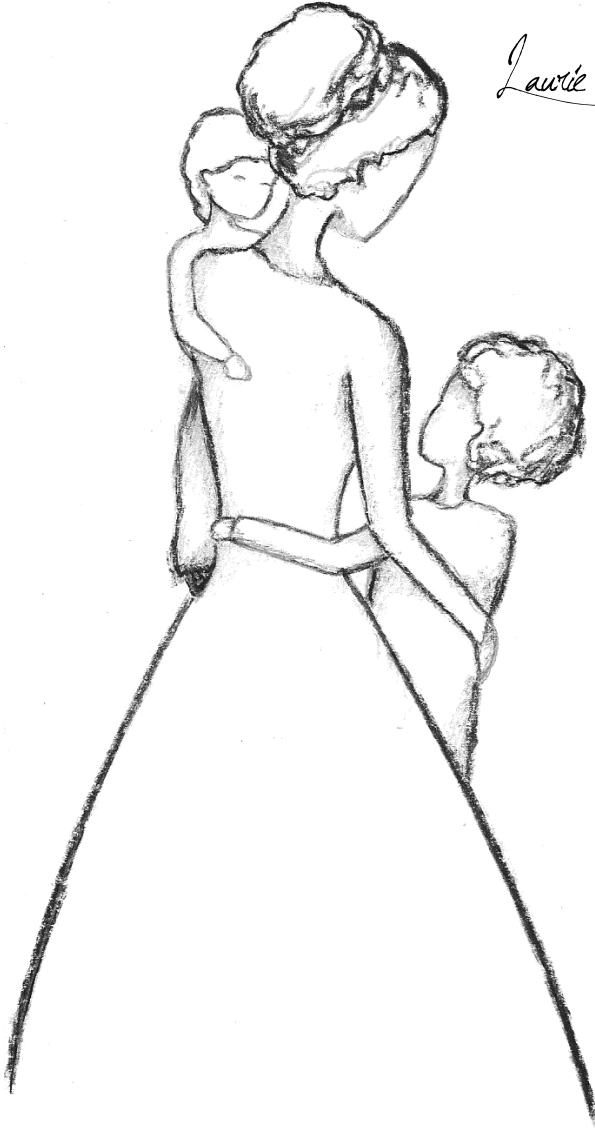


From Boom to Bloom

An original short story

Lucie Anne Merlott



FROM BOOM TO BLOOM

AN ORIGINAL SHORT STORY

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To my beloved mother Apple

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Preface

The story told is one of forgiveness and hope which a young widow, left with a newborn in a completely strange place, has to search out and embrace in a time when the English colonies were still struggling for survival in America.

The form of the book, a mix of letters, poems and diary entries, was one that I disliked because of the second-hand nature of the elements of the story; however, I appreciated the intimate manner in which they are unveiled and it is this precise point that made me want to write my own. The setting was chosen because it was dear to me, a place I had always wished to live, and that had accompanied my childhood through books of adventures such as *The Deerslayer*, by James Fenimore Cooper, set in those very areas.

The subject of bereavement was a consequence of the fact that, in order to write a correspondence, I needed two people to be kept apart and forced to communicate through letters. Mourning was perfect for that purpose. Though that theme might be common, it was completely new and unknown to me, as well as writing in the shoes of a mother and wife, simply because those are situations I have never lived yet; understanding and reacting as such has also been the main difficulty for me.

This work is not only mine: there were countless times when I had ideas and inspirations while simply talking with my family and the story was often the subject of conversation; jokes were made about it and the characters received nicknames; a melody was even created for a lullaby I had invented for the story.

During the hours that I spent writing, I felt closer and closer to the characters; describing their feelings often affected me as well, to the point that I am sad to have to end the story, because I became attached to them; in the same way, what the main character learnt during her journey, I have learnt; and I believe the reader can as well: when life hits someone in the face

and lets them no time to get back on their feet, they have to take a step back and consider the events from an external point of view to find hope and good in what has happened; otherwise, they sink in desperation and never touch the bottom.

Writing that correspondence has been an invaluable experience of life which has taught me openness to others, patience and perseverance.

PART I

Naught (Poem by Nehemiah Cox)

Understanding clothed the myriads of my dreams ;
A million conceited songs buoying me up,
I paraded, sustained by ambition's white beams,
While vanity and vainglory ate my core up ...

