

GRENELL

1904

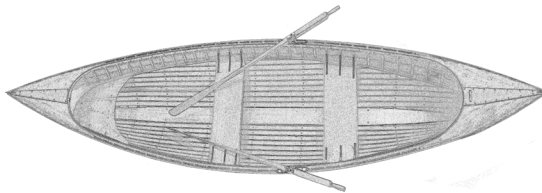
A NOVEL



1904

BOOK 3 IN THE THOUSAND ISLANDS SERIES

Lynn E. McElfresh



River Skiff Press
Grenell Island, NY

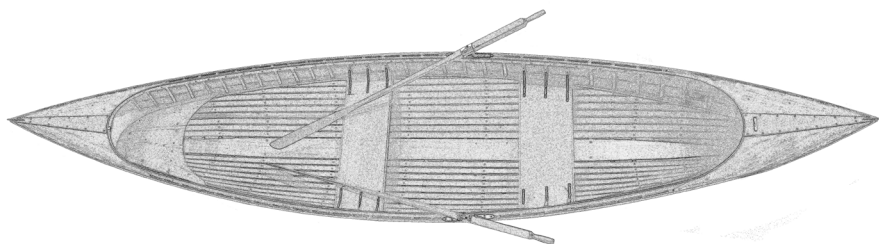
This is a work of fiction.
While real characters from history are represented,
their appearance, personalities, mannerisms,
and dialogue are imagined.

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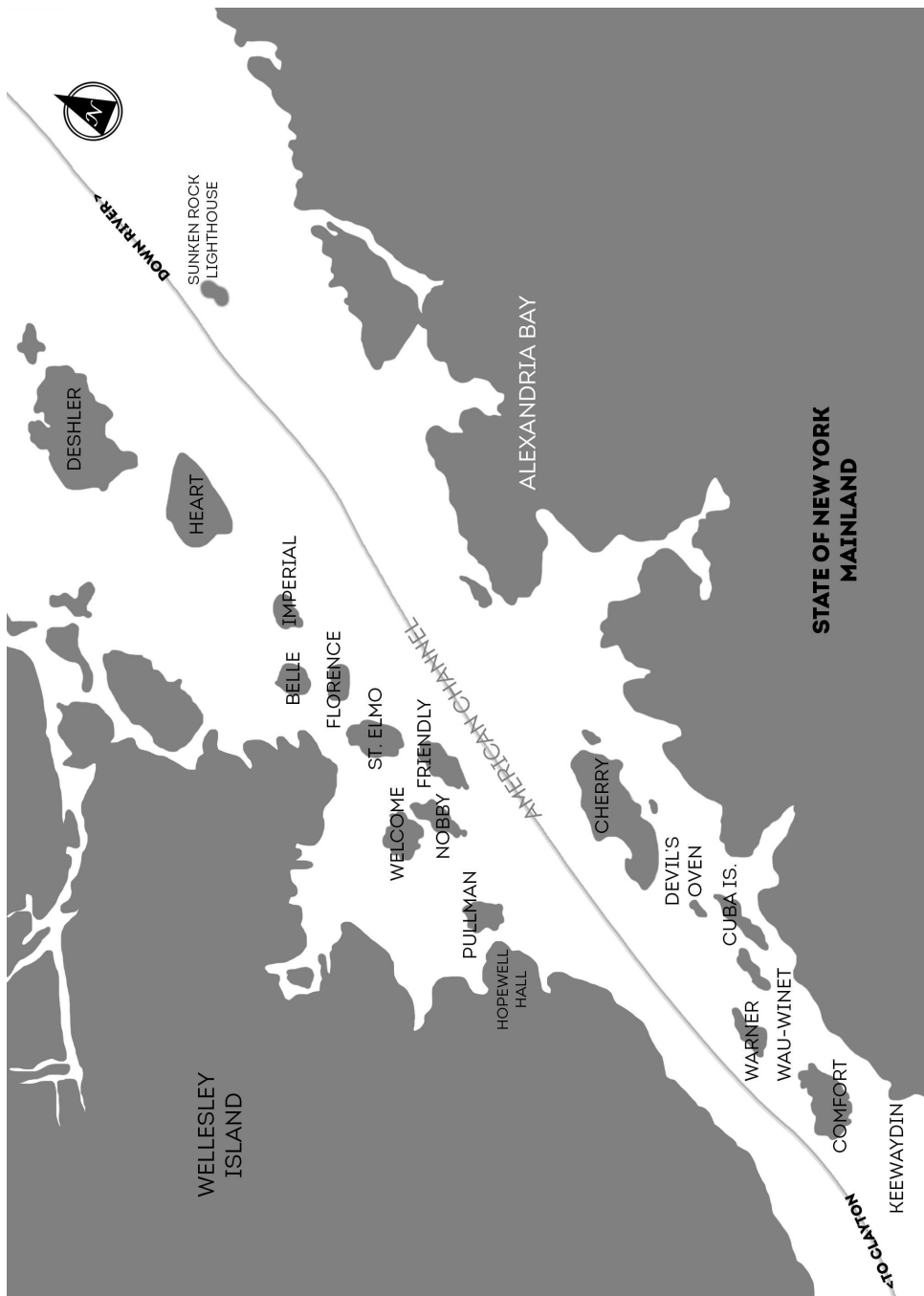


