

In a Grove of Maples

First in the series: Sheltering Trees

Jenny Knipfer

Jenny Knipfer © 2021

In a Grove of Maples

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JENNY'S OTHER BOOKS

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON SERIES:

Ruby Moon Blue Moon Silver Moon Harvest Moon

SHELTERING TREES SERIES:

In a Grove of Maples

Coming in late 2021

Under the Weeping Willow

Coming in 2022

On Bur Oak Ridge By Broken Birch Bay

Holly's Homecoming: a Christmas Novella

Coming in early November 2021

Praise for the By the Light of the Moon series

"Readers who love being trapped in a character's mind should relish this finely written, gripping series. A must read for fans of historical fiction." The Prairies Book Review

Ruby Moon

"This novel is filled with drama and a writing style that is insightful. From the beginning, the author creates a sense of mystery, capturing sensations in a style that defies perception."

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"Knipfer's characterization is stellar in this novel, and she skillfully ties in the themes of faith, forgiveness, and trust." Wisconsin Writers Association

"Ruby Moon is the type of book that hooks you from page one... and has you quickly turning the pages to discover more." Ya It's Lit Blog

"The prose is just beautiful with a lyricism that ebbs and flows perfectly. I love a story that sounds to me like a song." Jypsy Lynn

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Blue Moon

"Knipfer creates a strong sense of place, and she draws on her own experience with MS to depict the course of Valerie's illness with great sensitivity." Wisconsin Writers Association

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"In Blue Moon, the author tells a breathtaking story of twins Vanessa and Valerie. Page after page, the author masterfully weaves other exciting characters into the story..." Ksenia Sein, author of *Agape & Ares*

Knipfer continues to welcome her readers into Webaashi Bay... back into the town and characters we fell in love with in Ruby Moon, the first book in this series. I am confident you will love this book just as much – if not more – than the first. For in this book, Knipfer has woven an entrancing tale we all need to hear." Amazon review

Silver Moon

“Silver Moon is a highly recommended read for fans of historical wartime fiction, powerful emotive drama, and excellent atmospheric writing.” Readers’ Favorite, five-star review

“I am stunned by the amount of detail the author gave in this single story. On one hand, we have powerful characters... and on the other, we have a plot that demands all our attention. Jenny Knipfer pulls no punches and holds nothing back.” Readers’ Favorite, five-star review

“This story felt comfortable for a first-time reader to the author, more like being welcomed by new friends. The setting, a time of need, camaraderie and survival, brings the large cast and reader together. Ultimately, Silver Moon is a story of forgiveness, second chances, prayer and patience.” Wisconsin Writers Association

“Silver Moon is very highly recommended for readers who want a compelling inspection of love, duty, and battle based on historical fact, but flavored with the struggles of very different characters intent on not just surviving but creating a better future for themselves.” D. Donovan, Midwest Book Review

“Taking an original angle on a tumultuous time in history, Silver Moon by Jenny Knipfer is a sparkling slice of historical fiction. Rather than focusing solely on the violence of this tragic conflict, Knipfer fleshes out the complexity of wartime... a thought-provoking and surprising work of historical escapism.” Self-Publishing Review ★★★★★¹/₂

“Not a light-hearted read, this book will engulf your senses, evoking the deepest and highest of emotions as you cheer and cry for the survival of dearly loved characters.” Kathryn V. Goodreads review

Harvest Moon

“As in her prior books, Jenny Knipfer does an outstanding job of cementing place, time, and culture against the backdrop of evolving relationships. These approaches lend a solid feel of authenticity and attraction to her plot to keep readers both educated and engrossed, as spiritual and social matters evolve.” D. Donovan, Midwest Book Review

“Wielding descriptive language and unexpected imagery, this narrative transports a reader with ease. Harvest Moon is a moving, authentic, and original work of historical fiction, while this series is a testament to Knipfer’s skilled and versatile storytelling.” Self-Publishing Review

“Harvest Moon by Jenny Knipfer is one of the best books I have read in 2020. In fact, it is probably one of the best historical fiction novels I have ever read. I have come away deep in thought, feeling somewhat like I’ve had a mystical experience and one I will never forget.” Viga Boland, Readers’ Favorite five-star review