As I proudly pranced like a presumptuous prince,
Insured of my invulnerability,
I was raptured, captured, tortured, bashed, lashed,
mashed, squashed;
I fell down, passive, captive, unwilling to live.

From the ground I saw the bloodthirsty scavengers,
Vultures of fear slyly circling, ruthless beggars,
And as in dread I awaited the mortal hit,
Fright howlings hurled me into a bottomless pit.

I woke up to behold a world of meaninglessness,
Impassive nothingness, stoical hopelessness;
A despair that filled my bones, ran into my skin.
Will I die, will I live ? I don't care.

To Mrs Eve Cox. Fort Albany 20th June. 1698

Dear Madam,

We are truly sorry to inform you of the kidnapping of your husband Mr Nehemiah Cox by an Indian tribe near Fort Hope. His liberation is being negotiated and your presence is requested here as soon as the weather or any necessary arrangements make it possible for you.

Yours faithfully,

Lieutenant Wilfred, Fort Hope

Eve's diary

7 July 1698, in the morning – I am leaving for Fort Hope in just a few hours. Clara has just finished settling in my room. Susanna and Azel Jacob were delighted to have their aunt live here for the next month, although they seemed sad that we wouldn't be

together for a while; I couldn't tell them about their father so long as things are unclear. I said I was going to take care of family business, and those courageous children of mine didn't ask any more questions. Only Zeli looked at me with his quiet yet uneasy wide green eyes. His look is the same as his father's, so bright and full of sparkling light; and he already feels like the man of the house, at six years old. It's tearing my heart.

And what if I lost Nehemiah ? What if I was left alone again, and away from home ? What if ...

But I will go; I must bring my husband back to his children and his sister, and to me. I trust that God will help me reunite my family and that my love for Nehemiah will harden my forehead against difficulties and strengthen my back to struggle until I win.

To Clara Cox, Fort Albany 1st November, 1698

My dearest Clara,

Nehemiah's dead.

Even though I see my fingers form those words, I had never imagined I would have to write them before long; their reality still is strange to my heart. It feels so cold.

He was mistakenly killed in a surprise attack on the Indian village where he was being imprisoned; the fact that he was also a preacher didn't change anything for those savages. From the three other runners of the woods who left home with him, two escaped before the kidnapping and made it to Fort Hope, from where the Lieutenant urged me to come; the other one managed to free himself during the attack and despite several deep wounds, arrived last night. He was carrying Nehemiah's Bible with a few papers, apparently poems he wrote these last few months. Clara, when he gave me those documents, I dared not touch them at first; I feared that the violent beating of my heart would topple them, and that like an elusive vapor, my hands would destroy these invaluable relics of a time already lost.

I eventually grabbed them, ran to my room and cried all night.

I'm asking you to tell Susanna and Zeli; I know you will let them understand their misery in the softest way possible, if telling children they are orphans can ever be soft.

Snow widely covers the paths and the lakes have started freezing; frost and forest are about to become one under a cold white sun. I'll have to spend the winter here. And through all this, I'm expecting. I am now well rounded up and my whole body is sore. When I noticed this vulnerable presence inside of me, I felt my heart crumble. This poor thing will spring up full of life, and fall down like a flower on ashes. It will fade, stifled by this mourning world. And Nehemiah never knew.

Missing you,

Eve

Sleepless (Poem by Nehemiah Cox)

Lifeless I lay in the soggy dusk,
Wrecked and struck down by fear's tusk,
Sneering, smirking at my feeble knees;
What a ghastly slaughter my life is ...

Shameful are those wounded eyes of mine,
Full of pain and shivering scare.
Hurt I bow down and gaze at the line
Between life and death, neglect and care.

Restless and sleepless I beg my Lord ;
One last breath is all I can afford.
About to step into night's dark den,
I am a broken man.

Eve's diary

26 November 1698, Fort Hope – Had I been killed, it wouldn't have hurt more. Had my body been torn apart, my wounds would've been slighter than those who hurled me in this grim cave of confusion. And had it been me who was dying, I wouldn't have minded, as long as he was safe ...

Oh, how gladly I would have taken his place! God, can't I take his place? I don't understand this! I just can't take it! Where is your unfailing justice? Where is righteousness? How can this be called fair? Why this sacrifice? Was that really your will? Weren't you satisfied when you took my parents that you should also take my husband? Are you such a ravenous God?

