

Core Knowledge® Adventures in History™

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

THE VERY BEST ENDING



by Beth Kephart

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The Great Depression

The Very Best Ending

by

Beth Kephart

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ADVENTURES IN HISTORY™

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1

Fog Lifting

The fog is lifting off the swollen creek when I see her coming, rising up the slope of the hill. Through the chip and splatter of rocks and mud, where Molly, our dairy cow, used to graze, when we still had Molly. Past the wild ramps and turnips that Donkey Do loved best, when we still had that silly donkey. Past the vegetable garden with the bunny fence where last year hardly anything grew, but this year, maybe, will be better.

I run my hands down my pink cotton skirt, ironing out the three-day wrinkles. I comb my hair with my fingertips. I call over my shoulder and through the open door to tell our cat Titan to stay right where he is, even though it's sure as the sun will rise that he would never budge.

"Ma, she's coming!" I cry out, loud enough for Ma to hear through the wood crannies of the cabin and the cracks in the window glass and the newsprint we use as wallpaper.

ramps: edible plants that grow wild in eastern North America and are closely related to onions and garlic

crannies: small, narrow openings or cracks

newsprint: wood-pulp paper used for printing newspapers

Ma's out back, with her zinc pail and scrub board, washing my blue dress and her green one and the things we wear underneath. I've been on the front porch, darning our socks with our single pair of wooden knitting needles. The click and the clack of the mending. A big hole becoming a smaller hole. I'm good at some things. Mending is one.

"Ma!" I call again, hoping she will hear me. Because I'm not moving. I'm up now and standing tall. *Annie's a tall girl*, people say, like that's the most important thing about me. I'm waving the book woman in our direction, as if there were any other cabin on this particular spit of land. She's so close that I can hear her mighty horse huffing. "Welcome," I call. "Hello. I'm Annie."

"Hello, Annie," the book woman says, tugging the reins on her giant. "You a reader?" She has a smudge of color high in her cheeks. She has light blue eyes and lashes for miles. She has a missing tooth over to one side, which I notice only because she's smiling. She has a lot more freckles on one cheek than she has on the other. She could be a story herself, but she's a Pack Horse librarian, traveling miles every day to deliver stories of all kinds to people hungry not just for some good fried chicken but

scrub board: a flat, rectangular board with a ridged surface, used for scrubbing laundry

reins: straps attached to a horse's bridle that are used to steer the horse

Pack Horse librarian: a traveling librarian with the Pack Horse Library Project (1935–43) who delivered books to remote areas of the Appalachians

for things to read and learn from.

“Yes, *ma’am*,” I say, with emphasis, smoothing my skirt again with the palm of my hands and hoping I have made a good impression.

“What kind of books, Annie?”

“Oh,” I say, feeling the heat rising in my own face now. I don’t have much in the way of preference when it comes to books. I like the feel of them, their weight. I like the sound of turning pages. I like the way dust sometimes rises off the words themselves, as if the words could move or sway or drift. “Just—books,” I answer after a while. “I have a hankering for books.”

“You have family?” she asks, and I say, “For sure. I have a ma.” I turn my head, look over my shoulder. Ma is still not coming.

“She a reader?”

“Not as much as me,” I say, because I’m the one who got to go to the one-room school in the town way over there, across from the general store run by Ida. “But she sure likes stories.”

“Fine and good,” the Pack Horse librarian says. “Fine and good.” Says it almost like it is a song she is singing. She gathers her dark blue skirt with one easy sweep of her hand and swings herself off her mighty mount. Her

hankering: strong desire

skirt falls loose. Her dark horse snorts. She puts one hand by the steam of his nose.

“This would be Harvey Lou,” she tells me, introducing the horse, who looks to be about seventeen whole hands tall. I’m used to donkeys, like I said. Donkeys like Donkey Do.

“Nice to meet you, Harvey Lou,” I say, putting my hand beside hers. His muzzle is warm. His big yellow teeth are looking for something to eat. The traveling librarian pulls some carrots from her pocket.

“And I’m Sarah Deane,” she says. “This is my first month of librariansing.”

“I heard about you,” I say. The news has been everywhere. Down by the creek, when I was collecting our wash water, I heard it from Jessie, my very best friend, who lives across the valley of our hill: *The book woman’s coming*. I heard it from Walt, who was out hunting snakes: *We’ve got ourselves a library on hooves*. I heard it from Ma, who walked four miles to see her cousin Jane and then walked home again, singing her songs loud and keeping an eye out for bobcats: *They say there’ll be stories in our parts*.

“Even here?” I asked.

muzzle: the nose, mouth, and jaws of an animal

bobcats: North American spotted wildcats

“Even here. They’ve put a book depot in the back of Ida’s General. Next time we go, we can see it.”

Next time we go sounded funny to me. Without Donkey Do, it’s awfully hard to travel the long distance to Ida’s.

Still, I put all the pieces of all the tales together, and what I get is this: There are women being paid to bring us books. Women strong and on their own, earning twenty-eight whole dollars every month to rent a mule or borrow a horse or use one of their own raising. Women who saddle up and go—out into the knolls, past the caves, up the hills, through the brush, across the creeks—to deliver the books in their bags. The books come in from across the state and even from across the country. Secondhand donations and brand-new books. Magazines and pamphlets. Scrapbooks bound together by the librarians themselves, featuring old news about how to mend a skirt or till the soil or get some flowers growing. Some of the children’s books cost as much as two hundred shining pennies, the people say. Some of them come from Boy Scout clubs and fancy houses and schools and churches and committees.

book depot: a place where books are kept for storage or distribution

knolls: small, round hills

brush: short trees or shrubs

pamphlets: small, printed booklets with no hard cover or binding

till: plow and prepare for raising crops

Whatever it is, wherever they're from, there's a back room of books at Ida's General. There's book women stopping by and stuffing their saddlebags, then taking off for their miles of riding and reading every day. Book women ranging out across this part of Jackson County, which is in the Appalachians of eastern Kentucky. Book women conducting a library on hooves, all courtesy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his Works Progress Administration. The Pack Horse Library Project is thanks to him, and thanks to a whole lot of others who wanted to do right by us.

People who thought we deserved it.

We don't have much in these parts, never did. We were poor and then we got poorer starting all the way back in 1929, when I was three, nine years ago. That's when the banks failed and the jobs dried up and there wasn't enough money for the basics. That's when the long years of having less began. I don't remember the start of the Great Depression. I don't remember anything before it. All I know is that there's never been enough to go around, not ever, and there's never been anything so exciting as now. Because the books aren't just coming. The books are here. They will make the hours fly.