“The author created the perfect atmosphere for her story to truly bloom and progress. I would highly recommend this historical fiction novel to anyone who loves reading stories with intricate plots and powerful characters.” Rabina Tanveer, Readers’ Favorite five-star review

“Knipfer creates her characters with so much emotion and physical presence that they become almost real in the imagination. A captivating and evocative novel of the importance of family, faith, and forgiveness and how, together, those things help heal a broken heart.” Gloria Bartel, Wisconsin Writers Association

Dedication

For Grandma and Grandpa D., whom I never had the privilege of knowing. My inspiration for Beryl and Edward's story came from yours.

And to my brothers, Jody, Jayme, and Tim, who are farmers at heart and in practice.

Also, for my nephew, Max, and his family, who now own and live on the home farm.

The Heart of the Matter

*The heart of the matter
that keeps us together
humble love
that is more about you than me*

*A mutual stretching of arms that protects in life's storms lighthouse love
that watches out for each other*

*The breath of an artist
that bends hot glass
shaping love
that uses the flame to form beauty*

*An eye in the darkness
that sees through life's stresses
hopeful love
that gives faith in the midst of uncertainty*

*The steady spin of the day that moves us on our way lasting love
that is as sure as the dawn*

Jenny Knipfer © 2009

I think that I shall never see A poem lovely as a tree... Poems are made by fools like me But only God can make a tree. ~

Joyce Kilmer

Chapter One

November 5th, 1897 Maple Grove, Wisconsin

Dear Diary,

I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this. This broken wing. This storm between us. All the unmade memories I held dear before I put on my dress of white wound me. I grieve for a wish which hasn't come to pass—a wish for happiness. My disillusioned, childhood fantasy has taken flight like a dandelion seed blown off course. Happiness has not come to germinate inside of me. I'm not even sure how to define that most elusive of desires. I simply know—I do not possess it.

Is there a way through the tornado of our differences, or will the cold and the heat in us clash and destroy what we've built? Will we topple like a house of sticks or stand because we've chosen to construct our home, our hearts, together, from something more substantial?

I don't know. All I can do is try and pray that Edward is willing to do the same.

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May 1897 Quebec, Canada Six months prior

“It's so far away. Are you sure 'tis what you want?”

Beryl De Smet smoothed down the white, satin fabric of the

wedding gown she'd chosen. Her mother's voice rang in her ears, but an eager spirit rose within her to move forward in life with Edward.

It had been a whirlwind romance.

Edward Massart had swept her off her feet, literally. She'd been ice skating, hit a rough patch on the ring in town, and nearly fallen headlong. But Edward had scooped her up, as if she were nothing more than a feather. His crisp, blue eyes had held hers in the chilly winter air, and her world had spun counterclockwise since.

“Yes. We've discussed this, Mama.”

Beryl tried not to lose her patience with her mother. After all, Beryl was the baby, the last to fly from the nest in their family of six.

I will be the one to fly the farthest.

Some sympathy rested in Beryl for Mama's feelings. Beryl's siblings lived within a few miles of their family home on the edge of Quebec City.

“I know it is far. I will miss you too, but Edward says the land in Wisconsin is rich farmland. His cousin, Cedric, described the spot beautifully. It sits atop a hill, but the rest of the land lies flat and well-suited for farming.”

Beryl cradled her mother's head side by side against her own, their reflections in the large, square wall mirror similar, except Mama's hair was a graying chestnut and wrinkles were starting to etch her skin. Broad foreheads, high cheekbones, skin which tanned like shoe leather in the sun, and light brown, hazel eyes linked them together as mother and daughter.

Mama sighed and dabbed at the corner of her eye, a sad smile playing on her thin lips. "My bright little Beryl, what will we do without you?"

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Beryl studied their two faces in the mirror. Although she and her mother looked alike, their inner qualities were vastly different. Beryl had been told she glimmered brightly as her namesake. She liked to think she had a cheery disposition. Mama, quiet, tended to see life with a "glass half empty" outlook.

"You and Papa will manage. Besides, the grandbabies will fill the void," Beryl pointed out.

