

Three

WEEDS AND GRASS grew knee high around the small log cabin. Mounds of green mosses and yellow lichens covered the roof and clung to the edges of the window frame and the wooden door which was hanging on one hinge. The rough logs, weathered by the rain, were grey in color; a contrast to the green and brown mosses wedged between the logs to keep the wind from blowing through.

“Is this it?” Lorah and James, her eleven year old brother, said in unison. “Is this where Aunt Kate and Uncle Liam lived?”

“Tis so tiny,” said eight year old Alice. “And what’s that?” She pointed towards a tall, box-like shed a short distance from the cabin.

“Let’s find out,” replied Lorah, jumping down from the wagon and setting off along the over-grown path.

Alice followed, skipping through the tall grasses. “Ahhh!” she screamed, leaping into the air. “Lorah! Help!”

Lorah turned just in time to see a long green and brown snake slither across the path and into the grass. Her skin felt cold. The hairs on her arms started to prickle. “Dear God,” she uttered, looking at Alice’s frightened face. Swallowing, she collected herself, and as calmly as she could, said “Tis a snake. Tis for sure we scared him too!”

“I don’t like snakes,” whimpered Alice.

“Well now, you’ll have to get used to them, for this shed here ...” said Lorah, opening the door, “is a backhouse! See it has a seat with two holes. I be thinking you’ll need

company 'til you get to accept them snakes sharing our garden." Tickling Alice, she laughed.

The two sisters ran hand in hand back to the cabin, where they found James still muttering about how small their new house was.

"Hush. Be thankful you will have a roof to sleep under tonight," Lorah's mam replied in a tired voice. "Others must sleep under the stars 'til they can build a shelter." Holding Mary, she carefully climbed down from the wagon. The difficult, dusty journey had been hard on her fragile lungs, and the lingering cough had left her exhausted.

"Come James, stop yer whining and help me make a fire," called his da, as he strode over to the fire pit.

Lorah, her sisters, and their mam slowly walked towards the cabin door. Pushing it open, they peered into the dark, dingy interior. The one-roomed cabin, with its two small windows and dirt floor, was indeed tiny. It was damp and smelled of dead mice. Dust covered the rough pine table, wooden benches, the three small settle beds, and rocker crib. Spiders had spun lacy curtains across the two windows.

Over the next few days, the cabin began to feel lived in. The dirt floor had been swept clear of dead mice and flies. The windows, now free of dust and cobwebs, sparkled in the sunlight. Opening up the old wooden box they had brought with them from Ireland, Lorah sorted through their few treasured belongings. "Here, Alice," she said, pulling out two coloured blankets and an old frayed patchwork quilt. Handing them to her sister, she continued "Hang these on the fence in the sun for a while."

Later, standing by the window, they admired their hard work. The red and green blankets and the quilt now covering the beds added colour to the room. Lorah had placed the black leather bible beside James' jar of multi-coloured glass marbles and Alice's rag doll on the shelf her da had nailed to the log wall.

Lorah's Promise

"But we still need something else," Lorah muttered, pushing back golden locks from her forehead.

"What, Lorah? What do we need?" asked her sister, as she flopped down on the bed.

Glancing out of the window, Lorah said, "I know. Come on, Alice." And beckoning to her sister, she ran outside. "Look at all them beautiful flowers. That's what's missing,"

They walked through the tall grass. Stooping, they picked a large bunch of bright yellow black-eyed Susans, white daisies, and sweet smelling purple phlox. Returning to the cabin, Lorah scooped a ladle of water from the wooden bucket, filled a glass jar, and placed it on the rough pine table. Stepping back, she nodded her head. "Aye, that's better."

That evening, after collecting kindling, Lorah filled the iron pot with water her da and James had carried up from the river. She hung the pot over the fire on the arm of the iron bracket, and then sat down on a log and picked up the book that Mrs. Flanagan had given her in Ireland. She seized every chance she had to read and learn. Each time she studied the words and read a page, she felt she was a step closer to keeping her promise.

Her mam looked up from stirring the steaming potato soup. "Lorah, will you stop yer day dreaming and collect some firewood?"

"But 'tis me dream of being a nurse I be thinking of."

"'Tis food you need to be thinking of, not yer dreams, lass."

Sighing, Lorah closed her book. "'Tis for sure I have much to learn. Is there a doctor in the village do you think? And will he be needing a nurse, I wonder?"

"So many questions in yer head! 'Tis growing up you must do before you follow yer dreams." A fit of coughing gripped her. "But when the time comes, I have no doubt you will find a way."

"I'm thirteen! Almost fourteen, that's grown up."

Ann Harris

“You’re determined and stubborn, just like yer da,” said her mam, when the coughing subsided. “Yet he always finds a way to do what needs to be done. God works in mysterious ways, Lorah, and I’m sure He has a plan for you. Just believe in yerself and ’tis fine you’ll be.”

As Lorah collected firewood, she thought about what she must do to pursue her dream of nursing. *First I must continue me reading and writing*, she thought. *Perhaps I can go to school*. Her eyes sparkled at the thought. *But then I be needing money for learning how to become a nurse, so I must have a job as well*. A frown crossed her face. *If only we’d stayed in Ireland ...* Her original plan of eventually attending the Florence Nightingale nursing school in England had been crushed when her family immigrated to Canada in search of a better life... *Now I need another plan to follow me dream and honour me promise*, she thought. *But how am I going to do that?* Popping a wild raspberry in her mouth, she hurried home with the firewood.