milk & honey

Bethany Miller
Milk and Honey:
The Story of Frederick and Caradena

Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Bethany Miller

Thesis Advisor:
Joanne Edmonds

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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This creative project presents the lives of several historical figures. It tells the story of John Frederick Miller and Caradena Reef Miller (my great, great, great grandparents) and their first years in America, 1838 to 1853. Although based on facts about and research into the lives of nineteenth century immigrants, the story also contains fictional characters and events.
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Introduction

History, especially family history, has always fascinated me. From the time I was small, I loved to listen to family members tell the stories that had been passed down through the generations. When it came time to develop an Honors Thesis topic, I knew that researching the family and writing a family history would be a project that was not merely an assignment, but a labor of love. I decided to focus on my great great great paternal grandparents, Frederick and Caradena (Catherine), because they were the ones who brought the family line to the New World in the 1830s.

As I began to research immigration and life in the nineteenth century, I was struck by the enormity of the young peoples’ decisions to leave their homes and families, their culture, language and the life they had known, behind for an uncertain future in a land they had never seen. Even in the 1990’s, traveling to another country is a large undertaking, but to do it in the nineteenth century, aboard a filthy ship which would take weeks to cross the Atlantic, is truly heroic.

I soon realized, however, that it would be difficult to write a factual family history with what little information I had of Frederick and Caradena. Instead, I chose to take the facts I had of their lives and write a creative story about what might have happened to them by
researching what life was like for immigrants in general during the same time period. I started with the facts I knew about Frederick and Caradena. I had the date, for example, of Frederick’s birth, the year he came to America, when he bought land in Indiana, when he and Catherine married and when they moved to Indiana. I also knew that he worked for a farmer in Ohio for many years and that Catherine probably had a brother named John Reef who made the journey with her from Holland and bought land in Indiana bordering the Millers’. Armed with these facts, I allowed my imagination to fill in the blanks and answer the questions I had about their lives. The finished product is much more fiction than fact, but I hope that it gives some indication of what life must have been like for Frederick and Caradena.

In doing this project, many people have been very helpful. Fred and Anna Marie Miller, my great-aunt and great-uncle, allowed me to borrow several wonderful old photos of the farm in Indiana (these can be found in the Afterword). They also shared some fascinating stories about the farm that I had never heard. My advisor, Dr. Joanne Edmonds has been very helpful all semester, giving me many useful suggestions and much gentle guidance. My family, especially my parents, David and Virginia Miller, have also been very helpful and encouraging these past months. I feel like I have my own personal cheer-block in them. They have also taught me and my three brothers,
Andrew, Jonathan, and Paul, how important family is; family is there through good times and bad. Family is always on your side, behind you, encouraging you and loving you, even when you make mistakes. Finally, my fiancée, Eric Kutche, has been very supportive of me since I first met him almost four years ago. His eternal confidence in my abilities and intimate understanding of the stress involved in a Senior Thesis have helped to keep me motivated and confident. Without the help and support of all of these people, I could never have undertaken and completed such a project as this.

Even though this fictional story of the Frederick and Caradena is complete within these pages, I will continue to search for clues as to who my ancestors were and what they were like. Family history is important to me because knowing who my ancestors were, what they thought about things, and what they valued creates an unbreakable connection to my own life. It helps me to define who I am and who I hope to become.
Prologue

Clinton County, Indiana, October 1901

The man in the black coat tried to ignore the slight tremble in his callused hands as he plucked the newspaper from his desk's top. FREDERICK MILLER DEAD, the headline proclaimed.

"Dead," the man repeated softly as he sank into the chair's rich leather. His gaze fixed on the page before him:

*Frederick Miller died at an early hour Wednesday morning at his home in Mulberry of a complication of diseases brought on by old age. He was born in Germany nearly ninety years ago, coming to this country when a boy. By hard work and good management, he acquired several thousand dollars worth of property...*

The man looked up from the paper and stroked his brown moustache, now peppered with gray. *Yes, property. He'd left plenty of that.* Frederick had bought up as much land as he could when he had settled the family in Indiana. Land had been his religion, his obsession.

The man rose from from his chair and turned towards the morning light streaming through the second-story pane. He could
almost hear his father’s rich voice, heavy with the accent of his boyhood. “Land,” he’d often said, “iss where a man’s future iss sown.”

It had been difficult for a young boy to understand; more land meant more back-breaking work, more blisters and more aching muscles, leaving less time for the truly important things in life, like fishing or winging rocks at unsuspecting robins. Even now, having managed the homestead for almost 10 years, summoning his father’s kind of reverence for the vastness of the rolling cornfields was difficult. Corn was the past, he thought--the future lay in cattle.

A gentle rap on the door sent the man’s sentimental thoughts scuttling behind more pressing concerns. “Yes?”

The door opened to reveal a young, dark-haired woman. “Father,” the woman announced, folding her hands into her skirt. “Lawrence and Marvin have the carriage ready.”