Her expression lightened as Mama smiled. "Yes. Little Charlie is a dear, and baby Britta a dolly." Mama laughed, sounding like a trilling bird. "All that dark hair. She takes after her father, I suppose." Mama turned from their reflection and focused on Beryl. "You were born as bald as an egg, but look at these lovely tresses now."

She fingered Beryl's rolled and pinned, light auburn hair.

"I think I hear the organ," Beryl pointed out. She didn't want to be late for her own wedding.

"We need to get this veil attached." Mama fussed and pinned the Brussels lace over Beryl's head. The veil hung to her chin at the front and to the middle of her back behind. "There. Perfect." Kissing Beryl's cheek through the veil, Mama said, "I'll be up front."

Mama went to find her seat, and Beryl was left alone with her image. *I look like a ghost*, Beryl couldn't help but think.

With the heavy, white, lace veil obstructing her features, she

imagined she could be a bride from beyond the grave. But she wouldn't think of death when new life waited just around the corner—a new life with Edward.

Beryl loved Edward, but that wasn't the only reason she desired to uproot and move hundreds of miles away. She craved something new, an adventure, a new horizon. Beryl thought herself different from her siblings. They all seemed content with their lives, but not her.

From a young age, Beryl had dreamt of traveling and living somewhere other than the land she grew up on. She wanted to know more, see more, and experience more. Now, because of meeting Edward, she would get such a chance.

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She took a deep breath and walked to meet her father in the narthex of Grace Emmanuel. He would escort her down the aisle to Edward. A flutter in her heart and a deep smile on her face fueled her momentum forward.

So far, this is the best day of my life.

Beryl prayed the days ahead would be even more blessed.

Edward hadn't ever seen anything more beautiful. He folded back Beryl's veil to kiss her, pausing with a breathless catch in his throat. He couldn't believe this stunning woman under the covering of lace had married him. Edward considered himself the luckiest of men.

Her smooth, even features spoke of a well-formed piece of pottery, the ridges and depressions distinct. Her skin glowed as if glazed with happiness. He placed a soft, chaste kiss on Beryl's waiting lips. He hoped his eyes showed the intoxicating expectancy beating in his chest.

A place of his own called to Edward. As the youngest of eleven children, he had little of anything which was his alone. Hand-me-downs had been his life. He craved something original and a way to be different from his siblings. He and Beryl were the same that way.

This new life which awaited them in Wisconsin would be theirs alone, a shining opportunity to be unique. No one else in his family had ventured too far from the family dairy farm. His brothers worked with his father. His sisters had married local men. All but Olive, too quiet and shy to tolerate masculine attention. She might never leave home.

A thrilling future waited for them on the land Edward had purchased. He trusted Cedric, who had gotten the asking price cut down by a quarter. Excitement built in Edward, and a laugh almost erupted from his middle. He sucked back the urge, however, and resorted to a fat smile instead.

He grasped Beryl's hand in his. Accompanied by loud organ music, he promenaded his wife down the aisle and into their future.

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Wisconsin Weeks later

Beryl yanked at her pink-ticking-striped sunbonnet. "How much longer, you think?"

The sun slanted low in the sky and nearly blinded her. Sunspots danced before her eyes after her attempt to look directly at the road ahead of them.

She rubbed her weary neck and tried to muster patience for the last leg of their journey. They had traveled down the St. Lawrence River and crossed Lake Ontario, Erie, Huron, and Michigan. The trip had taken weeks, and Beryl, weary to the bone, thought adventure might not be all that much fun after all.

After docking in Sheboygan, Edward had bought a buckboard and a team of horses. They had stocked up on food stuffs, supplies, and tools at a store there.

Now, they traveled through the near wilds of Wisconsin to the plot of land they had bought sight unseen.

"Should be getting there soon," Edward promised.

His self-assured tone did little to comfort Beryl. "It's almost dark. I heard talk at the mercantile of cougars in these parts."

She looked from side to side. Every shadow in the trees and bushes held a menacing image.

"It's just up ahead. I recognize the marker back there." He pointed with his thumb in a backwards motion. "Fella at the feed store said to look for the crossing sign."

Beryl met his eyes when he turned his gaze to her. A smudge of dirt was chalked across his right cheek.

"Scared of the dark, are ya?"

