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ANNA ROSE'S STORY

Also by Anne Pellowski

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Stairstep Farm: Anna Rose's Story

By Anne Pellowski



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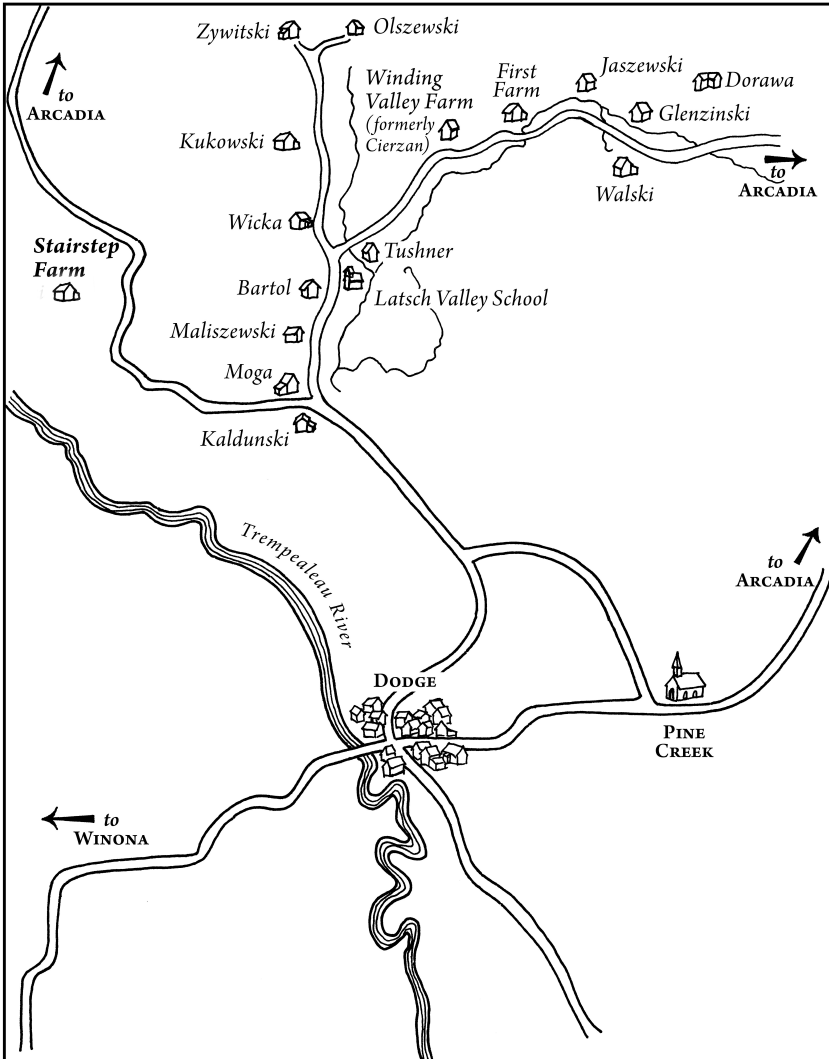
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To my Brother and Sisters

Latsch Valley



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1. *Brown Betty*

“MEOW, MEOW, MEOW!” Anna Rose woke up to the faint sound of a hungry kitten, crying for its milk. She poked her head out from beneath the feather quilt, and saw her oldest sister, Angie, standing over the heat register in the floor, getting dressed as fast as she could. It was a cold January morning. There was no furnace in their house, only a big, round stove in the front room and the black and white range in the kitchen. In the ceiling right above the front room stove was a square hole, covered with metal grating. Quite a bit of heat went up through this hole into the bedroom above, where Anna Rose slept with her two younger sisters, Janie and Mary Elizabeth. Angie and Millie,

her two older sisters, slept in the room next to it. In winter, they always came and stood on the register to get dressed.

"Maaah, maaah, maaah!" This time the crying sounded more like a little calf.

"Is that a kitten or a calf crying like that?" Anna Rose asked Angie.

"Why don't you get dressed and come down and see," laughed Angie as she went to give Millie a shake to wake her up.

"Time to get up for chores!"