The man gazed at his oldest child, thinking what a lovely young woman she had become. Her quiet intelligence and gentle but strong features often reminded him of his mother.

Though worn by nearly eighty years of life, his mother’s eyes were yet those of a young, laughing girl. There had always been a spark, no matter what hardship the family had suffered during those early years. Her unfailing belief that everything would work out
always made the bad a bit more bearable and the good that much more joyous.

*And things have worked out,* the man mused. Wasn’t the homestead one of the largest and most profitable in the county? Not that he or any other member of his family would admit the fact aloud—conceit had been squelched long ago. Hours of mucking out stalls had a way of humbling a person. They had worked hard for what they had, his father would say, and God had granted them reward.

“Thank you, Daisy,” the man said tenderly. “I’ll be down directly.” A brief nod and the black skirts swept from the room, the door swinging softly after them.

The man turned to survey the battered writing desk. Papers were strewn about its surface, correspondence left unanswered and account ledgers needing catching up. *Father kept up with it all so effortlessly.* He’d always known exactly how much was due to whom, what business affairs had yet to be tended, which acres needed weeding and how the newest farming innovations would work to his advantage. *How?* How could a man do all this and still put in a full day’s work right alongside sons and hired help who were decades younger? He’d been reluctant to leave the farm he’d worked so hard to build, but the family had finally convinced him to “retire” 15 years earlier at the age of 72 and move to Mulberry. He still made the trip several times a
week to the farm, though, saying city life didn’t suit him. He kept the accounts up to date and reluctantly let the younger men take care of the more strenuous labor.

A sigh escaped the man’s throat as he snatched his hat from the desk’s littered surface. The work would be waiting for him when he returned. He jammed the hat on his golden-brown head and straightened his coat. Quick footsteps clicked smartly from the bright room as the heavy door swung shut behind them.
Chapter One
Butler County, Ohio, 1838

“Just look at him!” Frederick spat. “He’s a besotted fool!”

Indeed, no one could look at Henry’s sparkling eyes and silly fixed grin and see anything but a young man deeply in love with his new bride.

Henry’s older brother gleefully elbowed the younger man, who was shooting sparks at the pretty blond woman whirling in Henry’s arms. “Just wait,” Albert teased through his wide grin. “Wait’ll you meet a woman who turns you into a grinning idiot. You won’t even know you’re a fool until it’s too late... One good kiss and you won’t care.”

“Humph! I’ll never allow some woman to make such a fool of me!” Frederick replied in disgust

“All right, Fred,” Albert said patting his friend’s shoulder with a laugh. “Whatever you say.” Albert left Frederick’s side, moving through twirling couples on the makeshift dance floor to claim his own wife’s attentions.

Frederick was unable to look a moment longer on Henry’s “public humiliation.” His familiar face was barely recognizable, flushed
and shining. Has Henry always had so many teeth? Frederick refilled his cider cup and moved towards the open door of Albert's barn. He tried to be happy for the man who was his brother in all but blood. This jealousy is childish... Henry really loves this girl. Frederick observed her flushed cheek and shining eyes. Or maybe they've both just had too much cider. A wicked grin split his face.

Frederick stepped through the barn's frame into the cool September evening, the jubilant notes of a lone farmer's battered fiddle spilling out behind him.

"We gotta do somethin' 'bout them squirrels," a burly man was saying in a loud voice. A group of heads bobbed in agreement. "They're stealing the corn we break our backs planting every spring." The man gestured wildly to the tree towering above the small group.

"If ya shoot one," another voice echoed, "a dozen more take his place!" More nods and grunts answered the lament.

If old Noah'd had them critters in his fields, he wouldn't have ever let them on his ark! 'Let them swim fer it,' he woulda said," chimed another irritated farmer. A chorus of deep chuckles agreed with him.

"Can't dees... squirrels... be eaten?" came a voice laced with a heavy Dutch accent.

"Sure," came the boisterous reply, "but ya gotta kill a couple a
dozen to get yer belly full!” Another round of deep laughs rippled through the circle.

The curious man, an obvious newcomer, laughed with the other men, trying to cover his discomfort. He'd ask his sister later if she'd seen any of these shifty-eyed creatures sneaking about the farm. *Maybe we should get another rifle,* he thought. He wondered if the hog he'd dragged half way across the country would be safe from these vicious creatures.

Frederick took another big gulp of the sweet cider and looked more carefully at the newcomer. He was tall and stout, his tanned face framed by summer-bleached blond hair. Bright blue eyes crinkled by some vague worry peeked from under his furrowed brows.

"Come on, boys," one of the men shouted. "I can see the bottom of my cup!" The gang of hard-muscled farmers made its way through the evening air back towards the light and music of the barn.

"Frederick Miller," he said stretching his hand towards the newcomer. The nosier group entered the barn as the two young men paused to talk.

"John Reef." A row of straight teeth showed between the man's full lips as he accepted the other man's greeting.