“Annie,” I hear Sarah Deane saying now. “Why don’t you come and take a look?” She undoes the soft leather straps on her soft leather saddlebag and reaches in deep for her wares. She tells Harvey Lou to be good, and he stays right where he is, chomping his carrots with big-horse gusto. He’s all black except for a diamond of white between his eyes. His eyes are full of expression. I wonder what books Harvey Lou would read, if Harvey Lou were not a horse.



saddlebag: a small bag with a flap closure attached to a horse’s saddle
wares: products for sale
gusto: enthusiastic enjoyment

Now Sarah Deane walks toward the beaten-down porch and lays the books side by side for me to see. I know some of the words on the covers, but not all of them. I've seen one of the books—a book about a train—but I have never seen any of the others. I try to guess at the stories inside. This one's the story of a girl with a clock. This one's the story of a girl with a flashlight. This one's the story of a girl standing on a box, peeking in through someone's window.

All the stories about that girl have lots and lots of words. So many words. I couldn't possibly know them.

I'm too old for the story of the train. I already know that one by heart: *Chug, chug, chug. Puff, puff, puff.* I'm not reader enough for all the others. I put my hand against my mouth so Sarah Deane doesn't see my disappointment.

"Now wait," she says. "I've got more where these came from." She returns to Harvey Lou, digs deeper inside her pouch, and finds what she is looking for. A book with an elephant on the cover.

"*The Story of Babar*," she says, coming back to the porch. "A very instant classic. You ever read it?"

"I have not, ma'am," I tell her. "You think it could be interesting?"

"I know it is," she says. "Sit with me. I'll read it."

She makes a pile of the other books and takes a seat on the top step of the stoop. Her blue skirt falls around her like soft petals. I take my seat, right there beside her.

“Harvey Lou likes this one, don’t you, Harvey Lou,” she says to the horse, and then she opens the book and starts reading. “*The Story of Babar*,” she repeats. “By Jean de Brunhoff.”

“He lives in Paris,” she says, the word catching in her throat. “Paris,” she says. “In France. Do you know where that is?”

I feel the heat in my cheeks. I shake my head no. I barely know the names of towns a few hills and dips away.

“France,” Sarah Deane says, “is across the sea. I’ve always dreamed of going. Walking the streets of Paris. Sitting in a coffee shop, eating a croissant.”

“I don’t know France,” I say. “Or Paris.” I don’t know what a croissant is, but I keep that to myself.

“Doesn’t matter,” she says. “Babar will take us there.”

Sarah Deane is a person to trust. I can tell it right away. Sarah Deane is a person who dreams. I like to spend my time with dreamers.

In a pretty, quiet voice, she reads: “*In the great forest, a little elephant is born.*”

croissant: a light, flaky, crescent-shaped roll

I follow each word as she says it, which is easy, because there aren't a lot of words on these pages, and besides, the pictures tell the tale. "*His name is Babar. His mother loves him very much . . .*"

"Well now," I hear my own mother say. "What is this?"

"This is Sarah Deane," I say, lifting my eyes from the page toward my mother, who has finally come around from the back. She has the stinging smell of the lye on her. Her hands are red and thin from the scrubbing. Her dark hair has lifted up with curls like it does when she's working hard at something. The gold circle she wears around her neck is glistening with sweat.

But Ma has the prettiest smile in all of Jackson County and probably beyond that. She wears her smile in her coal-black eyes, which always have a spark. It's always been just Ma and me. If I ever had a pa, I never knew him.

"You've come," Ma says.

"Like you said she would," I remind her.

"Annie's been so excited that she's been having a hard time sleeping."

I blush, but it's true. I can't deny it.

"Well, here I am," Sarah Deane says. "Annie and I are discovering Babar. What kind of book can I get for you?"

lye: a strong alkaline substance often used for making soap

“Oh, ma’am,” my mother says, and then she doesn’t say more. The spark in her coal eyes goes out. It’s Ma’s one shame, that she can’t read much better than the Little Engine book. It’s her lacking, is what she says. She will not have, she’s always said, that kind of lack for me. She will not stand for it.

“I’ve got something for everyone in my bag,” Sarah Deane says. “It’s just a matter of finding a match.” She sets Babar to the side. She makes her way to Harvey Lou. She kisses him on his long nose, then digs around on the other side of her saddlebag.

“Look what I have,” she says to Ma, returning with a thin pamphlet. The paper is thin and stained. The pages are tied together with string. She flips through and I can see what it is—some recipes for cooking ramps. Mostly lists of words like bacon fat and eggs and cornbread. But also words in sentences. Instructions. “Might be something here to get started with,” she says. “I’ll leave it with you, just in case.”

Ma wrings her hands in her pale red apron. She rocks forward with her worn-out shoes. She doesn’t say no and she doesn’t say yes, but Harvey Lou is getting impatient. Sarah Deane packs up her things. She says she’ll be back in a week or two. “The sun will dip soon,” she says, “and I’ve still got deliveries to make.”

She turns her horse. We wave goodbye.

“We’re grateful,” Ma calls out, her voice low and shy.

I gather my knitting and our new books and follow
Ma inside.

2

Revelation

The sounds of the mice running in the cabin walls are like the thoughts in my head. They scrabble all around, and I can't catch them. Every story I read is an adventure that I go on. Every character I meet is a new friend. Everywhere I look, there's revelation, which is a new word that Sarah Deane taught me, sitting on the stoop, turning pages.

I don't care if the books and magazines do come in used, bumped around, and thirdhand faded. Stories are for passing on, for knowing. Stories are for late at night, when the moon is bright and I'm not sleeping. I think of what I read that day. I keep the stories going.

Because every week now, Sarah Deane is coming. Every week, her saddlebag is full. Sometimes with books by writers with names like Louisa May Alcott and Carolyn Keene, which she says I'll be reading soon, because I am, in her estimation, a fine, fine reader. Sometimes with picture books about movie stars like

revelation: the act of revealing a hidden truth

estimation: judgment or opinion

Shirley Temple. Sometimes with magazines like *Reader's Digest*, with its "articles of lasting interest." Or *National Geographic*, with its maps and wonders of the world. Or *Ladies' Home Journal*, with its fashionable styles.

Ma loves the fashionable styles.

Ma loves Shirley Temple.

Ma loves when Sarah Deane sits with her, sometimes at the kitchen table, sorting through the letters that make the words that are printed on the paper.

They work on sounds, which Sarah Deane calls *phonetics*. They work on words that sound the same but aren't the same, like *their* and *they're*, or *our* and *are*, or *hole* and *whole*. *Homophones* is the name for that. Sarah Deane has a list of them that she's made for Ma, and Ma thinks up more while she scrubs and sews. "Creak and creek," she'll say with a laugh while she's scrubbing a stain. "Bin and been. Horse and hoarse. Wait 'til I tell Sarah Deane. I wonder if she's thought of them."