I am withering away on the ground like an empty shell; my hands still hold the food I eat, but it's falling into a hole; the water I drink freezes inside of me; my eyes still gaze at the light, but all I see is white nothingness and meaninglessness. Blind, deaf, dumb, I wander and stumble, get back up and bite the dust again; unmoved, I go on, because doing anything else is out of my reach. Powerless, I proceed.

30 November, at night – Empty. Shriveling, wilting, dried out, I barely breathe. No more wailing, no more whining, no more weeping. Tears have turned into ice on the walls of my unconscious heart. I am waiting, miserable, for a sun that is never coming back.

To Eve Cox Fort Hope 19th November, 1698

Dearest Eve,

Words could never express how deeply sorry I feel, and how hard I wish I could be there with you. What happened is terrible, simply dreadful; I know your loss is closing your heart on the loved universe you knew so far and opening your eyes on a completely strange and cold world, missing the person who had given your life a meaning.

Nehemiah was a man of exception who never failed to make way for justice and kindness wherever he went. Doubtlessly he has left a place that will never be possibly filled in the same loving way again. Being his sister was always a privilege I cherished and an honour; and from now on, our hearts will always hurt, because losing a husband, father and brother leaves a home without foundations.

Receiving your letter was a relief, and in the middle of our tragedy, I am still thankful to know you are well. Eve, this little one you are carrying and feeding is a true gift, as much as Zeli and Susanna, and he will need all the love we will be able to give.

I did what you asked me to. I have told your children that their father wouldn't come back. It is the most heartrending thing I've ever said, and even though I tried to be as affectionate as I could, it still felt like I was stabbing their souls; I knew that their lives would never be the same again.

Zeli asked me when he would return, and said he hoped it would be before his seventh birthday, because I had promised to help him make his favorite cake, and he wanted his daddy to taste it and see what a great cook he's becoming.

For now two days, Zeli has been pacing through the house, not wanting to go out. I can hardly get him to eat ; his roaming look constantly runs on the walls and windows without ever resting on anything and softly mumbling a lullaby that I remember you sang to him when he was little :

*Hide me forever,
And never let me go.
Hold me together,
Because you love me so.*

He falls asleep murmuring it.

Susanna has come back to her everyday life, but she is always on the alert. She doesn't understand what is happening, all she feels is her big brother's anxiety. I am trying my best to spread in this house all the comfort I have in store; I offer them my arms and my heart.

Reality is a complicated world on which none of us humans has a perfect view; Eve, even though you have no landmark, no familiar face to hold on to in those hostile and foreign lands in which you were thrown by mourning, I beg you to look inside of your heart, find this sparkle of light and love you've always had, and follow it. Despite the turmoil, please stand strong, for your children's sake. They will need you. Know that I stand with you, and you are in my prayers.

With all my love,

Clara

To Clara Cox, Fort Albany 6th December, 1698

My dear Clara,

Listen to that if you can, then repeat that I have to follow love and light if you dare. You don't know how things happened as I do, as Mr Kenway told them to me before he died, as if he were telling me the story of his own death.

The men were brutally attacked on a river side not long after they had left Fort Albany; two of the four, including Nehemiah, were easily kidnapped and dragged to Sahale, the French-allied village, a village of mocking women and arrogant children, insulting them and throwing mud at their faces, where the burden of humiliation and slavery was heavier from day to day.

Months went by, and with them all their tears and courageous attempts to escape. They were exhausted of knowing that home was too far from them to hope ever to return. When one night they felt the roaring of war rush through the tepees, they soon assumed that Sahale was being attacked in the dark by Fort Hope's other neighboring Indian village, the English-allied Milap. Their sworn enemies! That hatred was obvious

to see in the shrieking, screaming of Milap men swooping on the withdrawing Indians, powerless to defend their livestock, much less their families. Through this panic, an arrow stabbed Nehemiah's back as they were trying to escape; he gave his companion those documents that were then handed to me, and expired on enemy soil, unknown and unheard of in the turmoil of the fight.

Mr Kenway, who had managed to get away and crawl to Fort Hope, died of his wounds; his face exhausted, his body hurt, his spirit restless. Milap village, allied to us, should have protected and rescued our prisoners, but they blindly attacked out of rage. Have they no laws ? No respect ? No sense of honour ?