"Ahhhh... a Hollander, then," Frederick said happily. "When did you make the trip?"
“My family came across last spring, but we had much trouble traveling all the way to Ohio. My mother caught a sickness on ship. She is much weakened,” John replied, his brow again falling to shade his eyes. “We are working at Weaver’s land until we can buy our own.”

Frederick nodded, sympathizing with the man’s disappointment. As boys in Germany, Frederick and Henry had heard all the fabulous tales of America and had half-expected to be handed an armful of tools and the deed to their parcels of land as soon as they disembarked. They had allowed, though, for the painted savages that surely must be chased from the lush countryside. After hours of pelting unsuspecting birds with pebbles on their fathers’ farms at home, the boys felt confident that the savages would run in fear.

Weeks of rough passage changed the boys’ minds, though. The bad food, putrid water and sea-sickness shattered any illusions they might have had. As they had made their way west to Albert’s farm, the boys realized that America was not the land of milk and honey the glowing pamphlets and letters had promised. There was abundance in the land’s vastness, but the milk and honey took many hours of back-breaking labor and heart-wrenching disappointment before it would be coaxed from the soil. Land was available but often expensive, especially for two poor German boys who spoke no English.
and still owed three years of labor for the price of their passage. The acquisition of their own farms would have to wait.

_Seven years._ Seven years he had been working another man’s land. Albert was a good man, and Frederick was grateful for the opportunity Albert had given him, but it was still _Albert’s_ farm. But the dream would not die. How proudly he would someday write his sister Anna, a pen in one hand, the deed to his property in the other. He would describe every stalk of corn, every hill and the little stream that would snake through the fields, bringing life to each seed. It would be the Eden no man since Adam had known. And as Frederick looked into the face of the man standing next to him, he saw a kindred dream burning brightly in John’s determined countenance.

“I work here at Jager’s,” Frederick said. “The man dragging that poor girl about the dance floor, bruising all her toes, no doubt, is the younger Jager, Henry,” Frederick said, gesturing to the red-faced, swirling couple. “I’ll introduce you later.”

As John and Frederick stood watching the dancers, a young woman in a bright blue skirt pranced by, her blond head bobbing in laughter. Frederick’s eyes followed her graceful form across the dance floor, noticing John’s gaze doing likewise. He heard the girl’s laugh deepen when her sandy-haired partner drew her closer to say something in her ear.
Frederick turned to John about to make some lighthearted jest, but at the look on John’s face, Frederick’s words of merriment slid back into his throat. John was glaring at the man, Gregor Haag, his face flushing scarlet as the muscle in his jaw twitched in irritation.

“Excuse me,” John said in a low growl, his icy stare narrowing on the couple.

Handing his bewildered companion the empty cider cup, John strode across the floor, dodging other whirling laughing couples, intent only on reaching the blue-skirted girl.

Frederick was too far away to hear the angry man’s words to the couple, but the boy scuttled away as quickly as was dignified for a man of 17, leaving the frowning, pink-faced girl to thwart the giant alone.

Frederick, trying not to stare, watched the two throw sparks for a moment until the angry girl turned, tilting her head high, and walked away, leaving John talking to nothing but air.

John shook his head in frustration, and turned to survey the room for the Haag boy. He was gone, of course. Sighing, he gave up and made his way back across the barn to reclaim his cider cup. He took another deep, calming breath and running long fingers through already disheveled hair, a weary sigh escaping his throat. “My sister.”
Frederick grinned, thumping his friend heartily on the back. "I know... I have three of them."

John looked back to Frederick and the two men shared an exasperated look. "I think I could use some more cider," John replied.

"Lead the way, my friend!" Frederick laughed. "Lead the way!"
Chapter Two

December 1838

"There's a letter for you at the house, Fred," Albert shouted across the white drifts blanketing the barnyard. "Alice picked it up with our mail from town today."

Frederick made sure the stout wooden door of the barn was securely latched before turning towards the house.

"Thanks, Albert," he shouted into the frosty evening air. Frederick pulled the woolen collar higher about his face as his boots crunched their way through the snow-blanketed grass.

"I think we're in for another big one," Albert said as Frederick reached his side.

"Hope it's not one like we had a couple of years ago," Frederick replied. "I could barely get through the drifts to the barn to do the milking."

"Yeah, but a week later it was just a big puddle," Albert pointed out as the two men made their way to the little cabin silhouetted against the setting sun.

"I noticed a loose plank on the north side of the barn when I was bedding down the oxen just now. I'll be sure to mend it first thing
in the morning,” Frederick said.

“Tomorrow’s the day we’re butchering that hog Alice has been fattening up, too,” Albert said, his words becoming white puffs of smoke in the cold air. “Christmas dinner and that good pork she makes is just a few meals away!”