Beryl wet her fingers with her tongue and reached over to wipe his handsome face clean. His fair-skinned face wore his usual stoic look. He had a square jaw, angular cheekbones, brush-marked eyebrows, and a long nose. His blue eyes crowned his appearance; they were his most attractive feature, lighting up his face.

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She scrubbed at the grease and soil embedded in his skin. "With you to protect me, I'll always be safe."

"Here now, you'll rub me raw," Edward protested, but Beryl guessed he welcomed her attention.

When she finished, she placed a quick kiss on the spot she'd cleaned.

He smiled without showing his teeth. "Well, if you're gonna do that, I won't object."

"I hope not," she teased. "I am your wife now and, as such, I can kiss you when I darn well please."

"Is that right?" He grinned wider this time. "Again, no objections from me."

Beryl turned serious. "But shouldn't we be there by now?"

She tried to hold the genuine worry from her voice.

"Don't fret." He pointed. "It's not far ahead. Just over that hill." "Onward, then."

Beryl stuck her arm out and made a fist in a "high ho" fashion. She sat quiet on the bench next to him as he drove the team uphill. The sight of a semi-cleared portion of land drew her attention. Clusters of woodland arched not far back from the sides of the road, but up ahead a grassy clearing of flat land welcomed them.

"Ah, here we are." Edward pulled the team to a stop and jumped down. He came around and assisted Beryl. "Your future home."

He gave a little bow and spread his arm in a fanciful arc, as a ringmaster in a circus would.

Beryl fell in love. A little, log cabin squatted in the shade of a few trees. A stone outbuilding and a small, log barn stood opposite the house a hundred feet or so away. In between the log cabin and the stone building, a red-handled water pump spiked up from the earth.

Peace settled in Beryl as she took in the reward for their endeavors. Behind and to the right of the barn, cleared, fallow land waited for them to grow crops. A grassy clearing spotted with daisies, yellow rocket, and Queen Anne's lace lay to the south of the house. The woods skirting the area housed evergreens, pines, oaks, birch, aspen, and

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maple trees. One particular grouping of maple trees caught Beryl's eye. On impulse, she grabbed Edward's hand and ran as best she could through the long grass.

"Whoa! Slow down."

He laughed, and she joined him. Soon, they stood together in the shelter of a grove of maples, young like them. The palm-sized, pointed, green leaves danced in the gentle breeze.

Beryl leaned against Edward's chest. "It's like something out of a fairy story."

The trees almost formed a complete ring, like they had been planted by design.

"Yes. It's the perfect place to build our home." Edward gazed back at the cabin. "A real house. A house of planed boards with siding."

"The cozy cabin will do nicely for now."

She turned his face to hers. The stubble at his jawline scuffed against her hand. Their eyes met, and a shared joy was strung between them, like a gossamer thread of spider silk. Edward lowered his lips to hers as the sun flamed pink behind them.

"Promise me something?" she softly pleaded.

He wrapped his arms fully around her. "What?"

"Promise we'll be happy."

"Ah, well, that's easily granted, at least for me. I'm already the happiest of men."

He placed a kiss on her temple. Beryl turned his face so her eyes

could tell if he spoke the truth. She saw nothing to question in their cornflower blue depths.

"And I the happiest of women."

They kissed until the sun kissed the horizon.

"Well, let's see what our new abode is like inside." Edward led her

back to the little, log house. After fishing in his vest pocket for a moment, he pulled out a skeleton key. He held it out to Beryl. "You go on in. I better tend to the horses."

He left her side and went to unhitch the team. 7

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Beryl fit the key in the lock; it turned easily. She opened the heavy, wooden door with a creak and stepped into the dim interior of the cabin. A hollow space welcomed her. A small fireplace filled the north wall, a rusty, cast-iron pot suspended from a hook in its middle. The plank floor echoed underneath her steps as she moved about. A stack of firewood rested near the fireplace. One window, facing the south, let in a scant amount of light. Beryl noticed the top pane was cracked in a sharp slant from left to right.

Edward joined her. "Not much of a home."

His frame blocked the golden light creeping in through the door in the darkening hour of dusk.

Beryl strung her arm through his as they both looked around. "It's enough."