While Millie struggled out of bed and into her clothes, Anna Rose snuggled back under the fat, puffy quilt that was filled with goose feathers. Mary Elizabeth was sleeping in the middle of the bed, curled up in a ball. She had only started to sleep upstairs since Christmas. Sometimes she crawled in between Angie and Millie, and slept with them, but most nights she slept between Anna Rose and Janie.

"Myah, myah, myah!" Again the crying sound came up through the register.

"I've got to find out what that is," Anna Rose said as she took the leap out of bed, raced for the register, grabbed her clothes from a chair nearby, and dressed as fast as she could. Over her thick, long underwear she pulled on her long stockings and then her shoes. Down the steps she clattered, opening the door to the kitchen.

She stopped in surprise. She had expected to see her mother standing at the stove, getting breakfast ready.

But instead, there was her cousin, Dorothy, smiling at her as though she had a secret.

“What are *you* doing here?” Anna Rose asked. Dorothy hadn’t been there when she went to bed the evening before.

“Don’t you know why? Haven’t you been hearing some strange noises?” Dorothy seemed to be teasing her.

“Yes, I heard something crying like a kitten or a calf. Where is it?” Anna Rose looked all around the kitchen, but could see no animal.

“You knew your mother was expecting a baby, didn’t you?” Dorothy spoke in a voice that seemed to indicate she meant just the opposite. Anna Rose was not going to admit that she hadn’t known any such thing. She had suspected something like that might happen, but no one had told her definitely that there would be a new baby around their house.

“Myeh, myeh, myeh!” The crying started up again. Anna Rose could hear that it came from the big downstairs bedroom where Mama and Daddy slept. But it didn’t sound like a baby crying—it sounded like a kitten or a newborn calf.

Suddenly, Anna Rose imagined her mother lying in bed, with a row of kittens lined up beside her. What if, instead of having a baby, she had had a kitten, or even worse, a whole litter of kittens! Could such a terrible thing happen?

“There are no kittens in the house, are there?” Anna Rose asked anxiously.

Dorothy glanced up from her cooking with a questioning look. She saw the worried frown on Anna Rose's face.

"No," she said with a reassuring laugh. "There is only a new baby, a girl—your new sister. Sometimes when she cries she might sound like a kitten, but she's not. She's a tiny little girl, just like you were once. I'll take you in to see her after breakfast."

Anna Rose sighed with relief. Kittens and calves were all right in the barn, but she didn't want to see her mother cuddling and nursing them, like she used to do with Mary Elizabeth.

Dorothy put the oatmeal on the back of the stove.

"If that starts to bubble over, call me. I'm going upstairs to get the little ones up and dressed."

Anna Rose watched the pot of oatmeal, but nothing happened. The heat from the back of the kitchen stove was too weak to make it boil over. Soon Dorothy came down, carrying Mary Elizabeth and holding Janie by the hand. She set Mary Elizabeth in the high chair and put Janie down on a regular chair with a pillow on it. Just as she was dishing out the oatmeal, Angie and Millie came in with big armloads of wood and dropped them into the bin on the side wall. That was one of their jobs every morning. In the late afternoon, they had to bring in more wood for both stoves.

"Can we go in and see her now?" asked Angie excitedly.

"No, wait till you've all had breakfast," Dorothy replied, dishing out more bowls of oatmeal. No sooner

had she done that, when Daddy and Lawrence and Francis walked in the kitchen door. They had just finished the milking.

Francis took off his thick woolen cap and his red curls tumbled out, sticking up every which way. His hair was the same color as Janie's, and just as curly. Grown-ups always admired Janie's curls and stroked her head, saying: "My, doesn't she have lovely hair!" But for some reason, they didn't say that about Francis's hair. They would tease him instead, and call him "Carrot-Top" or "Curly-Head." Anna Rose always wondered why they didn't say the same things about *his* hair as they said about Janie's.

Lawrence was almost four years older than Francis. On his next birthday, he would be sixteen, but already he was taller than Daddy. When the other farmers living near them saw Lawrence standing next to Daddy they always said: "So, Alex, you're raising another one of those giants." That was because Grandpa and Daddy's uncles were all so tall and big.

Lawrence had smooth, dark-red hair and as he took off his cap with the earflaps, he ran his fingers through it to push it back, away from his eyes.