Frederick’s mouth watered as he thought of the succulent meal they would soon enjoy. It was a midwinter treat the men looked forward to for weeks. Alice knew how to do it up just right, Frederick conceded, even though she made it clear she resented having to do the other tasks common to a farm woman’s life. She’s just been here too long, he thought. She’s forgotten her roots.” Alice was clearly a soft American woman whose only duties were cooking, washing, sewing, mending, cleaning, putting up food for winter, making butter, baking, ironing, taking care of the children and tending the sick. Women from the old country took care of all these little tasks and put in a good day’s work in the fields alongside her husband. But Alice’s family had been in Ohio since before she was born. She has never learned the right way of things.

Frederick thought back to when he and Henry had first arrived on the farm. Alice had looked down her nose at the two boy like they were vermin she didn’t want near her person or her family. She’d made it clear that she, being a native born American and not a
transplanted German (even though her parents were born in Germany) was far superior to the recent arrivals. Frederick remembered promising himself that he would never treat a countryman that way, no matter how long he’d been in America, how well he could speak English or how large his farm was.

Frederick and Albert reached the door of the sturdy little cabin and stomped some of the snow from their boots before stepping into the warm glow of the cabin. Alice was just putting dinner on the long table where Albert’s son was squirming in his chair, anxiously awaiting the signal to start eating. The boy resembles his mother, Frederick thought as he shrugged out of his coat and took his seat at the family table.

Mathew was smaller than the other boys his age, and tended to get sick often. His mother coddled him more than was good for a boy, Frederick thought. Mathew was almost 8--he should be in the fields with the men. It just wasn’t natural for a boy his age to be afraid of the outdoors and have a sneezing fit anytime he got near the chickens or oxen. He was the Jager’s only son, though, and his father hoped to turn the reins of the farm over to him someday if no more sons were produced. He prayed Mathew would overcome his aversion to farm life as his boyhood faded into manhood.

The table was silent as Albert said the blessing from the head,
and four plates were quickly emptied into hungry bellies. As always, Frederick finished his meal and, thanking Alice for dinner, excused himself, leaving the family to their own affairs.

Tucking the crumpled letter Albert had given him into his coat, Albert stepped out into the black, starless night. He noticed, wearily, that snow had indeed begun to fall and the wind had picked up, just as Albert had predicted.

His lone figure made its way through the soft falling snow, the crunching of his worn boots the only sound breaking the silence. Frederick approached the one-room cabin that lay a short distance from Albert’s home and stepped through the dark doorway. This had been the first shelter Albert built on his place upon arriving in Ohio. After the first couple years, though, Albert had married and built a bigger home, anticipating filling it with children.

Frederick added a chunk of wood to the small stove in the corner. The sparse little room was even lonelier now that Henry had set up housekeeping with Katarina. Though their small place was just down the road, Frederick missed his friend with a keenness he had not expected. He looked at Henry’s abandoned bedstead remembering their first exciting summer nights spent here.

They had wondered at everything around them and had talked endlessly about how wonderful the farm was...well, Henry did most of
the talking. Although physically exhausted from hours spent helping the other men with the harvest, the boys could not rest but drifted to dreams of their own farms, painting pictures in their minds of wide, lush rows of corn stretching to the horizon and the snug homes they would build for themselves.

As Frederick stood warming himself by the stove, he suddenly missed Henry's incessantly cheerful banter. Henry was probably this very instant climbing into a warm bed with Katarina, telling her about the things he had seen or thought about that day, and planning with her what the next day would bring.

Finally the little room began to warm and Frederick shrugged out of his worn coat, hanging it on the clothes hooks that lined the far wall. He held the letter in his hands for a moment, taking in the neat German script in which his name was carefully penned.

Frederick looked forward to hearing from Anna several times a year, but one never knew what was to be found within the travel-battered envelope—maybe news of the family's good fortune or of its darkest hour. Frederick said a silent prayer as he settled himself near the wavering candle and tore open the envelope.

10 Oktober, 1838

Dearest Brother.
I pray this letter finds you prosperous and well. I was pleased to hear of Heinrich's marriage but I have to admit, it is strange to imagine him someone's husband. I still think of him as the ornery young boy he once was. As for me, I am expecting our first child in the spring. I have been feeling well so far with only a slight illness, which mother assures me is to be expected. Tobias is overjoyed at the prospect of becoming a father and is confident that the babe will be a large and healthy boy.

Other things here are as good as can be expected. The farm is doing better than many of our neighbors' but we struggle daily to fill our table and keep clothes on our backs. The money you are able to send is a great help and we are all grateful for your generosity.

Now, I'm afraid, a bit of bad news from home. Our dear brother Conrad is quite sick with a fever that is taking so many of our friends and neighbors. If the fever does not break soon, I fear the worst. I tell you this now only because I know you will wish to say a prayer for poor Conrad's soul. It is fortunate that he
never married and will leave no widow or children to starve in his absence.

Our father is getting on well and Mother is ever the same. Our brother Gerhard and his family have taken over the daily running of the farm, but father still insists on making his opinion known, of course.