Tuesday is our day. Ma and I sweep the cabin and weed the garden, where some small shoots of plants are finally sprouting—the starts of pumpkins from pumpkin

phonetics: the system of sounds that make up speech

homophones: words that sound alike but have different meanings and/or spellings

seeds, the starts of chard and eggplant. We sponge down our scrub boards and buckets. We dress in our cleanest clothes, fix the fray, iron the fabric with the palms of our hands. We wash our feet and slip into our sandals. We brush the dust out of Titan's fur and make a jug of lemonade or pick a bouquet of wild bee balm and arrange it pretty. We bring the three biggest buckets inside and plunk them upside down around our kitchen table. This way, we'll all have a place to sit when Sarah Deane arrives.

Finally, morning becomes noon becomes early afternoon. We watch the sun. We measure its distance from the horizon with our fingers. We agree that it's time now, it's time, so we go outside and sit on the stoop to wait for what we're sure is coming, because early afternoon is the hour we've come to think of as our Sarah Deane's hour—Sarah Deane, who has more customers than she's ever had, more readers crowding the hours of her morning. Everywhere we go, people are talking about Sarah Deane. "You meet the book lady?" they say. "You seen those magazines?" "She tell you about Paris?"

Because after Sarah Deane is done with the books she's brought, she'll sometimes sit and talk longer about Paris—about the places she'd go and the coffee she'd sip.

chard: a type of beet that is grown for its leaves and stalks rather than its roots

fray: a raveled or worn spot in fabric

About a river called the Seine. About a church big as a city.

At the first sign of Harvey Lou down in the valley, past the creek, through the trees, I stand and wave. When he starts climbing the hill and nodding his head, Sarah Deane removes her tan cloche hat with its tall spiky feather and sees us. We call encouragements to Harvey Lou. He nods his black face with that white diamond. Up the hill he comes, not a muddy hill now, but a dry and dusty one; we haven't had more than some evening sprinkles for ages.

Harvey is careful as he climbs. His hooves hardly slip or slide. By the time he crosses into our yard, his whole body is heaving. Sarah Deane dismounts. She wipes down Harvey Lou with the cloth she's started to carry. She offers him a few thin carrots, and I bring him a bucket of water. Then Sarah Deane says how hot it's getting, and Ma says to come inside to get some shade. Sarah Deane always does, looking like a princess on that bucket at our table. She removes her hat and sets it to one side. She sips her lemonade or talks about the flowers or tells us book woman stories—where she has gone, the tales our far neighbors have chosen, the new gardens people are planting in soil they are fixing, thanks

cloche hat: a close-fitting hat with a deep, rounded top and a narrow brim

to the information in the pages of the scrapbooks that she's delivering and even despite the lack of rainfall. Then she goes outside or comes back in with the books and magazines she's carried. We choose what we want. We read out loud to her. Sometimes, when we don't know the words, she reads out loud to us, scratching between Titan's ears while Harvey Lou dozes outside in the sun.



This is still the best thing that's ever happened.

I have started a collection of words. Never thought I would have such a thing, but there it is, my collection of words, written on the newsprint that we use as our wallpaper. The newsprint is all parts of old papers from

all sorts of times. It helps keep the wind out, the cold, too. Whenever the newsprint rips or peels, we ask our neighbors for more newsprint, and sometimes they have enough to share. There's only one wall of old newsprint Ma will not change, no matter how tattered it is. No matter how yellowed and sun-splotched and cracking. It's the old news that hangs above her straw-mattress bed and her crooked night table. The news above the tallow candle Ma lights each year, late spring.

Ma won't talk about that newsprint or that candle, about the band of metal that hangs from a chain around her neck, about her sadness. I ask her questions she won't answer.

On my part of the wall, above my own straw-mattress bed, I take care with my word list. I match my spellings to the spellings in the books, and I attend to alphabetical ordering. When Sarah Deane comes, I show her my progress:

Astonishing

Calamity

Cascades

tattered: old and torn

tallow candle: a candle made from animal fat

calamity: an event that causes great harm

cascades: waterfalls (noun); flows downward like a waterfall (verb)

Concentrated

Desolate

Indelible

Marvelous

Onslaught

Romantic

Whisk

The more words I know, the more stories I can read. Not just the ones in the books and magazines, but the ones right here, on our own walls, on all that peeling newsprint. Words I never really took notice of before, even though they were always right here, all around me.

Old news about old coal mines exploding.

Old news about old sawmills closing.

Old news about jobless men planting forest trees and fighting fires and fixing the poor soil on the poor farms, all thanks to President Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal.

desolate: deserted or showing no signs of life

indelible: unable to be erased

onslaught: a fierce or violent attack

Old news about the sewing rooms where the women come to sew—thousands of Kentucky women making dresses and shirts and pants for all the rest of us. The New Deal, again. Our president.

And then there's the old news hung up by Ma's bed, which I read now when she's outside doing scrubbing. That old news is the old news of our great and terrible flood—the “cloud-burst fury,” according to *The Mountain Eagle*, “the angry storm.” End of May. 1927. Big black clouds. Lightning. Thunder. A sudden downpour. I think of Walt, telling the story like he likes to tell the story. Water lifting the seeds right out of the earth, he says. Water running down hillsides. Fists of rain turning hollows into rivers. Turning log cabins into soggy, floating nothings. Turning much of what was real and upright into a pile of mushy sticks. Turning life plain upside down.

It was the great flood. It was our flood. I was one year old when it happened. I don't remember a thing. But there in the cracked and peeling newsprint is a version of the story I am finally learning how to read, thanks to the new words I'm learning, thanks to the books that Sarah Deane brings. A story to go alongside the story Walt and others tell. A story to which I, in the quiet hours, add my own imagination.

Stories can be adventures. Stories can be friends. Stories can be questions, too. Sometimes Ma catches me reading the newspaper tales. She bites her lip and turns away. There are secrets Ma is keeping.

3

Worry

It's the middle of July, and we've been waiting. In our cleanest clothes, in our cleanest cabin, a few skinny eggplants on the table in a cluster, our gift for Sarah Deane. But Sarah Deane is late and getting later. The sun keeps traveling across the sky. There's nothing in the valley coming. No four-footed shadow clopping forward. No Harvey Lou heaving. No saddlebag making its soft thudding noise against the belly of the beast.

Ma goes inside. She comes back out. We share a lemonade between us. Even Titan nudges through the half-open door, looking for his newest friends in his lazy tabby way.