Sahale was not going to overlook this outrage; they fell on Milap two weeks ago to avenge their brothers' blood and left the village a smoky heap of ruins. They killed Milap's chief and his wife. Their thirteen-year-old daughter, Matisoon, ran off and after one week of wandering in the forest, was caught sneaking around Fort Hope hoping to steal food, horses or weapons; whatever she intended to do, she was prevented from it, because she was seized and brought inside the fort. Since she is from an allied village, Lieutenant Wilfred decided to simply keep her as a stable girl and let her work to earn her food.

So this girl, whose father's tribe has killed my husband, impassively walks before my window twenty times a day, sometimes waving at me with a shy stupid smile, as if our pasts were just a detail that didn't matter.

Can you recall, Clara, how lost, confused and insignificant I felt when I arrived at Fort Albany twelve years from now, having just lost my family and home in the French attack? I felt like an intruder and whenever someone talked to me, it would warm up my heart and make me blithesome for the entire day!

Clara, when I look at Matisoon, I see myself. A pilgrim in the world in search of a new home, she fumbles and gropes clumsily. An orphan, like me. Fugitive, like me. A survivor, a fighter, like me. Desperate for love, like me. But she is the enemy! She is Indian! She is around me night and day, gazing at me with her wide innocent eyes, not understanding why my look on her is resentful and unkind. Foolish and obnoxious! –she is the dark corner of my life.

I fear her.

So, Clara, what do you say now? Still words of peace and forgiveness? Does the murder of your brother leave you untouched? Oh, I bet it does not!

I do not understand what the purpose of all this suffering is, but there is no cause that I know of that could be worth it.

Please give my love to Zeli and Susanna; I miss them so much ...

Still yours,

Eve

Dark, dawn, day (Poem by Nehemiah Cox)

Dark

The somber spot sprawling at my feet, the sap of my
strength, tears and blood,
Is the blaming banner of my defeat: I lost the war.
Against men, I lost; against myself, I lost; against God,
I lost.
Men struck me; my heart failed me; God silenced me.
The last brick of this broken wall sorely slipped from
my hand: Pride is no more.
To life I avow: You won.

Dawn

The dim, dusky sails of sleek silk hissing and kissing
my strayed spirit
Are gone. Undone, by dawn.
Hints of glints of bright white scarred the veil of night,
ended the fight;
The first pale rays never lie: the day will surely come.
And with it, hope.

Eve's diary

8 December 1698 – This goes beyond my understanding, beyond what I comprehend, beyond everything natural. Why did he, he my husband, just give up, give in and let go? Then what about our children?

What about Zeli, this young orphan, son of a martyr, heir of our name, our faith, our courage, who while the little boys his age carelessly play outside in the sun, keeps chafing the wooden floor with his anguished feet? And Susanna, our tiny impish rosebud, not yet open, who will never know the man the house she abides in was built on?

9 December, in the night – Nehemiah always told me that everything happens for a reason, and turns out to be good in the end. He told me this while bringing me an apple at thirteen years old, when I was crying after my parents' death behind the school of a fort I had just arrived in, desperate to find security again. He told me this while holding my hands, when we married five years later, his eyes looking into mine with a love stronger than anything human. He told me

this time and time again in our first years of raising Zeli, and then Susanna, and through all odds, he had always been right. But this time, he can't be. Because he left. He abandoned me willingly by refusing to fight anymore and not even attempting to escape; by choosing to wait, just wait, simply wait. Stupidly, cowardly wait. I hate him for that! Where is the man who protected this house ? Where is he ?

To Clara Cox, Fort Albany 30th December, 1698

Dear Clara,

You are the aunt of Andrew Kenneth Cox, my son who was born at the last ray of the sunset on December 28th! We are both well; Andrew must feel a strong vocation to use his voice, because his first cry was probably louder than a troop of trumpeting horsemen; as of me, the excitement of his presence fairly outshines my weariness. But let me tell you how it happened :

That day, in the afternoon, as I was helping Coalman (he regularly burns the meals) the army cook in his kitchen, I felt the pains of labor beginning to run me over; I somehow reached my room and laid down on my bed, sustained by his helper and him, who vigorously encouraged my arduous walk and indeed, I was chugging ; as the minutes passed, apprehension became the main feeling taking over my mind.

