Whenever Billy heard his last name being called, he knew it was important, so he left the barn and ran to the back porch. “What? What?” His face was full of perplexity.

Sally grabbed his arms. “It’s Ruby! She died on our veranda.” She paused and looked into his eyes for reassurance. “What are we going to do?”

Sally followed Billy through the house and onto the front porch. He bent down and examined the body of the old woman.

“She looks so peaceful,” he said softly.

Lulu stood behind her mother, peering over her shoulder.

Billy stood up and addressed his women. “I’ve seen a lot of death, but never someone more satisfied with dying.”

“But what are we going to do?” Sally asked again. “If she were my mother, I would lay her out, wash her up and dress her in her finest.”

“Well,” Billy said, “Do your best. I’ll go get Mr. Jenkins, the coroner.”

“I will go get Sister Dixon from the Church,” Lulu said, “Maybe she will help. She’s done this before.”

With her husband and Lulu gone, Sally had Tommy run out to the farm and get his older brothers Frank and Joe. With their help, they were able to lay Ruby out on an old door between the seats of two chairs from the kitchen. After that, Mr. Jenkins and Billy showed up. The coroner examined the body to make sure no foul play had taken place. Then he wrote out a cause of death.

“I will send for the body tomorrow,” Mr. Jenkins said, wiping his hands with his handkerchief. “James Ferguson will make the casket. I’ll let him know.”

Dinner was forgotten, and the boys’ stomachs were growling. Tommy was found in the kitchen staring at the platter of fried chicken. Lulu told Frank and Joe to join Tommy and go ahead and eat. She wasn’t hungry. She was going to help Mother with Ruby. Billy joined his sons eating chicken as though they were starving, and having been working out on the farm all day, they were hungry.

Ruby was buried near Sally's parents. Lulu and Sally stood watching in disappointment as the casket was lowered into the ground.

"I thought," Sally said, "we would get to visit her for awhile."

"Me too," Lulu replied. "I wanted to get to know her." Lulu sighed heavily with that double sigh that brings tears.

Billy put his arm around Sally. "She'll be with her folks now."

"If I interpret the quilt right," Lulu said, "she has a little sister."

"Yes," Sally said, wiping her eyes with her hanky. "But we don't know where she came from or who her sister would be."

After the funeral, which consisted of only the immediate family and no preacher, for he said he would not preside over a heathen grave, the family gathered at the dinner table. Billy was talking about the solemn occasion.

"I thought I saw a dark figure peering in at the gate, but when I looked again, it had disappeared."

Lulu, putting down her coffee cup, asked, "Do you suppose it was her sister? Did she look like an Indian?"

"Could o' been." Billy faced his wife and daughter. "Do you think I should go out and search for her?"

Sally wiped some gravy off her mouth with a napkin. "Don't you think, Billy?"

It was agreed that Billy should go out on the horse and scour the town for any Indian woman. He did that but came back empty handed. Everyone shrugged their shoulders and went on with their lives forgetting about Ruby.

Conclusion

“Granny,” Mary asked, “how did you get the quilt?”

“Well, I know I saw it when I was little, just like you girls. It was in a trunk, and we were packing things to move to San Barnardino, California.”

“That’s where you live, Granny,” Sarah said.

“And this was where Aunt Lucy had moved to. That was my dad’s sister. I will tell you about her someday. Anyway.” Granny played with Jamie’s hair who had laid her head on the quilt and gone to sleep. “As I was saying, when I was a little girl, I saw Mama pack this quilt in a trunk. She had to answer the telephone. I was drawn to it with a peculiar feeling. I took it out and laid it on the bed, looked at all the handwriting on it, turned it over and studied the picture. I ran my finger on all the figures and houses and trees. That’s when Mama came back.

“ ‘Would you like to hear the story?’ Mama asked.

“ ‘Oh, please, Mommy! Tell me the story,’ I said, jumping up and down.

“So Mama told me of how the quilt had been handed down from generation to generation, and told me the story that was painted on the back, all about Ruby and her sister.

“You know, my granddaddy never did find Ruby’s sister. She had completely disappeared. No one knew anything about her or ever saw her around New Hope. They all told him he had seen a ghost that day at the cemetery when they buried Ruby.

“I didn’t get the quilt then. By the time we arrived here in San Bernardino, I had completely forgotten all about it. No. It was when my mother died that us girls, Pat, Madge and Muggy were rummaging through her things that we found the quilt again. They all thought it so ugly and old, they were going to throw it away. But I grabbed it and told them I would keep it.

“Now I have the duty of passing it on to one of you girls.”

“Oh, may I have it?” Mary asked.

“May I have it?” Sarah asked.

“Well,” we will see.” Granny petted Jamie’s head who smiled and was in turn petting the quilt.

“Oh, you have it,” Sarah said. “You’re the oldest.”

“What about Jamie?” Mary asked. “Look how lovingly she is sleeping on it.”

Mary didn’t know, but Jamie was really awake and listening to everyone. She groaned as she put her arms around the quilt and hugged it to her as she lay there with her head on Granny’s lap.

“Well,” Granny said. “I may not have to choose at all.”

Mary and Sally laughed.

The End