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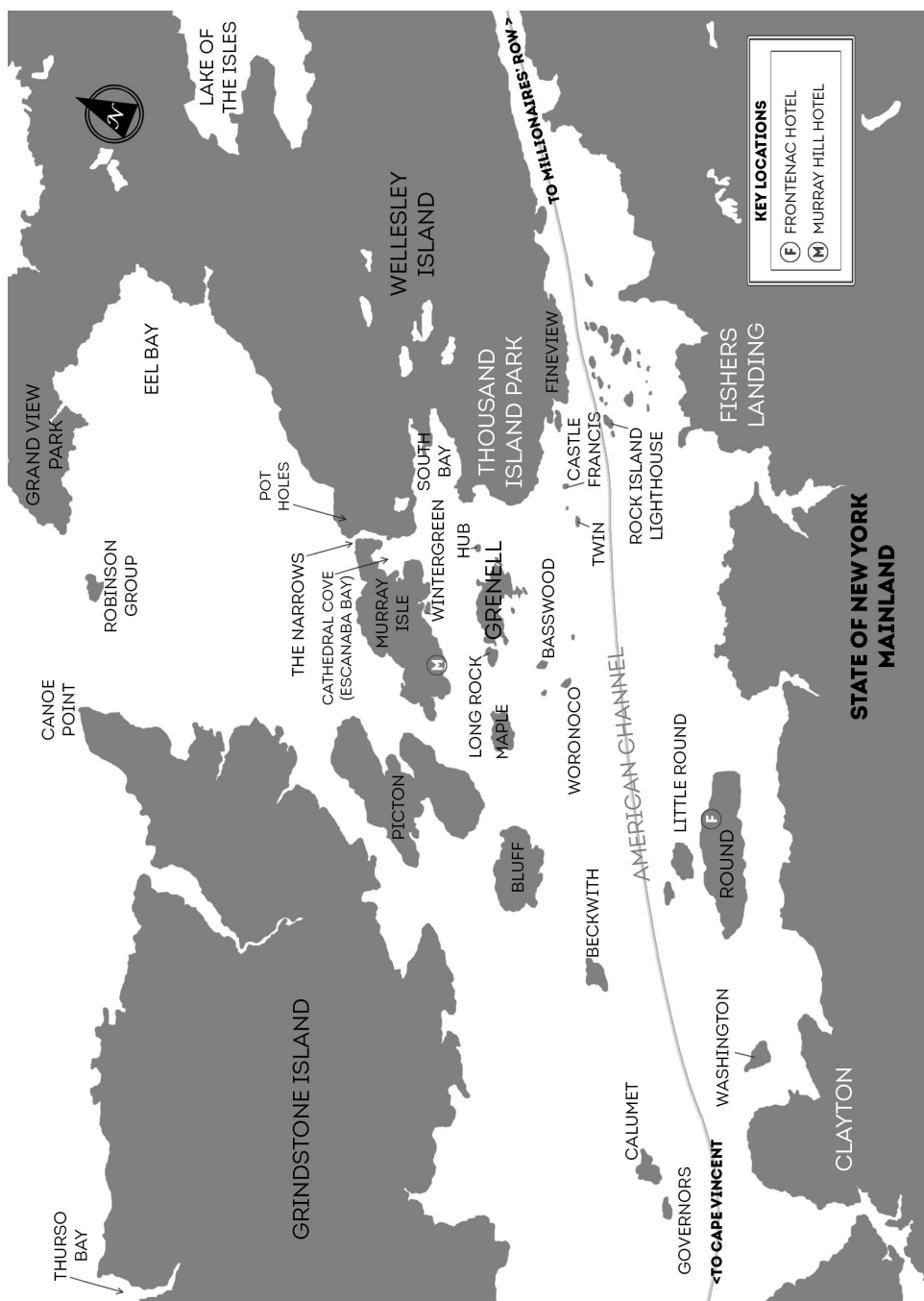
To Edith & Olivia Pratt, the first to
record Grenell Island history.

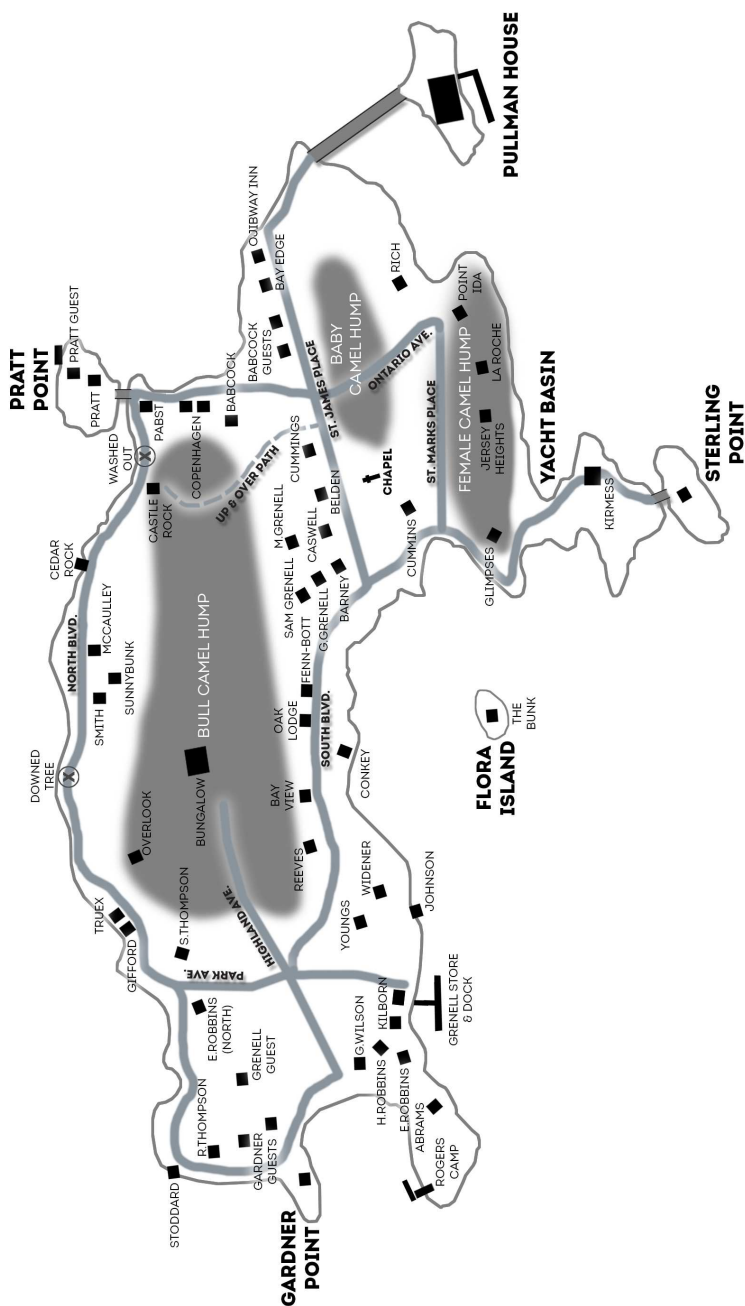


Millionaires' Row 1904



Thousand Islands Region 1904







CHAPTER *one*

Wednesday, June 1, 1904

SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK, R. W. & O. LINE

*T*he whole bed lurched, then shimmied.