"Well, Anna Rose, what do you think of our new sister?" asked Lawrence.

"She thought it was a kitten," interrupted Dorothy with a chuckle.

"I did not!" protested Anna Rose. "I just thought I *heard* a kitten." She hated it when they made fun of her about something she was supposed to know.

After breakfast, they went in, one by one, to see their new sister. She was almost as tiny as a kitten, but she was definitely a baby, with head, eyes, nose, and mouth and hands. She wasn't crying any more because she was sound asleep. Mama was dozing, too.

Later that morning, everyone went to church except Mama and the new baby and Dorothy.

"Are we going in the sleigh?" asked Anna Rose. When there was a lot of fresh snow their car couldn't make it up the hill, not even with chains on the tires. Then Daddy and Lawrence would hitch up King and Dollie, two of the horses, to the long wagon box placed on top of runners. They called it their sleigh. On the floor of the wagon box was a thick layer of hay, to make it warm and comfortable to sit. They also took along plenty of blankets to cover their legs and feet. Even though the wagon box was open, and not warmed by a heater like their car, they all loved to go to church in it, sliding smoothly along behind the team.

"No, I think we'll make out all right with the car," said Daddy. "We have to get back as soon as we can, to give Dorothy a hand. A new baby is a lot of work."

"I'll try to have dinner ready by the time you get back," said Dorothy. "I'm planning a special treat of Brown Betty. You all like that, don't you?" Dorothy turned to the younger children with a questioning smile.

Anna Rose did not know what Brown Betty was. She had never heard her mother mention it. It sounded interesting, but she was not so sure she would like it.

Anyway, she was disappointed that they were not going in the sleigh. She was also jealous of all the attention being given her new sister.

"I don't like Brown Betty," announced Anna Rose.

"Don't like Betty," said Mary Elizabeth. She had learned to talk in sentences a few weeks ago and now she repeated part of everything that Anna Rose or Janie said.

Janie looked as though she might say she didn't like Brown Betty either, but Lawrence interrupted before she could speak.

"That's good you two don't like Brown Betty pudding, because that leaves more for me. I *love* it!" Lawrence smacked his lips as he went out the door.

"Yum, yum, I do, too!" Angie rubbed her stomach. Millie did the same. Soon they were all talking about how good Brown Betty pudding was.

"I didn't know it was a pudding," Anna Rose said to herself. She liked most puddings, but especially chocolate. "Goodness," she thought, "chocolate is brown. What if Brown Betty is a kind of chocolate pudding? And I won't get to eat any because I said I didn't like it." She almost changed her mind and said she really did like Brown Betty a little, but she was too stubborn and cross to admit it.

"I don't like Brown Betty," she insisted.

All during Mass, Anna Rose thought about Brown Betty pudding. She thought about it on the way home in the car. The chains on the back tires thonked softly

at each turn of the wheels. "Brown Betty," "Brown Betty," "Brown Betty," they seemed to be saying.

When they got back to the house, there was a delicious smell of roast chicken and apples spreading throughout the kitchen. Wisps of steam curled up from the crusty brown chunks covering a big, flat pan set in the middle of the kitchen table. Dorothy must have taken the pan out of the oven a few minutes before.

"Um-mm!" Lawrence leaned over the pan and took a deep sniff. "I *love* that Brown Betty!"

"Set the table, Millie. Angie, you can help me by stirring this gravy until it gets thick. Lawrence, why don't you mash the potatoes for me, over there by the sink. Francis, run down and get some more milk from the cellar." Dorothy gave orders left and right while she brought out the bread board and began to slice a fat, rounded loaf of the bread Mama had baked yesterday. Then she fixed up a plate of food and took it into the bedroom where Mama still lay in bed, with the new baby beside her. Anna Rose peeked in to see if Mama was sick. Mama was sitting up, with the pillows behind her. She looked tired, but not sick and feverish, the way she had looked once when she had stayed in bed with the flu.

The rest of the family sat around the table in the kitchen and ate dinner. They were too hungry to say much. After they had finished the chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy and yellow beans, Dorothy cleared the plates away and brought out a stack of small bowls. With a serving spoon, she dished out the Brown Betty