Everyone sends affections and prayers for your continuing prosperity and good health. We anxiously await your next letter—Gerhard and Father are fascinated by your descriptions of the land and farm in America. The younger boys who wait with such excitement for your letters to be read are a bit disappointed, however, to hear that you have not seen any of the wild painted savages known to inhabit America; I pray for this continued uneventfulness.

Please give my warmest wishes to Heinrich on his marriage. You are in my prayers daily and I hope that you will be able to come home for a visit soon.

May God keep you and watch over you until I hear from you next.

Your loving sister,

Anna
As Frederick finished reading his sister's letter, his thoughts drifted beyond the roof of the Ohio cabin and across the Atlantic to the home of his boyhood. He missed Anna greatly, and at this moment, missed the old farm more than he would have thought possible.

Although the farm day had been long for a boy of 10, Frederick and Henry had always found time to spend at the little pond near their homes, swimming or fishing, catching frogs or just enjoying a short summer doze stretched out on the soft grass that circled the water. Anna, only a few years younger than Frederick, had often joined the boys in their outdoor adventures when she could escape the notice of their oldest sister Else long enough to slip away from the farm.

Anna was unlike Frederick's other sisters and the other girls Frederick knew of. Else, he realized later, had never really been a girl. She had taken up the reins of the household, caring for the younger children and household tasks as their mother grew more and more pale and withdrawn. Else was strong and resourceful, Frederick thought, never complaining about her lot or of giving up her chance for a home and family of her own.

Frederick wondered what changes the years had wrought on his family and the old farm. He missed everything. Everything but the future he would have had in Germany. He knew he would never return. There really was nothing for him there, no future. Land was
owned primarily by the wealthy and the poor had no access to its purchase. The farm his family worked was not truly theirs—they worked the land for its wealthier owner, paying an annual sum for the privilege. The best Frederick could have hoped for as the youngest son was a place on the farm as a paid hand. It was when Frederick realized this fact that he began to look elsewhere and the prospect of immigration became lodged in his imagination.

The idea was fueled when Albert, Henry’s older brother, made the trip to America and began sending home letters and money. Albert wrote glowing descriptions of unending green acres that anyone with the money could buy. There was a fortune to be made, he’d said. From that time on, Frederick and Henry were determined to travel to America themselves and claim their share of what the Americans were so freely offering.

Leaving the family, especially Anna, had been difficult, more so than he had anticipated. However, Henry and Frederick were closer than blood kin and the young men eased each other’s loneliness during that long sea voyage.

As Frederick eased himself into his cornhusk tick bed, visions of the morrow’s work replaced his childhood memories. But as he drifted off to sleep, it was the ghosts of a young Henry and a laughing, girlish Anna chasing leaping frogs along the pond that danced behind his weary lids.
Chapter Three

August 1839

Frederick tipped back in his chair as he ran both hands over his belly. “You are an excellent cook, Katarina. Thank you for dinner.”

Katarina turned from wiping the dishes to reward Frederick and Henry with a beaming smile. “You’re welcome, Fred. You know you’re welcome in our home anytime.”

“Well, I don’t know about any time,” Henry said with a grin and a wink to Frederick. His wife returned to cleaning up the dishes. Marriage certainly agrees with him, Frederick thought as he stretched enjoying the warmth of the cabin and his friends.

It had been over a year since Henry and Katarina had married and Frederick had yet to see his friend without a smile plastered to his boyishly freckled face.

“It’s ‘bout time you set to building a cabin of your own, eh, Fred?” Henry teased with a twinkle in his eye. “One with a double bedstead?”

Frederick shot a glance across the rough little table as the two airborne chair legs crashed to the floor. “I am not saddling myself with a wife anytime soon,” he said in a low determined voice. “So just quit wasting your time thinking on it!”
“Oh, let’s see,” prodded Henry, tapping his chin. “How ‘bout.... how ‘bout that Weaver girl... Sarah’s her name... her papa’s got that nice patch of land and all.”

“Yeah and nary a kind word to grace us poor folk with... or any word at all for that matter. Her and her prissy English manners! Bah!” Henry struggled to control the twitch in his lip as he baited his friend. “I don’t know... What do you think, Kat? How ‘bout Fred and that widow Schwanger that lives down the road? I bet she’d make him a good wife. One big family—Fred, the widow and all those cats!” Henry gave up trying to smother his laugh instead letting it ring through the cabin. Katarina shook her head and grinned to herself as she put the pans and plates back into the little wooden cabinet Henry had made as a wedding gift to her.

“Heeeen-ry... I’m warning you,” Frederick cautioned without a trace of laughter in his voice. “You know what happened last time you teased me about a woman...”

Henry stopped laughing long enough to catch his breath and look at his friend’s down-turned mouth. “Good God! That was at least ten years ago! We were children!” he said rubbing his jaw. “Do you remember what happened after you popped me?”

“No,” came the stubborn reply. “I don’t.”

“I think you do.”

“I remember you balling like a baby!”
A wicked grin lit Henry’s face. “I remember you trying to explain to your momma how that cow dung got in the pocket of your britches!”