"Let's get some eats goin'. I'll start a fire with my flint if you scavenge for what we have left for provisions in the wagon."

Edward kissed Beryl on the tip of her nose before he moved to start his task. Beryl stepped out of the house to find enough for a meal from their supplies.

Once cornbread, side pork, and beans filled their bellies, they sat side by side on a log Edward had rolled into the house to suit as a seat for them. Beryl felt weariness droop her head down to Edward's shoulder.

Before she succumbed to sleep, she reflected, *We make a good team. As good as Betty and Benny.*

She'd grown fond of their paired horses on the trip from Sheboygan. Turning her head over her shoulder and looking out the open door of the cabin, she watched the horses clipping the grass near them, silhouettes in the dusk and content in their new home. The same contentment washed over her as she nestled next to Edward—her husband, and the man she loved.

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*...Who plants a seed plants faith and trust, For only sun and rain
That come with passing seasons
Can change the seed to grain.*

~

From the poem: *Who Plants a Seed* Ethelyn Kincher

Chapter two

December 24th, 1897

Dear Diary,

I shoveled more than a foot of snow today. My back aches from the effort of clearing a path from the cabin to the barn. The babe within me protested as well. He rolled and churned until I rested.

Tomorrow I will spend my first Christmas away from home. I should think of this cabin and our farm as our home, but without Edward here, it isn't. Memories of Mama and Papa together reading cozily before the fire make my heart ache. I wonder if Beulah and Belinda miss me? My sisters and Mama are probably making our traditional sugar cookies, cut in fluted rounds and sprinkled with raw sugar. I can almost taste their sweet, buttery texture as I imagine one crumbling in my mouth.

James and Penelope's little boy, Charlie, must be talking and walking by now. When will I get to see him again? I miss his round face and cheeky grin. Beulah was expecting when I left—her and Samuel's first child. She

must have had the baby by now, but I've not received a letter. Belinda, I fear, might be too smart to find a spouse, or too ornery. She likes to speak her mind, and menfolk don't take to that in a woman very well.

What of Jericho and Jedidiah? Are they still bachelors? Mama often said

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she was going to have to rely on James, Beulah, and me to have the grandchildren she desired. I miss my family, their quirks, teasing, and laughter. I long for the sound of loved voices. I close my eyes for a minute and recall how melodic we sounded as a family when our voices were raised in song at Christmas. It has long been a De Smet tradition to greet the Christmas season with caroling, visiting our neighbors on Christmas Eve and singing a song or two for each. I know now I took for granted those wonderful times. Why did I want to leave home again? Love and adventure. They both are highly overrated.

June 1897 Maple Grove
Six months prior

Edward worked until the taste of blood pricked his tongue. Another huge drop of sweat drenched his eye. He grabbed at his hankie, dangling from the back pocket of his overalls, and mopped his brow.

Paul Le Bakke tilted his head back and looked at their progress. “We’ll tramp upon the far acreage tomorrow an’ you’ll be set.”

His brawny shoulders shone bare and tanned in the summer sun.

Edward didn’t know how he would have managed to get his fields ready for planting if his neighbor, Mr. Le Bakke, hadn’t helped him. He and his wife had stopped by with two loaves of fresh bread last week and introduced themselves.

It was weeks past planting time. Edward prayed for a late frost. He planned for corn and hay, which he’d use to feed the dairy herd he hoped to acquire.

Edward took in what they had accomplished and couldn’t help but feel a little prick of pride at his achievement—dark rows of soil lay folded over one another, filling half the acreage of the farm. “Think we’ll finish tomorrow?”

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“Most likely.” Paul swatted the dust from his cap by clapping it against his jean-clad thigh. “Say, Nola wanted me to invite you and Beryl for supper tonight.”

“That’s kind of you.”

Edward scratched at his neck, unsure if he should accept. A weariness beyond what he’d ever known crushed him. His legs wobbled, but his stomach rumbled.

Good food or rest? It was a tough choice. Beryl, bless her heart, tried, but her culinary skills fell far below those of Edward’s mother. He wouldn’t tell her that, of course.

“Better see if Beryl has anything planned first.”