As I was staring at the dark wooden ceiling, frightened and quivering, I heard the entrance door open and a pair of heavy and light footsteps approaching. I heard "Mrs Cox, this girl says she helped many women give birth at her village, so we have thought she could be of

some use ...” and I laboriously turned my head to blurt out an unpleasant grunt of disappointment, although I was thankful for Coalman’s attention and kindness.

It was Matisoon, and as usual, a timid smile began its course on her brown face. I could not believe it. Here she was again, to annoy me! I grumped and grinned, more out of anger than of pain, and she ran to my side like a little dog I would have called. She has stuck to me until Andrew’s birth !

At some point, that girl even wanted to make me deliver standing on my feet, like a cow ! – she said that’s what they do in their uncivilized tribe, and she insisted so much with her repellent sugary voice that right before the baby arrived, I had to shout to make her silent. I didn’t want him to land in a quarrel.

So this is how this insolent child has persecuted me while I was giving birth – obviously unable to defend myself.

Seeing her hands receiving Andrew when he arrived was offensive to me; the chief had killed my husband, would his daughter also kill my son ? You never know what’s going on behind her forehead, and she is an Indian! An Indian, in my own room ... this fort has

turned from an allied refuge to an ambush! This disorientates me to insanity.

Please give my love to my children.

Yours in incomprehension,

Eve

To Eve Cox, Fort Hope 16th January, 1699

Dearest Eve,

How glad the three of us were, to read about Andrew Kenneth ! It is wonderful that you were able to give birth in such harsh conditions, and we are looking forward to seeing both of you when you return home, and to hold you and your baby !

Eve, first, there is something you need to know. A long time ago, there was in Fort Albany a young man called Nathaniel, who was born there and was also a runner of the woods like Nehemiah. He was such a wonderful man, so strong and courageous, and he loved me as much as I loved him; but we were not yet engaged when one day, he went hunting and never came back. He simply disappeared. He had come into my life and had gone like a sweet and bitter gust of wind. He had been a true gift from heaven, and although my heart was aching, I thanked God for him, for the time that I had been given with him.

Eve, I know how this feels, I understand; but aren't you ashamed to say such things ? You cannot blame God for Nehemiah's death, nor can you blame anyone

else; furthermore, you have no right to be hateful toward Matisoon. Your wrath is not your friend ! It is devouring you from the inside; certainly all you feel now is fire, but in the end, there will only remain ashes from you. Do not feed the vicious circle of rage ! Do not make other people victims of your own pain! You were a prey; do not turn into a predator !

You do not deserve anything by your own deeds; rather, everything you have is a gift. Let us be grateful for what we were given instead of sour because of what was taken from us. Being resentful won't bring it back, but it will blind you to everything else good, true and beautiful. Look at you, how sightless you already are ! You were more focused on how Matisoon's presence disturbed you than on the birth of your own son !

Eve, what you are going through is nothing easy or usual, but if you want to be the winner in the end, you need to get rid of the shackles of self-pity and anger that you are fastening on your own wrists, and fight for your freedom. Nobody else will do it for you !

I love you and I keep you in my prayers, because there is no dearest person to my heart.

Lovingly yours,

Clara

PART II

Eve's diary

2 March 1699, in the afternoon – I have been sick for about four weeks with a persistent fever and this unpalatable and elusive feeling of queasiness that is not overwhelming, though ever present. I still had kept on working until I fainted in the kitchen, and Coalman told me I looked as mealy as a peeled potato.

From then on, I have been studying the ceiling for such a long time, lying on my bed, that I can find animals and faces in all the wood nodes.

The hours that I spent, supine, on my bed, showed me an unseen spectacle of rhythms, each one at a different speed. There was the race of the sun, slowly climbing up the sky, resting at the top for an hour, contemplating the scenery, and then initiating the long descent back to the bottom, until the last farewell before night. There was the beating of my heart, faithful but weak, sometimes almost silent. There was the irregular noise of the horses outside, of their powerful neighing, and the rhythm of their hard hooves on the soft ground, the whole blending into a constant and reassuring melody of liberty. I could

imagine their rumps, all in a row, vivacious and impatient to run, careless and free.