Instinctively, I reached out for Vivi. I felt her small form in the bed next to me and relaxed. It didn't matter where I was, as long as Vivi was with me.

I squinted into the inky darkness, trying to figure out where I was. The bed was wedged into a long, narrow room. A long row of windows ran the short length of the room in front of me. If it weren't for the windows, I would have thought my bed was in a butler's pantry. The room was small—yet twice the size of my tiny bedchamber at our cottage on Grenell Island.

I heard the crunch of boots on gravel just outside the windows. I placed a protective arm around Vivi and hugged her to me. As the footsteps grew closer, the murmur of male voices grew louder. Squinting into the blackness, I saw the dark outlines of two men carrying kerosene lanterns. The men stopped outside the window opposite me. One man raised his lantern, which glowed green on one side and red on the other. He waved the lantern back and forth. A train whistle pierced the night and brought me to my senses. I was in an executive private railroad car. The car jerked forward. We were on our way again. Who knows how long we

had stopped. Or where.

Soon the rhythm of the train told me we were moving at a good clip. I had left the window shades up last night so I might wake up at dawn and watch the sunrise. Our windows faced east. In the last few minutes, the intense blackness that surrounded me had softened to a light gray. I shut my eyes. When I opened them again, it was brighter. A slash of orange outlined the horizon.

I heard a faint tapping at the door. I grabbed my wrapper and pulled it on. The tap came again just as I reached the door. "Miss?" I heard a hoarse whisper from the other side.

I cracked the door open. Our porter, Delroy, was not wearing his cap or jacket. But instead, he wore a white apron over his perfectly starched white shirt. He lowered his chin. Through the crack in the door, I could only see Delroy's well-groomed narrow mustache over wide lips and a heavy fringe of eyelashes over one large round eye. I marveled at such long thick eyelashes on a man.

"Sorry to disturb you, miss," Delroy whispered, his deep southern accent making the apology sound like a song. "Miss Vivi requested that I wake her before we reach the railroad bridge over the Susquehanna. She said it's one of her favorite spots. We's about a half hour out."

"Thank you, Delroy." I closed the door and turned back toward the bed. Already the bedchamber was a bit brighter. I sat on the bed, reached over, and smoothed Vivi's hair away from her sleeping face. I sighed. Waking Vivi was an involved affair.

Vivi looked so peaceful, so angelic, but I knew that serenity would vanish when I tried to wake her. I placed my hand on her shoulder. She was so warm. I shook her slightly. There was no reaction. I placed my mouth near her ear and inhaled. Vivi always smelled like sunshine, like she had been running in a meadow all night. "Vivi? Sweetie, it's time to wake up." I whispered.

A serene smile flashed across her face. "Coming, Papa," she said, but she rolled over and continued to sleep.

Coming, Papa? These were often her first words when I tried to wake Vivi. It made me wonder if her father, having died years ago, visited his daughter in her dreams.

"Vivi! Wake up, sleepyhead. The sun's rising," I whispered in her ear.

This time, her face scrunched into a pout that quickly twisted into a scowl. I continued to shake her shoulder gently. Vivi batted at me as if she were shoos away a pesky fly.

I glanced out the window. The line of orange at the horizon had widened. I stood and quickly dressed, putting on everything save my boots. They would take a while to button up.

I looked at Vivi and sighed. Vivi did not wake well. Not in the morning. Not from her naps. She seemed to be in another world, a world that she did not wish to leave. It was my least favorite part of caring for Vivi. I tapped her shoulder with my index finger. This attempt garnered no reaction. I considered for a moment to just let her sleep. But the sun was rising and we were nearing her favorite bridge. Dealing with Vivi's disappointment would be more unpleasant than waking her.

"Vivi," I said, no longer whispering as I shook her small form. "Today's the day! Wake up or you'll miss the bridge over the Susquehanna. We're on our way to the Thousand Islands—the sparkling St. Lawrence River."

River was the magic word. Her eyes sprang open.

"Are we there yet? Did I miss the bridge over the Susquehanna?" she asked groggily as she rubbed her eyes.

"Not yet. But you have to wake up or you'll miss it."

Vivi yawned, stretched, and fell into me. I wrapped my arms around her and buried my nose into the top of her honey-brown hair.

Holding Vivi in my arms always invigorates me. I can't remember what mornings were like before I had Vivi to care for. Sometimes it seemed we had always been together, but it had only been four months.

I stood and tried to set Vivi on her feet. She was as limp as a rag doll. I sat her on the bed instead. I turned the toggle. The electric wall sconces illuminated our berth. The bright light made Vivi wince. I marveled at my surroundings: the gleaming mahogany paneling, the thick Turkish rug, monogrammed linens on the bed, the chintz comforter, and the fresh flowers on the side table.

Vivi groaned, buried her face in the pillow, and drew the comforter over her head.

I checked my bodice watch. "Come now, Vivi. Rise and shine! Delroy says we'll be there in less than fifteen minutes. You don't want to miss the

Susquehanna Bridge.”

She didn’t exactly bounce from the bed, but she did sit up again. I raised her arms and pulled her nightdress from her limp form. Wisely, I had Vivi pick out her traveling costume the night before. Even though she was only five, she was very particular about what she wore and how I arranged her hair. These decisions were more easily made when she was fully awake and not half asleep. I quickly helped Vivi pull on her chemise, petticoats, and stockings.

Somehow, we were both dressed when Delroy knocked again and said in a loud, clear voice from the other side of the door, “Susquehanna Bridge in two minutes.”

Vivi placed her hands against the window as if she could feel the world as it passed. I sat on the foot of the bed, watched, and waited.

