

*A Sequel to A Captain for Hans, The Brickmakers,
Follow Me & Clyde the Rebel*

Freedom's Star

REBECCA MARTIN

Illustrated by Joyce Hansen

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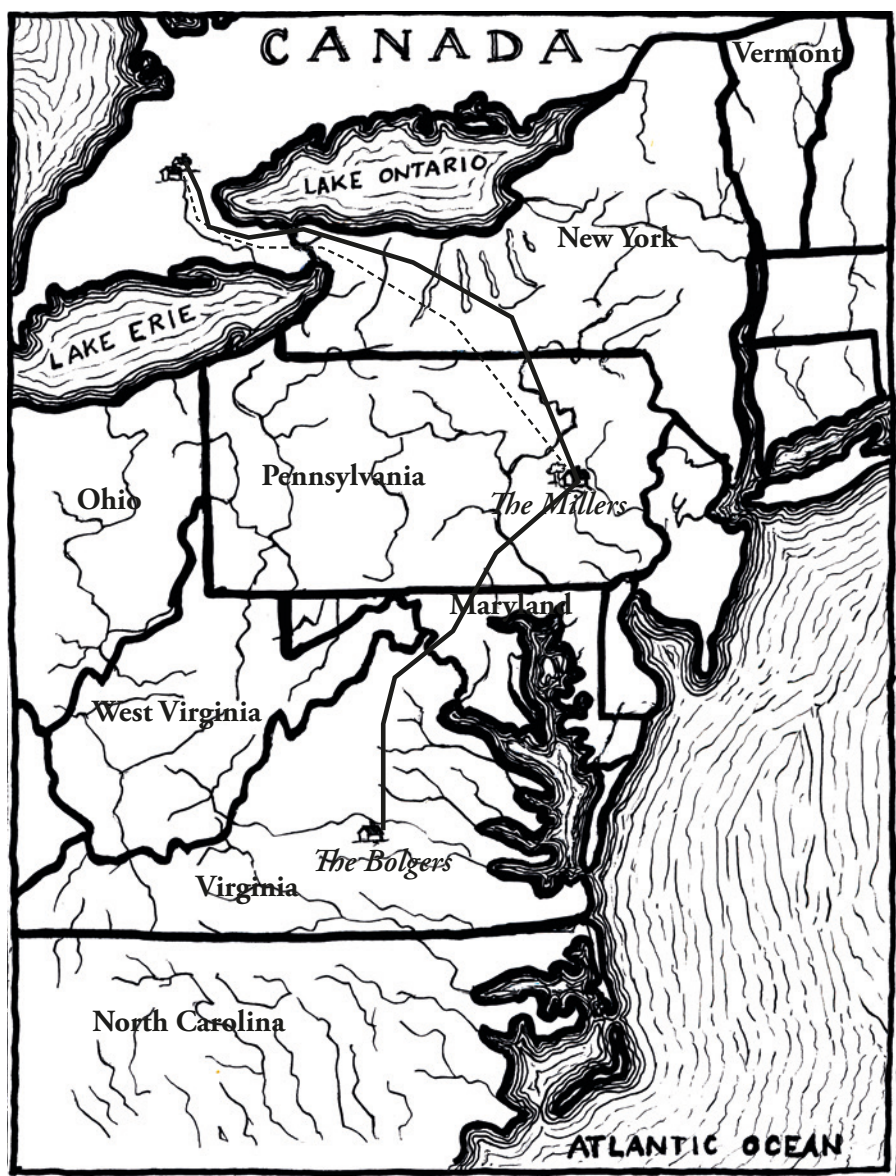


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- The Bolger's Journey
----- The Miller's Journey

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Foreword

It's sad but true: what happened to the Bolger family in this story is based on actual memories of slaves who experienced such things.

What the Miller family did to help them is based on accounts of the Underground Railroad that operated in the years before the war against slavery. In this story, the term "Underground Railroad" is not used because that designation wasn't common till the 1830s.

The characters in this story are fictional (except for a few well-known people like Sam Bricker and Richard Beasley). No Mennonite family by the name of Miller settled in Woolwich Township in the early 1800s. However, in the early 1800s Mennonites did leave Pennsylvania to settle in Woolwich Township. The Millers' move from Pennsylvania to Ontario, as related in this story, is certainly based on accounts of families who did just that.

Why did I use the Miller name? Simply because, back in 2005 when I wrote *A Captain for Hans*, I didn't realize I'm starting a series that will end up doing what my own forefathers did—moving from Pennsylvania to the Conestoga River valley. So actually, I'm glad this family is named Miller, because that way everyone knows the characters are fictional.

—Rebecca Martin

The Dungeon

BUCKINGHAM COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Betsy Miller did not like the root cellar. It was dank and dark, and it smelled of moldy earth and rotting vegetables. “The root cellar is worse than a dungeon!” Betsy declared in exasperation.

Mother, who was stirring a fragrant stew in a huge pot on the stove, looked thoughtfully at the ten-year-old. “You know, our forefathers were sometimes imprisoned in dungeons.”

“Our forefathers.” That meant the Anabaptists of Switzerland. Betsy knew, because Father and Mother often talked about them. Betsy could even recite from memory the chain of her ancestors that led from present-day Pennsylvania back to Switzerland. Peter Miller was her father. His father was John; and then, going backward, a generation at a time, it was Daniel, Peter, Hans, and Josef, who lived in Switzerland in the 1630s. At that time, the

Anabaptists were being persecuted for their beliefs. Many of them were put into prison.

Standing in the middle of the kitchen with its smooth hardwood floor, Betsy tried to imagine a prison that resembled their root cellar. Remembering the darkness, the horrible smell, and the dampness, she asked, "You mean people had to live in dungeons for days on end?"