The bright side of it is that I was not forced anymore to see this Soldier Lewis every time I went out. Maybe being a lunatic is his temper, but ever since I have arrived at Fort Hope, his reactions have been so irregular that I fear him. He can get enraged as swiftly as a thunderbolt, and become normal again before anybody could say anything. His behaviour is unpredictable and wayward. Thankfully, since I have been living in a rather commodious room upstairs in the fort's kitchen, Coalman often found a moment in the day to come too. He has generously brought me meals at noon and in the evening for all the time that I've been in bed; his loud humour has enlightened the house and has brought in a fresh and bulky gust of laugh.

Nevertheless, what can't be seen is that I am afraid to go home alone, afraid to stay here forever, I am afraid to live.

29 March 1699 – My existence is at idle speed. As if the days here at Fort Hope lasted twice as long as at Fort Albany. The hours are long, the hours are grey and muddy, the hours are insignificant. A

cumbersome routine of life, a yoke of weariness. Those never-ending hours leave me an aftertaste of unfinished work, which I don't have the strength to complete nonetheless. I feel dull, vain. Even seeing Matisoon doesn't ignite any more reaction in me.

14 April 1699, 11 am – This morning at 6 am, when I went outside to fetch water, there was an indescribable mood in the air and some kind of dust was floating. As I reached Coalman's kitchen, which is just next to the stables, I noticed that none of the horses was there. This had never happened since I was here; even when the soldiers go out, they leave us guards and horses.

At that moment, I saw a red feather on the ground, in the straw. Its end had been cut and a leather lace had remained attached. Perplexed, I brought it to Lieutenant Wilfred's office; he could tell me where this feather came from and why it was there. I imagined it was from the Indians, but I wanted to make sure. Seeing Matisoon on my way, I threw a cold look at her; I have always known that her presence in this fort was nothing good for us.

Soldier Lewis was present in the office too, but he didn't even deign to look at me. Lieutenant Wilfred

breathed deeply and explained stolidly, almost coldly, that they had noted the horses' theft earlier that morning. The feather was Indian indeed, and they were expecting an attack; but I would be taken care of. Then he considered me with calm eyes and commanded me in a grave voice to go back to my room, to gather my things, to get Andrew ready and to wait for Coalman to come for me. I returned to my room, confused. The explanation had left me unsatisfied because they kept me unable of mastering my own situation, and a goad of fear that I recognized stung me.

My bags are on the bed, Andrew is having a nap. For hours I have been watching soldiers bringing crates of ammunition to the tree trunk walls and towers of the fort; the windows have been armored with planks and sandbags, and everything valuable has been brought inside the warehouse. I have no idea of the events they're turbulently preparing for, but it looks serious and I am anguished, because I am absolutely unable to do anything at all.

I am waiting. The only noise is Andrew's constant respiration and the muffled sound of my slack feet sweeping the rough floor.

1 pm – We are in the kitchen’s cellar, hidden under the ground. There are cabbages on my right, turnips on my left, Andrew on my knees, Coalman in front of me, and Matisoon on his left.

Coalman landed heavily in my room almost two hours ago, gripped the bags, urged me to follow him and disappeared outside. I enfolded Andrew and ran after him. The fort was quiet, only spirals of powdery breeze were playfully dancing under the sun; but I noticed standstill soldiers stationed regularly all around the walls and on every guard tower, examining the forest outside.

Under the eyes of the women and children inside the houses watching me, I crossed the silent sandy square place and rapidly entered the kitchen without looking back ; I practically jumped into the open hole before me. There are spaces between the lid’s wood boards, large enough for me to pass my hand; but at least we’re safe for the time being.

Matisoon silently landed in our refuge a quarter of an hour after we arrived; at first, I was outraged of her coming; there was already so little space ! Yet I said nothing and without giving her a look, I went on observing Andrew’s sleepy face. And we are waiting. Waiting for the attack. Waiting like a wounded deer

waits for the hunter to kill it off, though without knowing where the mortal hit will come from. It is that sort of anxiety that we can all feel in the air we are breathing, in our movements, even in the rays of white light piercing through the spaces of the distorted planks.

15 April, 7 am – I want to write and record what has happened, because if we never reach Fort Albany, I want Clara and my children to know. I don't want Clara to see a loved one disappear again, for the pain of ignoring aches more than that of awareness; and I want to enable my children to think of their parents as resting and loving faces instead of vanished ghosts.