As the countryside whizzed past us, I was reminded of the whirlwind of events that had changed my life forever. It started nearly five years ago with Vivi’s birth. My sister Lily had been told she would never bear children again after the birth of the twins. But on November 19th, 1898, on the cusp of a new century, Vivi was born. My brother-in-law, Edwin, had been momentarily disappointed that she had not been a boy—the male heir that he had hoped for. But even as an infant, Vivi had this presence about her that both attracted and delighted people. Her father quickly fell into her orbit. Ivy and Iris—her older twin sisters—were thirteen when Vivi was born. They acted as if she were a gift to them, a real-life doll for them to play with. Everyone regarded Vivi as this wonderful, marvelous, miracle child.

Edwin had wanted to name her “Hope,” perhaps because he hoped that Lily would next have a son. But in the end, Edwin and Lily chose to name their miracle child for their two mothers, Violet Grace Dillworth. Edwin doted on this surprise intrusion into their world. Vivi was only two when the Park Avenue Tunnel train crash left her fatherless.

“Look! Here it comes!” Vivi announced.

In the distance, I could see the waters of the Susquehanna River sparkling in the morning sun. As the train entered the cage-like bridge truss, the shadows from the struts fragmented the sparkling light and sent it ricocheting around our berth. The silvery light and Vivi’s giggles were a salve for my weary soul. Vivi was like a rainbow after a devastating storm.

Once on the other side of the Susquehanna, Vivi opened the door and bolted down the narrow hall into the executive car parlor. "Delroy!" Vivi called out when she saw our porter. She rushed for the tall, lanky man and hugged him. "Thank you for waking us in time to see the bridge," she said, looking up into his dark face.

Delroy smiled. "It was my pleasure, Miss Vivi. Come along now. I have the breakfast table ready for you."

"Why do you like the bridge over the Susquehanna?" I asked as I sat down at the elegantly set breakfast table.

"I like the way the light flashes. It's like fairies are flying around our railroad car. But the best part, of course, crossing the Susquehanna means we are halfway to the Thousand Islands."

"Hmmm. Really? The Susquehanna River is halfway to Clayton?" I asked.

Vivi shrugged. "That's what Mummy always said."

"Perhaps it is true," I pondered as I spread the heavy linen napkin on Vivi's lap.

"We liked to celebrate with a toast," Vivi said, reaching for her glass of milk. "Here's to a fabulous summer at Grenell Island!"

I picked up my glass. "To a fabulous summer at Grenell Island," I said, raising my glass aloft.

"Auntie, it's not a toast unless you clink the glasses together," Vivi said, motioning to move my glass toward hers.

"Oh!" I said, "Then, by all means!" I clinked my water glass to Vivi's milk glass. The delightful sound that rang out reminded me we were holding expensive crystal.

"Toasts make such a happy sound," Vivi said, lunging her glass toward mine again. The crystal glasses clinked again, sending a cheery chime that cut through the fog of sadness that had surrounded me these last few months.

For the most part, Vivi was a happy child. Except for that uncomfortable period of time after she wakes, life for Vivi was a moment-to-moment celebration. I wondered as I took a sip of the water if I would ever be effortlessly, easily happy again. I felt incredibly dull and somber.

As I set my glass down, a lump caught in my throat when I noticed the floral arrangement was composed of all white flowers—roses, lilies, and

daisies. I realized that this was a flower arrangement Lily had requested months ago when she had made plans for this trip with Mrs. Ingram, her head housekeeper and personal secretary. The floral arrangement was Lily's favorite as it represented her family of origin—Rose, Lily, and me, Marguerite—the three daughters of Martin and Violette Hartranft. I dabbed at the tears flooding my eyes with my napkin before Vivi noticed.

Delroy brought the tea tray. Next to the silver teapot were tiny silver bowls: one with whole cloves and the other with cinnamon imperials. Mrs. Ingram would have requested these specifically for Anne and me. Mrs. Ingram made sure that Anne and I were served all our favorites on our trip from Philadelphia to Clayton, New York.

"Thank you, Delroy. One clove and two cinnamon imperials, please," I said as he finished pouring my tea.

"My pleasure, miss," Delroy said with a deferential nod. He picked up the tiny silver tongs in his white-gloved hand and complied.

"Will Dr. Anne be joining you for breakfast? Should I serve her porridge?" Delroy asked.

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, the door to Anne's berth opened.

"Good morning, Friend Anne," Vivi called out. Her little body twisted in the chair as she tried to free herself. There was no doubt that if she hadn't been wedged between me and the wall, Vivi would have lunged from the chair, run across the club car, and thrown her arms around Anne.

Suddenly, Vivi let out an anguished whimper. Her chin fell to her chest as she buried her head into my side. When I raised her chin to look at her face, I could see her eyebrows knit together, tears swimming in her eyes, and a look of utter distress clouding her face.

"Vivi, what is it?" I asked.

"I forgot," she whispered. "Friend Anne doesn't say 'good morning' or 'good night.' It's not Quakerly to do so."

"How are you this morning? Vivi? Did you sleep well?" Anne asked as she sat across from us.

Vivi nodded, but her head hung in shame.

Anne looked at me quizzically. "What is it?" she mouthed.

"She said 'good morning,'" I whispered.

Anne nodded. "Vivi, I am a Quaker. You are not. Your intent was good. Do not be sad, little one."

Delroy returned to pour a cup of tea for Anne. When he saw Vivi looking crumpled and sad, he looked wounded. "Is there something wrong with Miss Vivi's breakfast? May I bring her something different?"

"No, it's not the breakfast, Delroy. Vivi will be fine in a moment," I assured him.

"Sit up, Vivi. Finish your breakfast," I said as I gently jostled Vivi into a sitting position.

"Last night, you said you wanted to make a list after breakfast today," Anne said as Delroy poured her a cup of tea. "Two cloves and one cinnamon imperial," she said to Delroy. "What sort of list do you intend to write?"

The word *list* shifted Vivi's focus. "Yes! It's very exciting, Friend Anne. I will have a whole summer to spend on the island. That's so much longer than the two weeks I usually have, which is never long enough. I want to make a list of all the things I wish to do."