“Henry!” Katarina gasped turning to face the men. “You didn’t!”

Henry tipped his chair back onto two legs and hooked his fingers behind his head, striking a satisfied pose. “Yep. And those britches stunk for a good month!”

Katarina rolled her eyes heavenward thinking that little girls left their games behind with their short dresses but that men were always ornery little boys at heart, no matter how big their britches.

Frederick fumed remembering the incident. It had been years ago and the joke would’ve been funny if he hadn’t been the victim, but Frederick *hated* being bested. He still remembered sticking his hand in that pocket fishing for a shiny pebble he’d found that day and coming out with a handful of brown, smelly mess. His mother had been furious and he had gone to bed hungry that night.

Frederick rose from the table, red-faced and with clenched fists. “Thanks again for dinner,” he said his voice strained. He shrugged his jacket on, pointedly ignoring Henry. “Good night, Katarina.”

“Frederick.... don’t go,” Henry said, the smile fading from his face. “I was only teasing... and you have to admit...” The slam of the door shook the small cabin, cutting off Henry’s words.

Henry looked helplessly at his wife and shrugged. “I was only teasing...”
Frederick’s boots crunched dead leaves as he stomped home. The floating golden moon lent the lone man enough light to find the little path that led to his own bunkhouse cabin. “Damn,” he said aloud. *Forgot the lantern.* He considered going back for the thing but pride wouldn’t allow him to return to Henry’s cabin. A sigh escaped his lips and he kept walking.

When he reached the farm a few moments later, Frederick went to check to be sure the barn doors were securely latched. Even though Albert had surely already seen to the task, Frederick knew he would be unable to rest until he performed the nightly ritual. The oxen and horses were the backbone of any farm, he thought. Not to mention the cows they relied on for milk and butter. There were many predators lurking in the woods that circled the farm and a panther could make quick work of a cow or horse. Or, just as bad, spook it so badly with its scent, that the farm animal hurt itself and had to be put down. It was worth an extra moment to be sure that the animals were secured. A smart man knew that if he took care of his stock, it would take care of him.

As Frederick turned from the barn to return to his bunk, a flicker of light caught his eye. It was Albert’s lantern bobbing in the blackness.

“I was just coming to find you,” Albert said reaching Frederick’s side. “John’s mother passed on this morning. His Pa’s got the same
sickness but is hanging on still.” Albert’s voice held a sympathetic note. “Alice was over there today helping Caradena with the arrangements and such.”

Frederick was silent for a moment, thinking of the small stout woman of whom John was so fond. “When’s the funeral?” he asked quietly.

“Day after tomorrow.”

“Thanks, Albert.”

Albert’s lantern floated back to the cabin on the hill as Frederick headed towards his own bed.

He paused just outside his door and looked up at the stars scattered about the heavens. The fever has taken too many good people this year. The little cemetery was growing by the day, fresh mounds sprouting from the lush grass. This time of the year was the worst. People already stretched to the point of exhaustion from the bustle of harvest were easy prey for cholera, and no precaution or treatment seemed to help. Mothers lived in fear when an epidemic erupted. The most terrifying part of the disease was its swiftness. A body could feel fine one day and be six feet under the next. It happened that fast.

A long sigh escaped his lips as he pushed open his door and felt his way through the blackness to his bed. Wish I had that lantern... A sudden wave of remorse washed over Frederick. He had probably overreacted, he allowed. Henry really didn’t mean anything by his
teasing. It was just his way. That jolly manner had earned him more than his share of black eyes as a boy, but his good nature had also made it easy for him to make friends quickly. That constant smile and ready jest won people over. Henry had always had a witty retort at the ready for a much more serious Frederick whenever a foul mood had settled on him.

Frederick climbed into a cold bed promising himself to resolve this issue in the morning.

Frederick was bending to wash his hands at the pump before the midday meal when Henry’s form emerged from the woods. He was carrying the forgotten lantern. Frederick straightened and dried his hands on his rough work pants.

“Afternoon, Fred,” Henry said, the familiar smile absent from his face.

“Henry,” Frederick greeted solemnly.

“Just came by to bring your lantern back and apologize for the way I behaved last evening. I didn’t know it would rile you up so much...I’m sorry. Henry gazed at his friend, searching his face for clues to his thoughts.

Frederick was silent a moment. “It was a long time ago, Henry. No cause for me to lose my temper like I did.” Frederick’s damp fingers plowed through thick black hair.
A weight seemed to lift from Henry as his grin returned to its proper place. He realized that Frederick had given the closest thing to an apology anyone would ever hear from him. "Guess I'm lucky you didn't pop me again in front of my wife," Henry joked. "I'd never be able to look her in the eye again after she saw me laid out on the floor hollering for my Momma!" Frederick grinned, imagining the sight.

Henry's eyes grew darker as his brows knit together. "You hear about Mrs. Reef?" concern dropping his voice a note.

