

CHAPTER *Nº 1*

“Don’t let him have our fam!” Elizabeth tugged on her father’s sleeve.

“We’ll need the money in Nova Scotia,” Papa answered gently.

They stood at the window with Mama, watching the stranger walk up their road, an enormous man with a broad sea captain’s hat.

Leaving. The thought made Elizabeth squirm. It felt worse than having to attend Sunday meeting in wet woollen stockings. How much better to rip them off and *stay home*. If only they could!

But it was too late. Papa was leaving tomorrow with the men; she and Mama would follow in June. And here was the sea captain who was interested in buying their farm.

If only that land agent had never come, never convinced the Worths or her parents or so many of their neighbours to become Planters. Elizabeth knew from her heart to her bare feet it was a bad idea.

She squirmed again. Maybe if she told Mama about her bad dream? In her mind she saw the strange little house on fire. She looked up into her mother's careworn face.

"I had a dream about Nova Scotia. A house was burning—"

"Moving's unsettling," her mother said, patting her hand. "We'll have a fresh start in Nova Scotia, you'll see."

The captain loomed in their doorway, his coat billowing around him like a sail.

Papa nodded politely. "You've come about the farm?"

Before Elizabeth could cry out "Mistake!" the captain swept off his hat and boasted, "I'm the only man in all Connecticut who'd even think of purchasing your pitiful farm!"

Papa stopped smiling. Mama didn't invite the captain in. Behind her the great kettle stayed cold on the stone hearth and the best china teacups sat empty.

"If you're worried about the land's yield—"

"I've no worries whatsoever!" The captain laughed, pushing his way past them into the company room like a tall ship commanding its new harbour. "England's finally silenced those French dogs. This damn war will be over soon."

"I won't deceive you, the land's rocky and—"

"Land!" roared the captain. "What use have I for rocks and trees?" He pointed out the window to the distant harbour. "That's where I make my living. The sea. And we rule it now! So I'll buy your little house, for it means I can find a little wife to sit at this window awaiting my safe return."

He thrust his hairy hand towards Elizabeth and pinched her cheek. Horrified, Elizabeth smacked it away.

“You can’t want our house.” What could she say to discourage him? “It’s . . . cursed.”

Papa gave Mama a meaningful look. “Take Elizabeth outside. We’ll negotiate in private.”

Shawls were gathered and Mama pushed her towards the door.

“A cursed home is it?” The captain laughed greedily. “I’ll have to rethink my offer and a fair price—”

The door slammed shut.

Suddenly, everything, the world as she knew it, tumbled inside, outside, all around Elizabeth.

“Fair?” she cried. Hot tears wet her cheeks. “Baby brothers die. Our crops fail . . . Papa’s leaving tomorrow, and that horrid man gets our house . . .”

Mama’s face softened. “But we don’t want it. I share your bad feeling about it.”

“No! No! It’s moving to Nova Scotia I feel bad

about! I had a terrible dream . . . soldiers, and a fire burning the new house.” Elizabeth saw again the tiny log house with a thatched roof . . . nothing like their real home, which had a large front room to entertain company and bedrooms upstairs.

Mama put a comforting arm around Elizabeth’s shoulders. They walked slowly past the garden. “We’ve had years of bad luck. This is a good sign: a buyer for the fam.”

All her feelings gathered like a storm cloud and Elizabeth argued, “I hate Rebecca Worth. She got the women to convince you something’s wrong with our fam, that you’ll never have more children if you stay here. It’s her fault we’re leaving.”

Mama stiffened, and briefly closed her beautiful dark blue eyes. They had reached the far side of the garden, and Elizabeth’s words hit a tender spot. In a corner, two wooden crosses marked two small graves covered in a bit of late-March snow.

Elizabeth’s first brother had lived just a month. The second had survived only a few short days.

Both brothers were buried there under the willow trees.

Elizabeth found a few stones and placed them on the snowy graves. *Please God, she prayed. Tell them we'll always remember.*

Such short lives. Such a long shadow left on their hearts! And the shadow had lengthened. Last summer's crops had rotted in the constant rain. Then the land agent had come, and Rebecca Worth had convinced Mama to leave.

For the first time in months, Mama's voice sounded hopeful.

"God's face will shine upon us in the new land. I know it."

Elizabeth couldn't stay angry for long—not at Mama.

"Maybe God's face is shining on us right now. Maybe . . . there's just a cloud in the way."

Mama laughed at her. "You're just like your Papa."

Elizabeth straightened her shoulders. Yes. She was like Papa. Cheerful. She even looked like

him. Straight brown hair. Freckled cheeks.

On the willow branch above the graves Elizabeth noticed a fat, red-breasted robin. It began to chirp its clear and boisterous spring song: *I'm first, I'm first.*

Another sound interrupted. Voices. The sea captain and Papa were shaking hands outside the front door.

It could mean only one thing: the farm was sold.

She would be a Planter, Elizabeth thought. The first to settle the vacant lands. *I'm first. I'm first.*

Mama was right. Of course, the sun had to shine in Nova Scotia too. She would just pack her worries in the bottom of her trunk. The *very* bottom.

Maybe there would be a bright side to this leaving. Maybe, she could hide *all* her unwanted things at the bottom of the trunk? Perhaps . . . her woollen stockings?