Now the sun is middle-of-afternoon sun. It's starting to duck behind the tallest cottonwoods and honey locusts, starting to flatten its beams against the ivy and moss that run along the creek bed, against the cracks and ridges of these wild blue hills. I feel my heart starting to jump around in my chest. Ma is almost wholly silent, and

cottonwoods: North American poplar trees with fluffy, cotton-like seeds

honey locusts: North American deciduous trees with thorns on their trunks and branches and seed pods that contain a sweet, edible pulp

then she stands, shielding her eyes with one raw hand. Now I stand beside her, too, like two sentries, a word I learned yesterday from the book of history I've been reading. Sentries. From a war. A revolution.

Finally, I spy Harvey Lou out there in the distance, coming up through the trees. Ma sees him, too. I go flying down the hill to say *hello*, to say *we were worried*, but I pull up short and breathless. Sarah Deane is not on Harvey Lou's back. Sarah Deane is missing.

I turn around to see if Ma's seen it, too. She has, and now she's running. Down the hill, straight to the horse, whose loose reins she takes up in her hands. "There, there, Harvey Lou," she says, looking past him toward the woods and the creek, looking at me with lines of worry across her brow.



sentries: guards

“We’ll take care of him first,” she says, as if a plan is already forming. “We’ll lead him up the hill. We’ll wipe his body down. We’ll get him a pail of water and some old turnips. We’ll tie him up to the old fence around back. You listening?”

I’m listening.

“Here, Harvey Lou,” I say at last. “Here, here.”

“Where’s your Sarah Deane?” Ma asks, her voice so soft and gentle, her eyes full of that look she gets near trouble real or remembered.

4

He'll Know Where to Find Me

Anything can happen to a book woman in these parts. Anything can happen to a horse. There are coves and caves and bobcats. There are snakes. There's slippery moss. The Pack Horse librarians are the bravest people anywhere. And our Sarah Deane is the bravest.

Ma takes a good look at Harvey Lou, tied now to the back fence and fed and watered. She runs her hands up and down his legs until she finds what she's been looking for.

"There it is," she says, and I see what she's been looking for. There's a break in his hair coat just above his hooves, a line of injury, a wound where a scab is forming. Something happened out there. We don't know what or where.

"Check the saddlebag," Ma says. I untie it quick, lift it from the saddle, walk back around front, holding the thing in the cradle of my arms. It's heavy. Up the stoop stairs and in through the door. Now, at the kitchen table,

coves: in Appalachia, small, sheltered valleys between two ridges

I set the satchel down. There are plenty of books and magazines inside. There is also, as Ma must have guessed there'd be, a note, written on a pamphlet advertising soap. Written in Sarah Deane's handwriting:

Snake got too close. Harvey Lou
bucked. He'll know where to find me.

"Sarah Deane's all right," I say.

"Yes, she is," Ma says. Trying, I can see it in her eyes, to believe it. She walks around and around the cast-iron stove. Plops down on her straw mattress. The mice are quiet, staying out of our way. Titan meows like he smells danger.

"Okay," I say, after a while, after my plan has been hatched. "I'll ride Harvey Lou to Ida's General in town, see if we can get a search party going. I'll take the path she might have taken. You tell Jessie and Walt and start looking near. One way or the other, we will find Sarah Deane."

"No," Ma says. "Town's a long way off. Too many paths she could have taken. No, Annie Pearl. You stay right here."

"It's Sarah Deane," I say.

"Harvey Lou's a big horse."

cast-iron stove: a heating device made of an iron-carbon alloy that burns solid fuel such as coal or wood

"I'm tall as anyone, Ma. Harvey Lou's strong." I don't say what doesn't have to be said: Ma's way too short to mount Harvey Lou. She'd never make it down the hill or through the trees on this horse's back, and then what would we lose—time in searching for Sarah Deane, and maybe Ma, too?

"It's getting close to dusk," Ma says.

"The longer I wait, the worse it will be," I say. "I know my way around."

"It's not a good idea, Annie Pearl."

"It's the only idea," I say. "The *only* one." That we can think of, anyway. That we can imagine, just the two of us and the horse, right now. We need help. Ida and her old cowbell will help us. She'll ring it loud. Our friends will come.

Ma rubs her hands together. She touches the circle at her neck. She shakes her head, *no no no*, until she finally nods *yes*.

"This is what circumstances require," I say.

A phrase I learned from one of Sarah Deane's best books: *what circumstances require*.

"You be safe," Ma says to me now. "You be safe, my love. You promise?"

cowbell: a bell hung around the neck of a cow or other free-roaming animal so it can be easily found

Her eyes are blazing beneath her cloud of dark hair. Her hands are even redder now from all their twisting and turning. She's mad at herself, I can see it, for being short as she is. She's mad that there are no better solutions. I'm what we have. Me.

It's been a long time since I rode anything, and what I rode back then was Donkey Do. I find the biggest zinc bucket and flip it upside down to use as my step stool. Ma helps me up, settles me into the saddle. Harvey Lou is even more handsome from up here, but I'll need him to be more than handsome. I'll need him to be careful and brave, too. I'll need to be as brave as Sarah Deane, at least until we find her.

"You ready?" I ask Harvey Lou now.

He twitches his ears. Slaps his tail around. He's ready.

Ma reaches up, and I lean down. We say *goodbye, I love you*.

I rearrange myself. I find my balance. I say, "Ghee up. Ghee up."

Harvey Lou takes a long look around. I nudge him with my heels. I tell him, "You know what to do." Down the hill toward the trees, into the dark green forest, then alongside the creek we'll go, until the creek forks and we'll have to find our way over ridges and past knolls

and through more forest, to the general.

“Let’s go.”

We go.

We’re moving.

I turn back to see Ma waving from the top of our hill. I wave back before I disappear into the forest. Through the trees we’ll go, toward the creek. The book woman could be anywhere.



“Sarah Deane!” I start to call. “Sarah Deane!”

But of course she does not answer.

Through the forest we go, between the tall leafy trees, across the stumps, on worn-out paths, and over moss slicks. Sometimes Harvey Lou strains against my guiding, tries to go off in a separate direction. But I’m strong. I force him onto the path ahead, toward the general and Ida.

“Sarah Deane! Sarah Deane! We’re coming, Sarah Deane! We’ll get a search party going!”

When the forest ends and the creek begins, I look up and beyond, and that’s when I see that there are storm clouds coming.

“Ghee up,” I tell Harvey Lou, pressing my heels against him, but gently. His ears are full of twitch. His body’s heaving. If he could say Sarah Deane’s name, he’d be calling out, too.

5

Cowbell

Sacks of flour and sacks of sugar and sacks of feed. Jars of penny candy. Packets of seed and lengths of darning thread and balled yarn that comes in just one color. Pinto beans. Bacon fat. Dried herbs and bandages. Baking soda. Lemon extract. Fresh-picked morels and dried ones. A rusty shovel that came in through barter. On the best days, some bars of chocolate. That's our general store, under the rulership of Ida.