"Yes," Frederick said, his feature, too, rearranging themselves into a frown. "A shame."

"Yeah. Poor John and Caradena. God knows it's hard to bury family."

"Has the grave been readied?"

"No. That's the other thing I wanted to talk to you about. Thought you and I could go over there this afternoon and take care of the digging. The ground is still pretty soft—shouldn't take too long."

"Yes," Frederick replied softly. "I'll get the shovels."

"...And as the Lord tells us in the book of Job, 'For I know my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God.' Amen."

"Amen." A chorus of voices echoed. The old pastor patted
Caradena’s black clad shoulder and shuffled slowly away. A line of his parishioners followed.

Frederick gazed at the young woman across the open grave. Although her face was bleached of her usually healthy color, her eyes were dry and her form stood tall. It was John who looked ready to faint. Caradena leaned into her much larger brother, giving him a comforting squeeze. Tendrils of blond hair escaped her braid and floated softly about her head on the breeze.

She tossed the pretty white daisy she’d been fingering throughout the minister’s eulogy into the pit where it thumped gently on the new pine coffin. Her full lips were a grim straight line, but Frederick noted not even the slightest quiver. John audibly sucked in his breath. His sister hooked her small arm through his large one and led him away. As Frederick turned from the grave, he saw a flash of white as Caradena passed her handkerchief up into John’s callused hands.
Chapter Four

May 1840

The stubs of trees poked out of the newly cleared ground, flickering firelight dancing across their exposed white faces. Notes of laughter and fiddle filled the evening air as friends and neighbors celebrated the end of days of back-breaking labor and the beginning of a new homestead carved out of the forest.

The owner of the forested acres had been sawing the towering maples and oaks all winter, trying to clear enough land to plant his first corn crop. The lumber not needed for building or heating had been burned down to ashes. A dozen neighbors had lent their backs to days of piling the felled logs into stacks and setting them afire. An experienced log-roller knew how to pile the logs so that only one burning was required. The help was unsolicited and the only recompense the unspoken agreement that the newcomer would return the favor when another of the small community had need of his labor.

Now the group of weary men and the families took time to celebrate. Albert’s barn once again served as the grand ballroom of the Old Northwest, milkstools and straw bales the settees and wing-backs. Frederick stood with John against the barn’s back wall,
watching the dancing and merriment of friends and neighbors. On the far side of the barn, a bit away from the others sat Katarina with her new baby cradled in her arms. Henry stood behind her, a protective hand resting on her shoulder as he gazed down at his little family. As Frederick watched, Henry leaned down to whisper something private in his wife's ear. She turned to him with a gentle smile and a word of her own. Frederick looked away, leaving the family to their private scene. A cold tentacle of emotion tightened around his heart as a frown creased his brow. Could it be envy? Surely not.

"Which of these lovely girls is to have the honor of being your next dancing partner?" John asked, watching the swirling skirts float about the room.

"I don't dance," Frederick replied, turning his attention to the man beside him. "I feel like a prancing idiot. I prefer to watch."

"Suit yourself," John said handing Frederick his cup of cider.

John crossed the floor carefully, dodging the merry couples and approached a hay bale where two young women were perched. The fair-headed woman, Frederick knew, was Miss Sarah Weaver; her darker companion was the woman John had been seeing home from church the past couple of Sundays. He escorted her to the dance floor.

Frederick watched the abandoned blond woman for a moment, sitting all alone. She was her usual placid, stony-faced self, sitting and
examining her skirts where her folded hands lay. *Probably looking for vermin that might have hopped off one of us poor folk.* He looked from Sarah to her smiling companion in John’s arms and back again. He almost felt sorry for her. *Almost.*

Frederick’s gaze shifted to take in others seated or standing about the perimeter. He saw the Schwanger widow in one corner, draped with her signature white shawl. Even from here, he could pick out the short black cat hairs on her clothing, a reminder of her strange compulsion. She had talked Caradena into a corner and showed no signs of allowing her a merciful release, laughing and gesturing, unmindful of her victim’s indifference.

Caradena stood patiently listening to the widow and nodding her head every moment or so. Frederick noticed her eye wandering about the room, however, whenever she could. As Frederick watched, feeling sorry for John’s little sister, Caradena caught his eye. It startled him. He gave her a small sympathetic grin. Her face lit up as she returned it. The widow asked the girl a question, reclaiming her attentions and eye contact was broken.

A rescue was in order, Frederick decided. He would go over there and... well, he’d just go over there. A lump suddenly formed in his throat. He tried to clear it. *Must’ve been a skeeter in the cider.*

Caradena caught his eye again. With one more attempt to
swallow whatever was choking him, Frederick pushed off the wall and started across the room. He almost stumbled. *Must be a loose board.* He kept an eye on Caradena as he crossed the dance floor. Suddenly one of the dancers bumped hard into him splashing both cups of cider all over his shirt front and his chin. “Sorry!” came the jubilant voice as it twirled away.