So after the breakfast dishes were cleared, I brought a tablet of lined paper and a fat pencil so Vivi could make her list.

"You know how to write, Miss Vivi?" Delroy asked, clearly impressed.

Vivi nodded. "Friend Anne, how do you spell 'muskellunge'?"

"That is a tough one," Anne said, slowly spelling the word for her. "You want to fish for muskellunge?"

"No! I want to catch a muskellunge! I also want to catch pickerel, perch, and bass," Vivi said, pointing to items already on her list.

"She be readin' too?" Delroy asked.

I nodded.

"That's one special little girl," he said.

"How do you spell 'house'?" Vivi asked.

"House?" Anne asked, then spelled it slowly for her.

I couldn't resist peeking over her shoulder. "You want to build a treehouse?" I asked.

"Very much so! On the camel hump, up behind the cottage. Can I?"

"We shall see," I said, trying to remember if there were a tree on our property that was large enough to support a treehouse.

Instantly, Vivi stuck out her lip in a forced pout. "When Mummy

says ‘we shall see,’ it almost always means no.” She screwed her pout into a determined grimace as she added “with curtains” behind “build a treehouse.”

By the time we reached the small depot at Copenhagen, New York, Vivi had a list of thirty-six items.

I read through the list and nodded at the things I knew we could easily do. Others would not be as easy. “See a fairy?” I asked.

“I’m certain there are fairies around the rocky spot under the trees,” Vivi mused. “Maybe if we build fairy houses there . . .” Vivi bent over the paper again and added “build fairy houses” to her list.

It was midday by the time we approached Clayton. I quickly packed the things we had used during our trip. I folded Vivi’s two-paged “What I Want to Do at the River List” and placed it in my reticule.

Vivi had moved from the table to the comfortable chairs on the other side of the car and was busily counting cows. Anne and I talked about the season ahead of us.

“You know this railroad car is bigger than our entire cottage,” Anne said. “Both our bedchambers are so small. Where will Vivi sleep?”

“Didn’t I tell you? I wrote Hunk and asked him to make a trundle bed that we can roll out from beneath my single bed.”

Anne nodded.

“I’m sorry, I’ve been so busy with Vivi and the end of school, I must have forgotten to mention it.”

Anne patted my hand. “Have you made any decisions about where you will live when we return?”

I shut my eyes. “I don’t want to think about *anything* right now. Life has been such a whirlwind as of late. I’m hoping after a few weeks on the river, things will seem clearer and less muddled in my head.”

Again, Anne only nodded in response.

Vivi joined us then, wanting to play the alphabet game. We set about finding the alphabet in the world that whizzed by: animals, barns, chickens, dogs, eggs (Vivi was certain she saw one or two in a hedgerow nest), fields, goats, horses, an icehouse, a Jersey cow, kicking cows, lambs, mud, yet another nest, an orchard, pigs, quacking ducks, roosters, silos, a trough, a man who was obviously someone’s uncle, vegetables, a windmill, a barn door with a big X on it, yellow flowers, and, of course, zither music.

"I didn't hear any zither music," Anne said.

"I have very good hearing," Vivi explained, "and I'm certain I heard a zither playing."

"Did you recognize the melody?" Anne asked.

Vivi waved her hand dismissively. "It was some tune that I'm not acquainted with," she said, sounding very grown-up.

Delroy happened to be walking by at this moment and hid a smile behind his gloved hand. We shared an amused look.

Anne is a firm believer in the three gates of speech, the principle that one should only utter sentiments that are true, necessary, and kind. Clearly, Anne was dubious about the veracity of Vivi's last statement. Anne said nothing but looked vexed.

I had played the alphabet game with Vivi a hundred times in the past month. It had always ended with mysterious zither music that I couldn't hear and always ended right after Vivi heard it. Did I believe that Vivi actually heard zither music while on a train chugging through northern New York? Of course not. But I saw no harm in humoring her. Anne obviously disagreed.

"Let's play again," Vivi suggested, already focusing her attention on the countryside searching for something that started with the letter *A*.

"I don't think we have enough time. Delroy, how long do we have until we arrive in Clayton?" I asked.

Delroy had shed his white apron and was wearing his blue porter's jacket and cap. "Pullman Porter," was written on the brass plate on the cap. It glistened in the morning light. He pulled a watch from his pocket and opened it. "Only about five minutes more, Miss Hartranft," Delroy said. "I'll be gatherin' up your belongings."

I followed Delroy to our berth compartment to retrieve Vivi's hat and gloves for her to wear on the wharf.

"But Auntie, I prefer big bows to hats. Today, I would like to have a white bow because white goes with everything. Twenty-six!" she shouted, having reverted to counting cows in my absence. "I almost missed that one."

"But the sun is bright today. A hat will shade your face more. You don't want freckles, do you?"

Vivi brought a finger to her lips as if deep in concentration. "I do not

like those dots. Perhaps I can go without my hat now and use lemon on the spots later. Mummy says dabbing lemon juice on the dots makes them disappear.”

The word “Mummy” pricked me like a hatpin—a sharp wincing pain deep inside me. It reminded me that Lily was gone. This stabbing sense of loss was immediately followed by the ever-present worry that no matter how hard I tried, I would never be able to replace my dear sister’s loving presence in Vivi’s life.

The whistle blew, the train slowed, the brakes screeched, and we came to a lurching stop at the wharf in Clayton. The engine let out a *whoosh* of steam as if relieved to be here at long last. I looked out the window and caught sight of the sparkling blue waters of the St. Lawrence. I let out a heavy sigh. I was here at last.

There was no need to rush. Mrs. Ingram had arranged for a private steamer to take us to the island this year. There was no need to battle the crowd pouring from the train to secure a favorable spot on the steamer. We could take our time and disembark at our leisure.

As Delroy began unloading our trunks and crates onto a cart, I pulled on my gloves. I looked out the window and saw that a small crowd, including a few newspapermen, had gathered outside our car. They craned their necks to catch sight of who might emerge from the exclusive executive club car—a titan of industry, a star of stage or vaudeville, or perhaps even royalty? The Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901 had brought European royalty to the Thousand Islands. The islands had become a magnet for the rich and famous.