“I’m goin’ to take my hide home. Nola’ll be waitin’.” Paul gave Edward one long look up and down. “You could do with some fattening up.”

Edward smiled, the white of his teeth likely contrasting his grimy skin and tanned face.

“That’s what my mother used to say.”

“Well, she’s right.” Paul smiled. “We’ll expect you in about thirty minutes.”

Paul said the words as if it were settled, so Edward nodded in agreement, too tired to argue. He leaned against the side of the house and watched Paul unhitch his horse, Manfred, from his plough. Paul mounted and rode down the hill to his home west of theirs.

“Done for the day?”

Edward hadn’t seen his wife approach. *Must have been picking flowers again.*

Despite the fact that they didn’t have a table yet to put them on, Beryl liked to pick a fresh jar of wildflowers every couple of days. She placed them on the crate where they ate their meals.

She smiled her sunny smile, which transformed her whole face; her thin but well-defined lips stretched back into a grin, which arched high on her cheeks.

“Yep. Paul invited us for supper. He didn’t give me the option of declining.”

“Oh, well, I suppose the beans and bacon I had planned can wait.” 11

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She winked at him. He moved forward to touch her face and wrap her in his arms, but thought better of it, being so sweaty and dirty.

“Come here and give your wife a kiss. The result of your hard work matters not.”

Beryl motioned with her free hand. The other held stems of grasses and flowers. What kinds they were he didn’t know. He obeyed her command and stepped forward to lightly encircle her waist with his arms and kiss her on the lips. She tasted of summer berries ripening in the sun.

“Mmm, me thinks the lady has partaken of some fruit.”

Beryl tilted her head up and gave him a sneaky flash of eyes. “What? How can you tell?”

He backed up a little and unwrapped her arms from around his neck. Grabbing her right hand, he held up her red-stained fingers.

“You bear the evidence of your crime,” he said in mock judgement.

“Darn. It was supposed to be a surprise.” She pointed to the east. “I found a bunch of raspberries back there. I filled a small basket full.”

“Well, I’ll wash up before we head to Paul and Nola’s. Let’s bring the berries as a thankyou gift.”

“Fine idea. It’s one of the things I love about you—your generosity.”

Beryl clasped her hand in his as they ambled back to their cabin. Edward felt heat rising in his cheeks. Whenever a compliment came his way, they tended to flush pink. He didn’t need his wife seeing him blushing like a girl, so he turned his face away and changed the subject.

“While I wash, you fetch your berries and take care of your bouquet. Then we’ll hitch up the team and be off.”

“Why don’t we just take Benny? We can both ride on him, and it’s not far. It’ll be cozy.”

She winked again. The thought of being cozy sent a tingle through his muscles. It might be a precursor to another sort of intimacy. *But maybe not. I’m dog-tired.*

“Sure, whatever you’d like,” he offered.
She smiled and walked toward their little abode. Edward realized as

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he watched her sashay off through the tall grass that he’d say yes to almost anything his wife asked for. She captivated him, and he was thoroughly entrenched in love.

Later that evening

Beryl smoothed her hand over the quilt top Nola had pieced and quilted in an array of bright colors and patterns. “Oh, my. What beautiful stitching.”

“My mother taught me how to do appliqué. It can be tricky but tucking the fabric under—with the needle as you go—works for me.”

Beryl had not taken much of an interest in the handicraft of needlework, much to her mother’s dismay. “Are these embroidery stitches?”

“Yes. I did a bit of fancy stitching over the top to add some character.” “Well, it’s just lovely.” “Thank you. It kept me busy many a long winter’s night.” Nola

turned from the quilt laid out before them on the bed and motioned for Beryl to lead the way back out of the bedroom.

Beryl’s heart was glad that she and Edward had come to the Le Bakkes’ for supper. The men folk had taken to the barn after the hearty meal of ham and vegetables, while she and Nola had turned to talk of hobbies.

Beryl liked Nola immensely. Her softly rolled, dishwater-blonde hair, green eyes, and easy smile were attractive and welcoming. Beryl supposed Nola and Paul to be in their mid-thirties. A few lines formed around Nola’s eyes when she smiled, but no gray showed in her hair.

“Would you teach me how to quilt?” Beryl asked, surprising herself.