"Not just days. Months and years." Mother slid the big pot to the back of the stove's shiny cast-iron surface. "People got sick and died in those dungeons."

Betsy shuddered. "I'd get sick, too, if I had to live in our old root cellar!"

"It isn't the most pleasant place, is it?" said Mother. "Still, I think root cellars are wonderful inventions. Vegetables like carrots and turnips and potatoes stay fresh there all winter. What's more, Betsy, you needn't call our root cellar old. It's not nearly as old as the rest of this house. Your great-grandfather built this house, whereas the root cellar was made when your father was nineteen years old, back in 1779."

Betsy wrinkled her forehead, trying to do some fast figuring. "Father's 52 now. So that means the root cellar is 33 years old. Hmm. No wonder it smells moldy!"

"We should clean it out one of these days," Mother said. Then she added sweetly, "Betsy, please go down and bring me some potatoes to add to this stew."

Betsy gave Mother a lopsided smile. "So I'm off to the dungeon!" Lighting a candle, she carried it down the dark stairway.

The cellar beneath the main house was not entirely dark; daylight peeped in through cracks around the covered windows. Wooden tubs and crates were stored in neat piles along the walls.

To one side stood Mother's "pie cupboard"—a screened cabinet Father had made to keep pies and cakes safe from the mice.

Right beside the pie cupboard was the root cellar door. That is, if you could call it a door. Betsy had once complained to her brother Dan, "Going through that door is like wriggling into a groundhog's burrow!" Grownups had a hard time getting into the root cellar. No doubt that was why Mother usually sent Betsy to fetch things.

Mother once explained to her how the root cellar had been made. "To begin with, they had to cut a hole into the basement wall, which wasn't easy because it's built of rocks. That's probably why the doorway wasn't made any bigger. From there, they simply dug a cave into the hillside and installed beams to keep the earthen walls in place."

Wrinkling her nose in distaste, Betsy unlatched the little door. As it swung open, the candle flickered wildly, and out spilled that peculiar root-cellar odor. Gathering up her skirt to keep it from getting soiled, Betsy stepped over the threshold.

The trouble with a candle's tiny, fluttering flame is that it produces huge, wavering shadows. Bringing a candle into a dark cellar fills it with vague, groping monsters.

Betsy tried not to see them. As fast as she could, she filled her basket with potatoes and scrambled back out. Crash! The door clanged shut. A blast of air snuffed out the candle.

Betsy tore across the basement and pounded up the steps as though all those monsters were hard on her heels. Only when the door was safely closed behind her did she stop to catch her breath.

Luckily, Mother wasn't in the kitchen anymore. What would she have thought if she'd seen Betsy just then, panting hard and leaning against the doorjamb because her knees had turned to

jelly? The porch door slammed open and twelve-year-old Dan stepped in. He took one look at his sister and asked, "Huh? What's the matter with you?"

Betsy set the basket of potatoes on the cabinet and smoothed down her dress. Airily she replied, "Why, nothing. I just came back from the dungeon, that's all."

"The dungeon?" he repeated. "What has your imagination gotten you into now?" The whole Miller family knew that you couldn't always take Betsy seriously. Not only was she the youngest member, but she also had too many fanciful ideas.

Betsy let out an embarrassed giggle. "Actually, all I did was fetch potatoes in the root cellar."

"Oh," grunted Dan. "Say, Betsy, you can't guess what Father and John and Reuben are talking about out there."

Betsy moved to the window. Near the barn she saw Father, gray-haired and gray-bearded. With him were nineteen-year-old Reuben and her married brother, John. "I didn't know John was here. Did he bring Susan?" Susan was Betsy's five-year-old niece.

"Nope. He came to pick up some seed grain. He thinks the fields will be ready to plant before the end of the week. But they're not talking about seed grain now. They're talking about Canada!"

Canada. Whenever Betsy heard that word, she pictured a land of ice and snow, far to the north across the Allegheny Mountains. Indians and wild animals roamed that northern wilderness. Only a few white men lived there, in huts made of logs. "And why would they talk about Canada?" she wondered, though in her heart she knew, and she did not like the reason at all.

"It sounds like John is really serious about moving to Canada," Dan went on enthusiastically. "And do you know what? I think Father is getting interested too!"



Now Betsy's knees truly turned weak. "You can't mean that. Not Father. Not us."

Dan grinned. "I do mean it, though. I wouldn't be surprised at all if we ended up moving to Canada." He turned and clattered out over the back porch again. Running down the stone steps, he flung over his shoulder, "Don't worry, Betsy. Father knows what he's doing."

Shaking her head, Betsy followed her brother outside and sat down on the porch steps. Jasper, their old black dog, scrambled out from beneath the porch and came to sit beside her. She put her arm across his smooth black back and stared out over the yard.

Like rows of pink clouds, blooming cherry trees marched down the length of the orchard. Beyond stood the big, sturdy barn with its outbuildings. Plowed fields stretched to the faraway woods, which were bright with spring green.

"Jasper, I just don't understand," Betsy mourned. "Why would Father want to move away from this beautiful place?"

For quite a while now, Betsy had known that her brother John wished to move to Canada. Her brother-in-law Ben too, for that matter. Both of them longed for more farmland, yet here in Buckingham County, Pennsylvania, land was very expensive. The way it sounded, you could buy land for next to nothing up in Canada. It was really no wonder that John and Ben had such ideas.

But Betsy had never dreamed that her own parents might go too. "Jasper, quick!" she snapped. "What can we do to get these notions out of Father's head?"

Jasper was no help at all. His only response was a long-drawn-out doggy sigh as he plopped his nose on his paws.