They were disappointed when they saw a nattily dressed girl with a fancy hat and two plainly dressed women step down from the car.

The moment Vivi stepped from the train, she squealed, “Mr. Peppermint!” and ran. In an instant, she was gone, swallowed up by the crowd.

“Vivi,” I called out, trying to keep the panic from my voice. “Vivi!”
Nothing. No response.

I rushed forward. “Vivi!” I called again, louder this time. In my head, I heard my mother’s voice from long ago reminding me that a lady should never raise her voice above a whisper. She had emphasized that to shout in public like a fishmonger was below our position in life.

Something stirred in the pit of my stomach. What if harm came to Vivi? I was responsible for her now. "Vivi!" I called out again. A few heads turned my way. I followed the path she took, looking over men's bowler hats and around women's hats festooned with flowers and feathers. "Excuse me. Pardon me," I said as I pushed my way through the crowd. "Have you seen a little girl?" It seemed no one heard me. They were all consumed in their own affairs and oblivious to my query.

At last, I spied the top of Vivi's hat, its pink and burgundy flowers fluttering in the breeze. She was talking to a large Negro porter, who was on one knee in front of her. Vivi pushed the brim of her hat, so it slid from her head and fell to her back, safely secured to her by ribbons tied beneath her chin. She leaned forward and hugged the man, her small arms barely able to encompass his broad shoulders.

The man's dark face tipped back and a booming laugh filled the air. "Vivi," I called out again.

The man saw me approach and struggled to his feet with the help of a crutch. I noticed that while he had strong, powerful shoulders, one leg was shorter than the other. His crutch was attached to his arm with a strap, so when he stood, his arms were free to lift and carry. "Miss Vivi, your governess has caught up with you and she doesn't look too happy."

Governess? I thought. But then I looked at how Vivi was dressed. Vivi was wearing a petal-pink dress with puffed sleeves, a burgundy velvet sash, and a lace hem. Her shoes were dyed to match her sash. The flowers on her hat were the same perfect pink as her dress. I was dressed very simply in a white shirtwaist, dark walking skirt, and unadorned boater. Even my gloves were plain. I suppose I did look like a governess. It was a rational assumption.

Vivi turned to see me. "That's not my governess, that's my Aunt Marguerite."

"Oh, I see the family resemblance now. Where is Miss Lily?" the large man asked, pulling his handkerchief from his front pocket and mopping the perspiration from his face.

"Mummy's dead. Aunt Marguerite takes care of me now," Vivi said. "This is Mr. Peppermint! Our favorite porter."

The smile fell from the man's face. He turned his yellowed eyes toward me with such a sorrowful look—a pleading look—as if he were

begging me to tell him it wasn't true. "The name's Eli, ma'am. You mean her mama, Miss Lily. . ." he said to me as if he couldn't even utter the question aloud.

I nodded. "Died of scarlet fever in February."

The man dropped his head and dabbed at his eyes this time.

I tilted my head to one side and studied the man. "Thousands transferred from train to steamer at this wharf each summer. Was my sister so memorable?"

Eli nodded. "That she was! Always a kind word. Always asked after my kin and always let me know she valued my service," he said, patting his pocket, which jingled with coins. "Don't get me wrong, I appreciated her generous tips but I woulda hustled for her on that smile alone. My sympathies to your family, miss," Eli said.

I dropped to one knee and turned Vivi toward me so I could look directly into her eyes. "Vivi, you must not run from me like that in a public place. In such a crowd," I said.

Vivi's eyebrows scrunched together as if I had made a nonsensical request and she was trying to figure out the rationale behind it. "But Auntie, I saw Mr. Peppermint—I mean Mr. Eli. It's been a whole year! He is my favorite porter. He always has a peppermint for me." Vivi held up the peppermint in her hand.

"Be that as it may, I was worried. You may get lost."

"Lost!" Now her face brightened. She smiled and giggled as if she had just heard a funny joke. "Auntie, the train is there and the steamer is over there! How could I get lost?"

I grabbed Vivi's gloved hand in my own gloved hand and pulled her closer to me.

"Miss . . . ?" Eli leaned on his crutch.

"Marguerite," I provided as I rose to my feet.

"You's in the executive car, right?"

"Yes."

"I'll retrieve your luggage for you. You on the *Islander*?"

"A private steam yacht is meeting us this year—the *Mabel*. There! I see it approaching the dock now."

"Yes 'em," Eli said as he tipped his cap to me, and then to Vivi before he turned and hobbled with a quick peg leg gait toward the executive car.

As I watched Eli disappear into the crowd, I saw Anne. One gloved hand shaded her eyes as she panned the wharf, looking for us. I raised my hand and waved to her. When I saw that she was walking toward us, I sunk to one knee again and looked directly into Vivi's face. "Vivi, it's not proper for a little girl to run in a public place, especially one so crowded."

"But why?"

"You could get hurt."

"I don't see how. I . . ."

"Vivi," I said, my tone sharper than I had intended. She stopped and looked at me with big eyes. The words were on the tip of my tongue and would have spilled from my mouth if I hadn't quickly pressed my lips together. But the words were there and echoed in my head. *Please curb your impulse to question everything. You do not need to understand. You need only to listen and obey.* If my mother had said that to me once, she had said it a thousand times. Oh, how I hated those words. That I had nearly said the same thing to little Vivi shocked me to my core.

"Look! Auntie! Kittens!" Vivi shouted. Like a shot, she dashed off in the direction she had pointed, her hat blowing back from her head again and flopping against her long curls with each step.

My mother's words—*You need only to listen and obey*—repeated in my head. Instantly, another voice, a male voice, offered a rebuttal. *Resist much. Obey little.* Those were the words of Walt Whitman. It had been twenty-three years ago, when at the tender age of sixteen, I had deceived my parents, took a train to the Thousand Islands, and attended a symposium on Walt Whitman. I'd met the Good Gray Poet at Hub House. He had signed my copy of *Leaves of Grass* with that quote. That quote had given me the impetus to strike out on my own, attend college, and get my degree and advanced degrees in the classics. I was now a full professor at the Graduate Department for Women at the University of Pennsylvania. Where would I be if I had only listened and obeyed?