She longed for the company of another woman more than she desired to know how to quilt, but it would provide an opportunity for them to spend time together and also keep busy. Beryl guessed Nola to be the type of person who fully occupied her time.

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I bet she doesn't make time for simply resting.

Beryl craved a few stolen moments here and there to do absolutely nothing. She wouldn’t call herself lazy, but she did value the importance of being quiet. Beryl often turned to prayer at those times. She’d found the grove of maples the perfect place to rest and pray.

Nola sat at the table and gestured for Beryl to do likewise. “I’d be more than happy to show you. Perhaps of a Sunday afternoon we can have our first lesson.”

Beryl took a seat on a wooden dining chair decorated with carved oak leaves on the backrest. “Wonderful. Maybe after the house is finished.”

"You won't be working on the Lord's day, will you?" Nola raised her eyebrows and pulled up a corner of her mouth, forming a dimple in her cheek.

Beryl wasn't certain if Nola was chiding or kidding her. "Edward's determined, and he's not much of a church goer."

Edward's lack of interest in attending mass had caused her some worry, but Beryl thought time would most likely change that.

"Ah, and you?" Nola reached for a coffee pot and cups in the middle of the table. "Coffee?"

"Please." Beryl took a cup after Nola poured. "I would like to attend. Edward isn't much for church." She took a sip of coffee. "Do you and Paul attend somewhere?"

"Yes. St. Joseph's in Oconto. In '95 they erected a new, brick building. It replaced the old, log church. Cramped it was in there." Nola took a drink and set her cup down with a clink in the saucer. "Help yourself to sugar and cream." She pointed to the tiny, white pitcher and sugar bowl clustered next to the coffee pot. "We'd love to have you and Edward join us."

"We just might do that. Well, me at least."

Beryl offered Nola a shy, apologetic smile with her eyes down and her lips up. She heard the step of heavy feet and the squeak of the screen door. Her eyes met Edward's when she looked up. His presence

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brought a sense of home to her.

Being home means being with Edward.

She no longer thought of her parents' house or Quebec as home. Edward was her home now.

Edward stepped into the kitchen, his face showing a bit of sunburn on the side where his hat hadn't done the job of shading it. "It's about time we head home, Beryl."

Beryl nodded. "Of course. We've had a long day." She spoke to Nola as she rose. "Thank you again for the hearty and delicious meal and your excellent company."

Edward looked at Beryl sideways and winked. "An' just what does that say about my companionship?"

Nola laughed. "You married a joker it seems."

She shook her head at Edward and smiled widely at Beryl.

"Don't I know it." Beryl laughed and grinned back. She mimicked

the tone of an aged farmer's wife and stepped to Edward's side. "Keep yer overalls on, Mr. Massart. I'm a comin'."

Edward clasped her elbow. "We thank you."

He tipped his head to Nola and to Paul, who had slipped in behind him.

Nola rose from her seat, stepped over quickly, and adjured them, "Come again, now. Our door is always open to friends and neighbors."

"For sure and certain," Paul concurred.

Friends. The word fell softly on Beryl's ears. She needed friends. She missed her social groups and activities in Quebec. Edward was good company, but she required more than his attention.

Nola hugged Beryl without asking for permission. At that moment, Beryl suddenly missed her mother. She sniffed and willed herself not to tear up. It had been well over a month since she'd seen her. She'd received a letter last week, care of Cedric in Oconto. Edward had been to see him and put it in her hands. Beryl and Edward had yet to get to the post office in town to inform them of their residence and discuss the mail route.

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JENNY KNIPFER

They finished their goodbyes with Nola and Paul. Both Beryl and Edward dragged their feet on the way out. Edward seemed as reluctant to leave as she was, but he readied Benny, and they headed home.

Home—four letters with so much meaning.

Days later

"This durn'd rotten sun-of-a-gun!" Edward sputtered out.

He kicked the corn planter he'd bought used from a fella Paul knew. He almost uttered another oath, but he glimpsed his wife heading toward him out the corner of his eye. He ignored his throbbing toe and took a moment to take a deep breath and mop his sweaty brow with his handkerchief. Edward leaned against Benny and patted him on the rump while he waited for Beryl.