Open the door and it closes fast behind you. Stand in the shadows of the shelves until your eyes do their adjusting. Your nose, too.

The smell of the earth.

The smell of tomatoes.

The smell of sage.

The smell of Ida herself, at least two hundred years old, or so she has seemed to me for as long as I can remember.

darning: mending by weaving stitches into the existing fabric

morels: types of edible fungi

barter: the trade of one good for another without the use of money

Ida's face is like an apple left to wither. Her lips are grayish green. Her hair is one long white braid that falls in a sloppy twist to her waist. She's the favorite grandmother to all of us here. In the valley. In the county. In the blue peaks and wet creeks and moss banks of eastern Kentucky, our Appalachian hills.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" Ida asks, turning around to face me, using a broom as her crutch. She was sweeping the floor when I showed up, making her swish-swish sounds, leaving little bursts of rising flour in her trail.

"It's Sarah Deane," I say, breathless from the trot and gallop, the keeping Harvey Lou along the path to here. I kept sliding around in the saddle. I kept calling out, "Whoa, sir." I kept saying, "Now, now, Harvey Lou, you've got this, Harvey Lou," between calling our book woman's name. All the while, a black cloud was getting fatter, hovering like a hammer about to drop and swallowing the sun before it lost its place on the horizon.

In all that time: No Sarah Deane. Nobody out and about to ask for help. Nobody, and now I'm here, and Ida is alone. Not a single solitary customer staring up at the shelves or leaning on the counter or paying for their goods. Not a woman mending books back in the book room.

wither: dry up and shrink

When she hears the news, Ida plops down on her stool and balances her chin on the tip of her broom handle. She tugs at her long white braid.

“I’ll ring the cowbell,” she says. “I’ll ring the bell, gather the good folk here, explain the news for now, make arrangements. We’ll send a search party out, soon as the storm passes and the sun comes up. You stay here, overnight. I’ll make a bed up.”

“I’m sorry, Miss Ida, I have to get home.”

“It’ll be a big storm,” she says. “No messing with weather. We’ll start off first thing in the morning.”

“I can’t,” I say. “If I don’t get back, Ma will worry.”

“Your ma will worry more if you set back out again. You see those clouds, Annie? They are serious clouds.”

I nod, but I’m not budging. I’m imagining Ma biting her nails down to their quicks. I’m imagining finding Sarah Deane—that big stroke of luck that I’ll need, that chance worth taking.

“It’ll be a big one,” Ida says. “And Harvey Lou’s already put plenty of distance in. You, too.”

“Harvey Lou is strong,” I say. “Harvey Lou is missing Sarah Deane. He’ll go.”

“Not safe, Annie.”

“Sarah Deane is out there,” I say.

Ida gives me a good long stare, the kind of look Ma gives me. *Never met anyone more stubborn than you*, Ma says. But always she forgives me.

“All right,” Ida says. “Seems I can’t stop you.”

“Thank you,” I say. “For understanding.”

“I have sugar,” Ida says at last. “And I have feed. And we’ll get Harvey Lou properly watered before you go. Still, Annie. I wish you’d reconsider.”

But what I’m considering is Sarah Deane and the storm that’s coming and the night that will be long. How scared I’d be, out there, lonely.

Ida gives me one last long look, then takes quick charge. She brings me a mug of sassafras tea and the jar of penny candy. She disappears into the back book room and returns with the biggest cowbell you’ve ever seen. She hobbles along, cradling the weight of the thing in her one free arm, and makes her way outside. She rings. Over and over—that sweet, quick sound of the copper clapper against the copper bell. Over and over again.

sassafras: a North American tree related to laurels whose root bark was commonly used for medicine or flavoring



“I’ll gather the folk,” she says. “Tell them the news. Get them all ready for the morning.”

“Ma’am,” I say, grateful. For I know our people will come no matter what the weather is—nobody ignores Ida ringing that bell. They’ll hurry down the hills and up from the valleys and make their plans quick and gather early in the morning, when the storm has cleared. We rescue each other, in our part of the world. We’ll rescue the book woman because she is part of all of us now. Because she brings the stories we are telling.

After a long, loud stretch of cowbell clanging, Ida steps back inside the store. That broom in one hand.

That bell in the other. She smashes her lips together, knows she's been heard, knows time will be passing slowly now as she waits for the local folk to gather. Doesn't say a word. The white rope of her braid swings back and forth. She leaves the bell near me on the old chipped counter and collects what she needs for Harvey Lou. Then she finds me an old crate and helps me up onto the horse.

"Okay," I say.

"Okay," she says.

Okay is like a homophone. It means *Be safe, take care, take courage. We will join you when we can.*

6

Black Storm

We're riding straight into it, and there's no turning back.

Even the late-day bugs are taking cover.

Even the birds have gone quiet.

Even the faces of the wildflowers are looking away from the sky and looking away from me as I call and call Sarah Deane's name.

Now the first drops of rain begin to fall.

Now more.

Plunk and plunk on my head, on my hands, through the cotton of my dress. Rain falling down like liquid pebbles.

Harvey Lou's ears are twitching like mad. I tell him *there, there*, but I'm nervous. It's the absolute end of this long day of summer. And now here comes the storm.

"Only rain, Harvey Lou," I say, but the skies crack

open and the downpour begins and it's like a river falling from above. In no time at all, the dusty earth becomes thick goo and mud. In no time, the creek waters will start rising. The creek, whenever we find it, and now, at last, we find it.

Harvey Lou stops and shakes his mighty head. His hooves sink into the wet, sucking ground. He starts again. He shakes his head again. The creek is growing swollen, knocking up against its banks, adding goo to more goo, making going forward harder. Traveling alongside the creek bed would have been the quickest way home, but the water's racing, sloshing over the banks. Higher ground and forest shelter are now the only choice we have.

A boom of thunder. A crack of lightning. Noise like I have never heard noise. When the skies light up, the forest trees go white bright. Their branches scratch the air like fangs. What was end of day is now start of night. A night with no moon, only wet and hollering terror.

Away from the line of the creek Harvey Lou goes. Up into and now out of a holler, which is our word for the bowl of the forest. We rise up, among the trees and shrubs—the tulip poplar and bitternut hickory, the azalea and the laurel—soaked to the bone, eyes blurred with rain, our heads bowed low to take on the storm.

Everything beautiful by day is scary by night, especially when the thunder rolls and the lightning cracks, and it all pours down faster and harder. I clench the reins, certain I'll fall. I squeeze Harvey Lou tight with my knees. If I fall and Harvey Lou leaves, nobody will find me.



Now, all of a sudden, in the thick of the trees, inside the shout of the thunder, beneath the crooked strikes of lightning, Harvey Lou stops. Just stops. Won't budge. I dig in my heels, I show him the palm of my hand, I promise him turnips, but he's decided. He's not going any farther. "Home, Harvey Lou," I say. "Home, boy." My home.