"Auntie! Aren't they adorable? Look at this one! It has one blue eye and one green eye. Oh, but this one has the cutest pink nose. Can we get one? Can we get two? There's plenty of room in the cottage for two kittens. They're so small!" Vivi picked up the kitten with one blue eye and one green eye and hugged it to her.

"Great mousers, ma'am. They're good for keeping the mouse

population down at your cottage,” the young boy said. “Only a dime apiece. Three for a quarter.”

“Three! Oh, Auntie! Please?” Vivi said, picking up two more kittens and hugging them all to her.

“They are darling,” I said. “But I’m afraid cats make Friend Anne sneeze. Besides, we don’t have a mouse problem at our cottage.”

“Look! Auntie! The river has come up over the dock to greet us.”

At the word *look*, I reached out for her gloved hand. As I suspected, she lunged in the direction where she had pointed. I pulled her close to me. Again, I dropped to one knee. “Vivi, look at me. It’s not proper for young ladies to run in public.”

Vivi pushed her lips together into a pout and huffed out a breath. Her shoulders slumped.

“And pouting only makes you look babyish,” I said, giving her hand a little squeeze.

There was a splash as another steamer wake sloshed over the dock. A collective gasp rose from the crowd as everyone surged back toward the railroad station. Travelers picked up their valises and stepped back as the wake rolled over the timbers wetting shoes and skirt hems.

“See Vivi, if you had run over there, you might have gotten all wet,” I said. *Or slipped off the dock into the water*, I thought but did not say.

Vivi opened her mouth to reply, but I held up my hand. “That does not require a response,” I informed her.

Friend Anne had once again caught up to us. “The river is incredibly high. I have never seen it this high before.”

“Yes,” the boy with the kittens said. “My grandpop says he’s never seen the river this high in all his years. Came up two weeks ago. Had a storm last Wednesday. Quite a blow! Water came up four feet higher than this. Water was over this dock—all the way to the tracks iff’n’ you can believe it. Look downriver! You can see that the coal dock was tore from its moorings. Washed clean away. Lots of damage up and down the river.”

Now that the water had receded, dockhands were maneuvering a makeshift stairway next to the steamer *Islander*. Usually, the gangway is angled slightly up early in the season and angled down late in the season. With the water level so high, the steamer was floating well above the wharf. A gangway would be too steep.

"Loading and unloading steamers takes a little more time now. Can't roll the luggage on with carts no more," the boy told us.

We turned back to watch two men struggle as they lugged a steamer trunk up the stairs.

"I see," I said, taking the kittens away from Vivi one by one and putting them back into the box.

"Sure you don't want a kitten or two?" the boy asked.

"They are darling, but we'll have to pass. Come, Vivi! I see Eli has gathered all of our luggage on a cart. We'll make our way to the *Mabel*."

"The *Mabel*? We're taking a *private* steamer to the island?" Anne asked.

"Yes," I said, turning to Anne, feeling my face redden with embarrassment. However, I don't know why I should be embarrassed. I didn't make the arrangements. "Mrs. Ingram made all the plans for our trip, including a private executive car and the *Mabel*. She was following the plans from the last two years when Lilly and the girls visited us."

"I see," Anne said.

Anne is Quaker and lives an austere life of simplicity. For nearly two decades, I have lived in Anne's house, managing the household for my room and board. I have acclimated to a Quaker life. So I understand why Anne balks at extravagance.

I reached down to grab Vivi's hand but she was gone again. "Vivi? Where did she go now?"

I looked about and saw the top of her hat as she walked beside Eli as he pushed a cart loaded with steamer trunks and hatboxes.

"There you are, Vivi. You must . . ." I started when I caught up with her.

She turned to me and tilted her head toward me, her eyes bright, "What? Auntie, I didn't run. I walked very calmly over to Mr. Eli."

"Vivi, you must stay beside me while we are on the wharf, especially in a large crowd. There are so many people. I don't want you to get lost."

"But I'm not lost," Vivi insisted. "I'm right here!"

"You be good, Vivi. And listen to your aunt," Eli said.

"Vivi, I must insist that you stay next to me when we are on the wharf or in a crowd. If you want to go somewhere, you only have to ask me first and I will go with you," I explained.

- *Lynn E. McElfresh* -

Vivi let out a sigh again. “Mummy never made me stay next to her,” she mumbled and turned to watch the dock boys as they dragged a set of makeshift stairs to the *Mabel*. Her tone had not been sharp, yet it was said with a degree of annoyance that wounded me.

My role as a guardian is more demanding than my role as an aunt.



As the crew began loading a summer's worth of luggage and supplies onto the sleek steam yacht *Mabel*, Capt. Morgan welcomed us aboard. "Mrs. Ingram had asked that we prepare a luncheon for you," the captain informed us. "I can have the steward set the table up in the salon or here on the fan deck."

"I want to eat outside," Vivi interjected.

"If it isn't too windy," I said. "We must make sure your hat is properly tied on, so we don't lose it overboard. How is the wind today, captain?"

"If I thought it were too windy, I wouldn't have suggested the outdoor venue, I assure you," Capt. Morgan said with a smile appearing from beneath his well-trimmed mustache.

"Then we'd love to eat on deck, if it isn't too much trouble," I said.

"The table has already been set up. Mrs. Ingram suggested that this would be your preference. Please explore the yacht if you wish. Whenever you're ready, luncheon will be served. If you'll excuse me, I will make sure your provisions are all loaded and properly secured." Capt. Morgan brought his fingers to the brim of his captain's cap and gave us a deferential nod before turning and leaving.

"Come! I want to show you the salon," Vivi said, pulling on my hand.