He tried to calm his irritation at the situation. He didn't want her

to think he wasn't equal to the challenge placed before them. Edward noticed as his wife approached how her hair shone with copper highlights in the sun, and her smile reflected the brightness of the day.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

Her eyes were shaded slightly by her "V" shaped brow. Her flowered apron flapped in the breeze. She held out a Mason jar filled with water. Condensation collected along the outside of the glass, telling Edward the temperature of the water was colder than the air.

He took it, swallowed a giant gulp, and answered, "Middle of seeding the field, hit a rock, leaned on it hard, and twisted the drill."

He couldn't help his disgusted tone. His eyes roved over the progress he and Benny had made.

Beryl frowned. "What'll you do?"

He took another drink and shrugged. "Try to fix it."

He spewed out the breath he had been holding. His lips flapped against his gums in frustration.

16

Beryl stepped closer to him. "Maybe Paul would know how?"

Edward didn't want her coddling him. He handed the jar back, turned, and busied himself with freeing Benny from the planter.

Cripes-a-crimminy, I don't need to ask Paul about every livin' thing.

Didn't Beryl think him capable? Didn't she trust enough in his own skill and initiative?

"I'll manage," he told her, and he pulled Benny forward to step out of the harness of the plow.

She spoke to his back. "I'm sure, but it doesn't hurt to seek help."

Edward didn't respond. He didn't trust himself to. He could gauge the tension building up in his muscles. The pressure of providing for Beryl and himself overwhelmed him. The fear of failure gripped him, feeding his anger and frustration.

Moving to Wisconsin too late in the year to plant had been a mistake. How in the world was he supposed to grow the crops needed to feed the livestock they would buy?

"Edward?"

He didn't have anything to say. Why didn't she let him get on with his work? He started to walk Benny back to the barn.

Beryl stepped closer and didn't give up. "Edward, answer me."

He stopped and turned, raising his voice, "What is it you want me to say? I gotta get on."

Edward waved his arm in the direction of the barn.

"I know. I didn't mean to . . . meddle. I only want to help." Edward hated the hurt tone he heard in her voice. *Darn it! Why do*

I always have to lose my temper when problems arise?

"You can help by making supper. I'll figure something out. That's my job," he muttered, plodding on with Benny.

"But I thought we were a team, a—"

Edward cut her off. "Dad-blame-it, woman, would you give me some peace!"

The look on his wife's face shocked him and he turned away. He had scared her. Edward avoided her eyes and continued on to the barn.

17

JENNY KNIPFER

She didn't follow him, and he didn't blame her.

Frustration had gotten the better of him before, but not like this.

He had not meant to yell or take out his anger on her, but he had. Edward's conscience pricked him for his outburst, but Beryl had to realize he had a lot resting on his shoulders. He couldn't help it if she didn't understand.

Beryl stood dumbfounded in the freshly turned soil. She couldn't believe her husband had shouted at her in such a way. She had seen him get irritated a number of times during the

trip to Wisconsin and since they had been here. However, he had never directed it at her. It hurt.

Edward's outburst shocked her. Was it the broken planter or something entirely different feeding his anger?

She would have to wait to tell him about the baby now. She wondered what he would think when she did.

Beryl was pregnant. She had missed her courses, unusual for her. From the age of thirteen, she had been as reliable as the dawn.

She picked up her feet and headed home, thinking through the possible reasons for his anger. *Is it me?*

Did he somehow regret their marriage? That couldn't be it. He loved her; she was certain. She thought back to previous outbursts. They had all been centered around the perceived notion of his inability to manage what troubles came along.

Lord knows he doesn't have to be perfect.

She wasn't. But yelling in anger at someone you were supposed to love—well, that was wrong. There was the broken planter, though, of course; that brought a burden on him he hadn't planned to bear.

She forced herself to continue walking back to the house. Her dress flapped in between her legs with her stride, as the wind pushed against her. She sucked in a breath and lowered her head. A thundercloud advanced from the north; the weather had turned. Edward would have had to take a break anyway.

18

IN A GROVE OF MAPLES

Beryl took up a faster pace and prayed for a way to help her husband with his burdens. She prayed also that her news would be well received when she revealed what she suspected.