I think of Ma. I feel her worry.

I think of Sarah Deane, who would never hear her name now, if I were to call against the storm.

My heart is beating high in my throat. My breath is coming out ragged. I pull the reins and dig my heels in harder, but this beast has a mind of his own. He shakes his head, and the rain flies off.

The rain falls less hard here, among the trees in the holler.

The darkness is darker.

My heart beats harder.

What happened to Sarah Deane, I wonder—sending her horse on, without her. Sending her saddlebag with the note she must have known I'd find, just how she'd trusted Harvey Lou to come his familiar way, to our most humble home:

Snake got too close. Harvey Lou bucked. He'll know where to find me.

If I climb down off of Harvey Lou right now, I'll never get my feet back in the stirrups. Tall as I am, I'm not tall enough for that. If I climb down, it'll be all walking home.

And it's a long way down.

And I don't know what to do.

"Harvey Lou, won't you consider going on," I say, but I know. This horse is not budging, and he has his reasons, and I can't just sit here in the saddle, waiting for whatever will happen next. I swing my left leg around to the right side and jump down to the ground from the saddle, guiding the reins over Harvey Lou's head and nose so they come to hang in my hands like a lead rope. My shoes make a small rustling splash in the rotted, wet leaves. Harvey Lou flicks his black tail. Rainwater splashes my face.

"OK," I say now. "What do we do?"

I look around for animals stronger, faster, sharper than me.

I listen for snake sizzle.

The rain's still falling through the trees. That's the loudest sizzle there is.

Harvey Lou turns. He looks straight at me and nods and nickers. Then he faces forward again and starts to make his way through the many trees. I loosen my hold on his reins. I follow.

nickers: makes a low, gentle whinnying sound

7

Holler

Somehow he knew. Somehow Harvey Lou knew to bring me here, to this place in the holler where I have never been. We walked far, between all those trees, across all that slippery moss, through leaf rot. We walked beneath the squirrel nests and the bird nests and all the ivy hanging off those branches, like the trees had put some clothes on. There were salamanders and furry things at our feet. There were bobcats—maybe—near and prowling. There was rain bursting its way down through the canopy above, but in some parts of the forest it seemed to rain less, the leaves above our heads acting like umbrellas.

Harvey Lou led the way. I kept his reins in my hand, kept by his side. I trusted. What else could I do?

Finally we reached a clearing. I couldn't tell how black the clouds were because the moon was hidden and the night had come on, but here, in the clearing, the rain fell endlessly down.

canopy: the uppermost layer of tree branches and leaves in a forest

I thought I'd wash away with it all, out in that clearing,
I thought I'd become one giant raindrop.

And then I understood that Harvey Lou had had a particular plan all along—that he was taking us to the broad space beneath a wide rock ledge. Toward a limestone shelter.

“Harvey Lou,” I said, when we reached the shelter, when the ledge of the rock was over our heads, when the rain couldn't fall on us.

“Harvey Lou,” I say now, and throw my arms around his neck. “Thank you, Harvey Lou. Thank you.”

He stomps one hoof. He nickers.

“All right,” I say. “All right. Good boy.”

It's the two of us, soaked through. It's the two of us, no food to eat, no water to drink, no protection from the animals that live here. We'll have to wait through the night and set off early in the morning. We'll have to rest here, beneath that ledge of limestone, hoping no other animals will want to share our space.

“You sleep first,” I tell Harvey Lou. “Then I'll

limestone: a type of sedimentary rock made from bits of shells and other animal remains

hoof: a hard, horn-like covering that protects the toes of horses and other animals

sleep some. We'll be OK. We have each other."

Sometimes if you talk brave, you can be brave. I read that in a book that Sarah Deane brought me on a day that feels like years ago.

But Harvey Lou is still wide awake. He's nervous with the night. He won't be sleeping anytime soon. I won't be either, to be honest. I slide down against the rock wall and sit with my back against the huge damp stone, my long aching legs plopped out before me.

"Let me tell you a story," I say to Harvey Lou, and I tell him the story of Babar. How, in a great forest, an elephant was born. How the elephant was loved by his mother. How the baby elephant lost his mother one day and ran all the way to a big city, where everything was shiny and new, where the people drove in fancy cars and dressed in fancy clothes.

Harvey Lou snorts. He flicks his tail. He gives me a long look through one of his big black eyes.

"All right," I say, and I close that story in my mind.

"I'll tell you the story of a movie star," I say. "Her name is Shirley Temple."

8

Dawn

I must have slept some. Harvey Lou must have slept some, too. I open my eyes and see him standing there—the big, black, beautiful beast he is in the halo light of the holler. It’s full of green and glisten and blue songbirds. It’s full of wet leaves and wet nests and squirrels. Harvey Lou has found a bush of wild raspberries. He’s helping himself to some breakfast, his head held high, no plunk of rain on his head, no roll of thunder.

I fell asleep with that wall of stone at my back. I’m full of ache and stiffness. I try to stretch. My dress feels tight across my shoulders. My shoes are full of squish. My hair is knots and tangles.

I go into the forest and do my business. I find a pawpaw tree on my way back, but the fruits aren’t ripe. I’m hungrier than I imagined. I’m hungrier than ever.

“What do you think?” I ask Harvey Lou, after he’s done his nibbling.

pawpaw: a type of small tree or shrub native to eastern North America that produces a large, edible fruit sometimes called a custard apple



He gives me one of his long looks and blinks his long-lashed eyes.

“You ready to go?”

He snorts.

“Let’s go find Sarah Deane,” I say, and he seems to understand. “And let’s get home to Ma.”

I take his reins in my left hand but leave them loose, walking quietly beside him.

9

I'm Here

Were closer to home than I'd have guessed. Out of the holler, into the sunny stretch, on the opposite side of the ridge and climbing up so that soon we can climb down. The tall grasses are still wet with rain and the bugs are full of itch and the wild lavender is in sudden pink-purple bloom. Now Harvey Lou stops and swishes his tail. I stop, too. Now I hear what Harvey Lou heard—the sound of voices calling. The echo rising up over these Appalachian hills.

Sarah Deane. Sarah Deane.

Annie Pearl. Annie Pearl.

Harvey Lou. Harvey Lou.

Annie Pearl.

Sarah Deane.