Frederick looked up to see Caradena watching. She wasn’t laughing, but the twitch in her lower lip and her twinkling eyes betrayed her mirth. Frederick felt himself redden as he quickly wiped his wet chin with his sleeve, hoping no one else had seen the mishap. He reached the other side with no further incident, two sticky, empty cups of cider in his hands and a large wet spot on his chest.

“Evening...ladies.”

“Why Mr. Miller,” the widow boomed. “How sweet of you to bring me a cup of cider!” She took a dripping cup from Frederick’s sticky hand and peered inside. Caradena covered her mouth to keep the giggle from escaping as the widow looked from Frederick to the cup and back again, a puzzled look creasing her brow.

“Well, never mind,” she said shoving the cup back into Frederick’s hand. “I’ll just go and get a fresh cup.” The woman ambled away, taking out her handkerchief to wipe her sticky hands.

“Oh, Frederick!” Caradena laughed when the widow was out
of hearing distance. "You should've seen your face!"

Frederick reddened further.

"Thank you for sparing me another minute of that woman's company," she said catching her breath. "She was just getting set to tell me another story about how smart her cats are." Blue eyes rolled heavenward.

A grin crept to Frederick's lips as he listened to Caradena's woes.

"Oh... I think she's coming back," Caradena said in a low voice. "Come on!" She took both cups from Frederick, setting them down on one of the milking stools. Threading her arm through Frederick's, she guided him to the barn's door. "Over here she said when they had stepped into the twilight. The pair stopped by the smoky remains of the cooking fire that had been built hours before. "The smoke'll keep the skeeters away."

Frederick looked back to the barn. They were far enough away to escape the noise and the Widow, but near enough to the others to escape any charges of impropriety should anyone come looking for them. Safe. He looked to the young woman before him. She was gazing up at the sky.

"Look how big the moon is tonight!" she said in wonderment. He wasn't looking at the cold, pale body hanging in the
heavens, but at the warm, upturned face before him. The red embers of the dying fire cast a glow on her slightly parted lips and made amber dance in her hair. A tiny sigh of contentment escaped from her lips and she lowered her gaze the man before her. She caught him looking at her.

Frederick was suddenly fascinated with the toe of his boot as he kicked a stray ember back into the fire pit. Say something. He cleared his throat. “So...ah... you getting on all right at the Weavers?” he forced his brown eyes to meet hers.

She smiled. “Oh, yes.” But the smile slipped a bit. “This winter was hard with Mother gone and all.”

He thought he detected the slightest tremor in her voice. “Papa took it pretty...hard...and John...it’s been nearly a year, you know.” She looked down, absently smoothing her skirts. “Christmas was rough... She always made this special pie--kept the recipe a secret. She always told me she’d teach me how to make it when I married,” Caradena looked into Frederick’s eyes. “It was a tradition in our family.”

Frederick had a crazy urge to stroke the girl’s soft cheek. He mentally shook himself. Good God! My brain is turning to mush, like Henry’s! His brows knit together in concern for Caradena and for himself. But still, looking into that soft face was enough to make a
“Caradena!” John’s voice broke the spell between them.

“Caradena?” He called again.

With a slight smile at Frederick, she tore her gaze away.

“Here, John! I’m here!”

Frederick felt suddenly guilty as John approached, his figure silhouetted in the barn’s door frame.

“Oh, it’s you Frederick,” John said in relief. “I was afraid it was the Haag boy, the little devil!”

“Just getting some air,” Frederick explained, swallowing. “It was getting too crowded in there.”

The trio started back towards the light and music of the barn.

“I was worried when I couldn’t find you, Caradena. I wish you would let me know if you are going to step out for some... air.” His eyes slid to Frederick.

Caradena’s face burned. “I’m a grown woman, John Reef! I don’t need you to watch over me like a... like a girl in short skirts!” She stormed ahead of the men and through the doorway.

John ran a hand through his hair as a weary sigh escaped his lips. The men paused just outside the doorway. “You’re awful quiet, Fred. Anything wrong?” John eyed the stain on his friend’s chest.

“And what the heck happened to your shirt?”
Frederick looked down and swore. "I had a little accident," he said in a small voice. "I'm fine, John... just tired."

"Yeah."

The men stood in companionable silence for a moment, enjoying the cool breeze that carried the scent of wood smoke and spring grass. Laughing dancers paraded by the open doorway in time to the music. Frederick's eye was drawn inexorably to a certain young woman's form. She was talking to Gregor Haag. An uneasy feeling wound its way up from his gut as he watched him laughing at something he'd said. He glanced over at John, expecting to see a murderous glint in his eye. But John's attention was focused elsewhere. His gaze was locked on Sarah Weaver. Frederick looked back to where Caradena was standing. She was gone. He searched the room to find her swirling about happily in Gregor's arms. A foreign emotion that Frederick dared not acknowledge almost choked him. He cleared his throat.

"Ah... I'm turning in, John. See you tomorrow."

John could barely tear himself away long enough to wish his friend good evening.