I pulled back on her hand, bringing Vivi's forward progress to a stop. I knelt in front of her, looked into her eyes, and said in a whispery voice,

"Vivi, I have a secret to share." Immediately, her eyes were focused on me. "Vivi, it is impolite to interrupt two adults when they are talking. Next time, please squeeze my hand so I know that you want to ask a question or make a comment. You must wait for me to address you. You're a bright girl. I know that you can manage this. I know you can be the most well-mannered girl the *Mabel* has ever seen, can't you?"

A huge grin spread across her face and Vivi nodded. I took her hand as I rose. At first, Vivi pulled me about the yacht like a dog pulling on its leash. After sharing another "secret" with her, we walked civilly here and there as we admired the salon's posh interior.

The steward had a tray of tea sandwiches on the table. "Lemonade for the little lady. May I serve you ladies tea?"

"That would be lovely, thank you," I said.

"My, this is quite elegant, a bit out of my purview," Anne said as she picked up her linen napkin, shook it out, and placed it on her lap.

The steward returned with a pot of tea and two small canisters, one with whole cloves and one with cinnamon imperials.

"I'm impressed with Mrs. Ingram's attention to detail," Anne said.

"Indeed," I agreed.

"What sort of sandwiches are on the tray?" Vivi asked.

"We have three types," the steward said, moving closer to point out which sandwich was which. "There is watercress and cucumber with basil butter on rye, smoked salmon with dill butter on dark bread, and peanut butter and pimento on white bread."

"Peanut butter and pimento is my favorite," Vivi said.

"That's what we were told," the steward replied.

"What in heaven's name is peanut butter?" I asked. "I've never heard of it."

"It's only the bestest thing ever," Vivi said, reaching for the tray.

I held my hand out to indicate that she should wait to be served.

"We hadn't heard of it either," the steward admitted. "It's rather hard to come by. Luckily, Mrs. Ingram sent a tin. Oh! I almost forgot . . . we're supposed to send it along with you. I'll retrieve it from the galley before I forget."

"Iris and Ivy had peanut butter and pimento sandwiches at some tearoom in Manhattan. They liked the peanut butter so much, they

brought a tin back with them," Vivi said.

"I've heard of peanut butter before," Anne said as she served Vivi two tea sandwiches and took one for herself. "Dr. Kellogg, the director of the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan, came up with the concoction decades ago. A concessionaire at the St. Louis World's Fair is promoting it as a health food. Terribly expensive, though."

By the time we finished our tea sandwiches, our supplies and luggage were safely aboard. We were munching on macaroons and gingersnap cookies when the captain reported that we were ready to shove off. He assured me that even the opened tin of peanut butter had been packed into one of the crates.

As the *Mabel* announced her departure with a sweet toot of her steam whistle, I bent to secure Vivi's hat. Vivi edged along the starboard-side railing and onto the bow to watch our transit from Clayton to Grenell.

"Look, Auntie! That boathouse is sinking!" Vivi shouted, pointing to a boathouse on Washington Island.

"The boathouse does look as if it is sinking but its not. The river has risen up over the docks and into the boathouse. The boathouse is in the same place. The river is higher."

Everywhere I looked, the river overwhelmed the islands. Rocky shorelines were submerged. In some places, the high water engulfed the roots of shoreline trees. A few tiny islands were totally underwater with only a telltale top of a tree or bush alerting sailors to their presence.

Capt. Morgan invited Vivi to take a turn at the wheel. As the captain and engineer gave Vivi quick pointers on yacht navigation, I wondered if the Grenell Island Store dock were completely submerged. Then a little more frantically, I worried if our small dock were there at all. Several years back, we had replaced the two-plank dock with a more substantial dock supported by rock-filled cribs. Ice floes sometimes wrenched docks from their cribbing during the spring thaw. High water and wind were equally destructive. Had our dock survived last Wednesday's storm?

Anne joined me at the railing. "The river was high two years ago, but not like this. I've never seen the river this high. I hope our dock is still there." We shared a concerned look.

Two large cottages had been built on Bluff Island at the turn of the century. Both had covered porches that overlooked the shipping channel.

When we passed the first one, Mrs. Robinson and her two daughters, Mary Mason and Anne, came to the railing of the deep porch and waved to us. When we passed the second cottage—near the foot of the island, Mrs. Kessler and her daughter waved to us from their porch.

Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Kessler were sisters of our dear Grenell Island friend, Clara Kerr. The Robinsons and the Kesslers had spent several summers renting guesthouses on Grenell before they bought and built on Bluff Island. I still think of the two families as part of the Grenell Island Park Community.

“They look high and dry,” I said.

By now, Vivi had relinquished the wheel and joined us at the rail. “Oh, Auntie! Do you think the water crept into our cottage?”

“No,” I said, rubbing Vivi’s back as if to brush away any worry. “Our cottage is perched high on a rock. I’m sure Castle Rock is just fine.” The dock I wasn’t so sure about, but didn’t share that with Vivi.

“Why do you call it Castle Rock? It doesn’t look like a castle. It isn’t even made of stone,” Vivi said.

“That is an excellent question,” Anne noted.

“It started as a joke, really,” I said. “You remember Mr. and Mrs. Sharples. They have the large stone cottage at the top of the island.”

“Yes! *Their* cottage looks like a castle,” Vivi said.

“That’s exactly what I thought. Mr. Sharples named their cottage, ‘Bungalow.’ That is a word for a home that is one-story, long and low.”

“That sounds like your cottage,” Vivi said.

“Right again! So I said to Mr. Sharples, ‘if you’re going to name your cottage, Bungalow, maybe we should name our cottage, Castle Rock.’”

Vivi threw her head back and laughed. Her laugh sounded like tiny silver bells. It was such a happy laugh that sounded so much like Lily that my heart ached and tears sprang to my eyes.

As we passed Maple Island, Capt. Morgan asked if he might have a word with me in the salon. I left Vivi with Anne and stepped inside. “Mrs. Dillworth contacted me last December and entered into negotiations to purchase this steam yacht. When Mrs. Ingram contacted me about the details for this trip, I asked if Mrs. Dillworth were still interested in purchasing the *Mabel*, and she said I should speak with you.”

The news stunned me. My flummoxed reaction caused Capt. Morgan