I can picture Ma's raw hands cupping her delicate mouth. I can hear the low baritone that belongs to Walt, who is not just the county's best fiddle player but the county's best singer of songs. He draws our names out.

baritone: a male singing voice between bass and tenor

fiddle: a stringed musical instrument played with a bow

He turns them into tunes:

Sarrrrrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaahhdeeeeeeeeeane

Annnnnnnnnniepeaaaarrrrrrrrllllllll

Harrrrrrrveyyyyyyyylouuuuuuuuuuu

In between are the high notes of my best friend, Jessie, whose hair is corn silk and whose eyes are kind blue. Our names in her voice sound like whistles on the breeze. I can picture her now, up to her knees in new creek water, walking in the direction of wherever we might be, in between the leaping of the frogs, beside the others who I hope have come from town. But Harvey Lou—he's not persuaded.

"Harvey Lou," I say. "You hear that? We're almost home. Let us go and get there."

He nods. He nickers. But he is in no mood to budge. He moves his head like he's making talk, rotates his ears, tosses his tail like a black flag. Harvey Lou has somewhere else to go. He is as mighty as he's ever been. He won't be listening to me. Not one single chance.

"Come on, Harvey Lou," I say, giving his reins a tug, putting out my best, most forceful whistle. "Come with me."

Harvey Lou knows something I don't. I can see it in his eyes. The way he blinks, willfully ignoring me.

I can't leave this horse, with a mind of his own. I can't ease my dear Ma's worries. I lean into the breeze to hear what he might hear, but all I hear is the sound of the search party spread up and down these hills, looking for a horse, a girl, and Sarah Deane.

Sarrrrrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaahhdeeeeeeeeane

Annnnnnnnnnnniepeaaaarrrrrrrrllllllll

Harrrrrrrveyyyyyyylouuuuuuuuuu

She's still out here, somewhere, in these hills. She was out here through the night in the storm, by herself, without the mighty protection of her horse. I keep my eyes peeled. I fill my lungs up with her name and call her just as loud as I can, so that maybe she, and also the others, will hear me.

Sarah Deane. Sarah Deane. Sarah Deane. We're missing you.

I place the reins back over Harvey Lou's head, and he leads. I walk behind. I call her name, call my own name, too. I say,

I'm here, we're safe.

We're coming.

This is Annie. I've got Harvey Lou.

The words ricochet across the sweet misty blue

ricochet: bounce off at an angle

hills—their ridges, buckles, rolls, and folds.

My own voice whips back around and finds me.

I'm here, I call.

We're here.

We're coming.

10

The Rocky Ledge

We're halfway up to the top of the hill when Harvey Lou starts running. I run with him, as far as I can. I let him go. I watch him run. I call his name. He will not hear me. He swerves to the right. He swerves to the left. And then suddenly he stops. He turns to look at me over his broad shoulder. I run as fast as I can.

And now I see what Harvey has already spotted.

It's Sarah Deane's cloche hat, still holding onto its feather. It's Sarah Dean's hat, loose in the breeze of the day. Zigging and zagging on the mountain.

Now Harvey Lou is running again. The tall grasses have given way to pebbles and stones. The lavender is behind us. There are rock formations here that I never have explored. Afraid of claws, I guess. And hiss.

The sounds of the voices have faded to nothing. We're back on our own—Harvey Lou and me running up this part of the hill, chasing a hat in the breeze.

Harvey Lou rears up and stands on his two back hooves. He roars like no horse you've ever heard.



11

It's Me

And now I hear what Harvey Lou must have heard—the echo of a voice coming from a rocky ridge not far from where we are now. An echo coming from a hole in the hill, a sideways hole, a limestone cave wearing a coat of tall green grasses. It just looked like grass from where I stood before. But now, coming closer, I see what it is. A cave big enough for a bear, when there were bears in these parts. A cave big enough for Sarah Deane. Who is calling me now, calling my name.

“Annie, oh Annie. It’s me. I am so glad to see you.”

I run as fast as Harvey Lou. I toss my shoes and run faster. I’m out of breath and it doesn’t matter. Sarah Deane is alive. And we have found her.

12

Hand over Hand

She used one of her worn-out boots as a pillow. She laid herself out, to sleep, and for a while she slept, and then she didn't sleep at all. She thinks maybe it's her hip that broke, maybe the big bone in her leg, she doesn't know. It was a long-tongued snake that Harvey Lou saw. He scared it with his fierceness—roared and bucked. But it all happened so fast, and Sarah Deane flew to the ground, and there was a rock where she landed, right there, beneath the grass. She saw sudden white stars and then nothing at all. When she opened her eyes, there was Harvey Lou, sitting on the earth beside her, forming a big black wall in defense of her.

She reached for her saddlebag.

She found a pencil, wrote her note.

Told Harvey Lou to go find us. He wouldn't budge. She told him again and swatted his rump with her hand and finally he understood, he got the message.

“Go,” she told him. “Tell them where I am. I'll take care of me.”

Because she'd spotted the cave. Because she could get herself there. Because, hand over hand, she could pull herself up and up, through the grass, until she was there, in the shelter of the cave, where other men have been, she says. Look at the old ash. Look at the fire burns on the stone walls.

"I must have slept," she says. "Or maybe I lost consciousness. But when I woke, there was the storm."

"But why," I ask, "were you here, on the ridge? Why weren't you coming by way of the creek?"

"New family," she says. "Moved into an abandoned cabin over there. I wanted to give them some stories to read."

"You're the bravest person I know," I tell Sarah Deane, and she says, "You look at yourself, Annie Pearl. Look at yourself and say those words."

"You're going to need a new sweater," I say, for hers is stained and torn.

"I know a fine knitter," she says.

"A knitter who reads," I tell her.

"Yes," she says. "Indeed. A knitter who reads."

"You read to me, and I'll knit you a sweater. Socks, too. Whatever you need."

consciousness: the state of being awake and aware



She laughs. And then she cries.

All this time Harvey Lou is standing by the mouth of the cave, out in the sun, eating the tall grass, waiting for something to happen. All this time, flicking his tail.

“I need to tell the others,” I say. “We need a wagon, to get you to my house. We need to find the good doctor.”

“Yes,” she says. “I suppose that’s so.”

“I’ll be back,” I say. “As soon as I can. There’s a lot of people out there looking for you. A lot of people who love our Sarah Deane.”

I stand halfway tall, so as not to hit my head on the cave ceiling. Then I crouch back down, to give Sarah Deane a hug. Then I go out into the sunlight and give Harvey Lou a big hug, too. "You stay here," I say, but I don't have to tell him to be good. Harvey Lou always knows where he belongs.

13

A Flag in the Wind

Up to the top of the ridge, then down, through the forest, to the creek, where I find Jessie first and give her a muddy hug. “Annie,” she says, reaching up to pull my hair behind my ears. “We were all so worried. That storm.”

“Safe,” I say. “And we’ve found Sarah Deane. Go tell Walt to harness up his donkey. We need his wagon. It’ll be going up a hill.”

“But—how?” Jessie starts.

I shake my head. “I’ll tell you. Soon. Did you hear me calling?”

“Didn’t hear a thing,” she says. “Didn’t hear a word.”

“What a night it was,” I say. “What a storm.”

“You’ll tell me everything?” she asks.

“Everything,” I say. “I promise.”

I ask Jessie where my Ma is. She says to look up by the house. She says that she’s been walking the hill, up and down, looking for me since before the storm struck.

harness: put a harness (a set of leather straps used to direct an animal) on

"I'll go find her," I say. "You go find Walt." And now I am running even more—away from the creek, through the forest, up the hill, to my log cabin, my feet slapping the wet brown beautiful earth. I call Ma's name and she hears me quick. And now she's running straight toward me, that cloud of black hair rising around her.

"Honey," she says, when she's near enough. "Oh, Annie." She sweeps me up into her arms. She can barely talk for all the tears. "Oh, love," she says. "I cannot lose you. Ever. I've lost before. I will not lose again."

"The flood, Ma?" I ask, because suddenly, in the light of this new morning, with the passing of the storm, it all makes sense—the newsprint posted by Ma's bed, the gold circle that she wears, the candle she lights at the end of May each year, like that date is her own kind of religion.

"Your pa," she says, through her tears, clutching me to her again, telling me the secret she has never wanted to tell. "He lost his young life in that flood because he was saving us. He got us to the higher ground, but the waters took him. You weren't but a baby when he disappeared."

I hold her tight. I hear her sob. I let her cry into my hair.

"You should have told me," I say.

"I couldn't bear to," she says. "Saddest day in the whole wide world. I didn't want his daughter carrying sadness. But I didn't want to lose the memory of him, his name, right there, in that paper."

Ma hugs me even harder now. She takes a long breath before she begins again. "I should have never let you go to town with that big storm coming," she says. "I don't know what I was thinking. Forgive me."

"I insisted, Ma. Remember?"

"Still."

"It all turned out for the best," I tell her, pushing back, turning her head with a touch of my fingers. "Look." I point to the folding, rolling hill, where Jessie and some of the town folk are running. I point to the very top, where Harvey Lou stands, his tail like a flag in the wind.

"She's all right," I tell Ma. "She's all right. She was up there all along. She'll need some fixing, but she'll be fine. She can sleep in my bed for a while."

"Better than any story I've ever read," Ma says, crying again, and I agree. Best story, with the best ending. But that will never mean that Sarah Deane and the books she brings still aren't the very best thing that's ever happened in this part of eastern Kentucky.



Afterword

In 1935, the United States was six years into the Great Depression, a long period of deep financial hardship sparked by a weakening economy, panic by investors, and a collapsing banking system.

With millions out of work and many going hungry, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected in 1932, pursued new plans designed to boldly care for American citizens who were in desperate need of help. These new plans ranged from the creation of the Social Security Administration, which provided financial help to those over the age of sixty-five, to the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which eased the financial burden facing famers. The Hoover Dam, though begun in 1931, was completed as part of President Roosevelt's directives. So were La Guardia Airport and the Lincoln Tunnel.

economy: the system of how people in a society make and spend money

investors: people who put money into a company or project in hopes of earning a profit in the future

Social Security Administration: a U.S. government agency created in 1935 to establish a system of retirement, disability, and survivor benefits for Americans

Agricultural Adjustment Act: a U.S. federal law passed in 1933 that paid subsidies to farmers with the goal of stabilizing food prices

The Works Progress Administration (WPA), instituted as part of something Franklin called the Second New Deal, was designed to put unemployed Americans to work in nearly every manner imaginable. Roads and bridges, parks and schools were all built by those hired through the WPA. Artists, musicians, actors, writers, and historians also found work through the program.

The Pack Horse Library Project (1935–43) was one of the WPA's most interesting initiatives. Here was a chance for young women (and a very few men) to set out into the impoverished hills and valleys of eastern Kentucky to deliver books and other reading material to those who might not otherwise have them.

Sometimes these “book women” walked the hills and valleys. But mostly they set out on horses and mules—their own horses and mules. They braved the steep hills and low valleys, the weather, and the wild animals, all for twenty-eight dollars a month. They had to pay for—and care for—their own horses. But something bigger than money motivated them—a desire to bring stories, recipes, news, and connection to isolated families.

Sometimes the books that were shared through the Pack Horse Library Project arrived at book depots

impoverished: very poor

(general stores, post offices, schools, churches—whatever was available) by way of charitable organizations and donations. Sometimes the librarians themselves sewed together “books” of their own, compiling old magazine articles, recipes, and sewing instructions for eager readers.

These brave women (and those few occasional men) were beloved for their dedication to the people they served. They often went well beyond the call of their already magnificent duty—stopping on their way to teach children and their parents to read, bringing news of neighbors or the wider world, listening to stories and concerns, and being present during times of family sadness. When the program ended, library services also ended for a good long while in much of eastern Kentucky. But the memory of those courageous souls lives on. They have become part of the story history tells.

charitable: created to give aid to people in need

Meet the Author



National Book Award finalist **Beth Kephart** is the award-winning author of more than three dozen books in multiple genres, an award-winning teacher of memoir at the University of Pennsylvania, a widely published essayist, and a paper artist. Her new book for adults is *My Life in Paper: Adventures in Ephemera*. Her new book for children is *Good Books for Bad Children: The Genius of Ursula Nordstrom*. More at bethkephartbooks.com and bind-arts.com.

Meet the Illustrator



Kailien Singson. A born artist, Kailien hails from the northeastern region of India known for its rich natural beauty that serves as a constant inspiration in his work. His passion for art began at a young age with artistic scribbles in notebooks at school, and gradually developed into a serious career that led him to pursue a degree in arts. Having explored several techniques in art through his education and professional years in publishing, Kailien specializes in using striking colors and depicting realistic forms in his work. He is equally adept at traditional art styles, taking inspiration from everyday life.

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Courtesy of Kailien Singson / 67

Kailien Singson / 7, 17, 23, 29, 35, 39, 47, 53, 57, 62

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Core Knowledge® Adventures in History™

Annie loves to read and learn about the world outside of the hills and woodlands she knows. Her reading skills are improving all the time thanks to her new friend and Pack Horse librarian, Sarah Deane, who comes courtesy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sarah Deane travels miles on her loyal and steadfast horse, Harvey Lou, to deliver stories or news to folks in the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky. Up hills, down into valleys, and across creeks she goes, following trails either thick with mud or dust dry. One day, when Harvey Lou arrives at Annie's simple home with an empty saddle and a note in his saddlebag, Annie realizes that her beloved Pack Horse librarian needs her help. As the sky darkens and a bad storm rolls in, Annie and Harvey Lou set off to save Sarah Deane's life.

These books are suitable for readers aged 8 and up.

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