We got out of our refuge yesterday at around 6 in the afternoon. Shortly after Matisoon had arrived in the cellar, we heard acute shoutings, first in a foreign language and then loud orders in English. From then on, it was all a tumult of hazy voices, rumbling and covering one another with a rage out of control. After several long hours, it began to decrease until it became a splutter, and a menacing silence. Even Lieutenant Wilfred's grave voice wasn't there anymore. We had heard the Indians penetrate inside the fort, and we did not dare to hope for survivors. Then

Matisoon declared : “We must leave now. They will return with the women to gather the spoil and burn the fort”. And so we did.

There was no other noise outside than the English flag wildly flapping in the wind, and the discreet cracking of flames somewhere near. None of us said one word.

The inside of our fort was not recognizable. Lifeless bodies, English and Indians, could be seen on the ground, mostly inside the houses and next to the walls of the fort; all kinds of goods were scattered on the ground, dirty clothes, covers and sheets trembling in the air. As far as I could see, footsteps had sculpted the earth into a rough sea, and the mark of Indian hands was present everywhere.

When I saw such death where there had been so much life just a few hours ago, I hid my face in Andrew’s blanket; I couldn’t believe it, I didn’t want to. Fort Hope looked like a dying animal, ripped open, exposed and shameful. Once again, my home was ransacked.

Coalman grasped my arm and put me back on my feet. The four of us silently got out of the fort, following one another. Just before disappearing in the forest, I threw a last look back on this shelter that had seen life been given and taken away. From the

outside, nobody could have said there was anything unusual about it. The tree trunks seemed as strong as ever, although I knew the inside was rotten. At last I was able to leave this place. Even though they had been a safe protection for me, those walls had contained and retained too many emotions, provoking an internal torment. But I turned away with apprehension.

No sound was uttered for three hours, during which we walked through the thick forest with difficulty; after that, my feet and my back were sore, and I was exhausted, carrying Andrew.

When Coalman noticed my sweaty forehead and heavy walk, he said that we would soon stop for the night; we continued for a few minutes until we found a dark recess in the rock next to a powerful maple tree that would be our shelter for the night. Matisoon went to fetch some wood for a small but necessary fire.

After a scant dinner, I sighed : "I'd never seen so much violence in such a short time". Matisoon was passionately gazing at the dancing fire, and Coalman gently looked up to me; he began to talk softly : "You know how relations between Natives and English colonists are complicated and irregular. Today was a perfect picture of the use of Indians to achieve a self-

interested purpose. Sahale village was French-allied, and so was Soldier Lewis, known among them as Soldat Louis. Lieutenant Wilfred told me that just before I came to fetch you and he consigned me a letter that I have to send to England from Fort Albany”.

I sarcastically assumed our fort was a “threatening spot” on their map and Coalman silently nodded. I had always known that Solider Lewis, or Soldat Louis to be correct, was moody, but I had not imagined that. It left me upside down. I asked why the horses had been stolen, and why he had been commanded to take care of us. Coalman answered : “I suppose they wanted to steal our means of communication; plus, the Indians wouldn’t despise having a few horses more”. Here he had an amused smile : “I’m not worth a penny as a soldier with my clubfoot and poor eyesight; besides, you need someone to cook, right ?” I smiled too. I remembered when, last fall, I mistakenly threw what I thought to be coal in the large cast iron stove. The coal was fresh bread.

Just now, Matisoon has been contemplating Andrew in my arms with an ineffable expression of sadness on her tanned face. I wondered what she was thinking and whether she hated Sahale as much as I did, or if she even understood the amplitude of the arm

wrestling between England and France here. For the first time, I felt in my chest a flicker of compassion. She said nothing, lay down and closed her eyes.

The night is black above us.

PART III

Hope is (Poem by Nehemiah Cox)

Yesterday was a hazardous, dubious din,
a traceless trail ;
Today monotonically mumbles the measly notes
of a melancholic memory and
They say our future is baneful, fully filthy,
baleful and shabby.
I deny it. Survivor, I sustain
the steady standard of hope.

Hope, is embracing abundance wholly
when days weave havens of happiness ;
Hope, is daring to dance a tribute to life's beauty
on the thinnest tightrope ;
Hope, is blindly believing in the imperishable plan
of passion's redemption ;
Hope, is fiercely feeding a ruthless love for light
through night ;
Hope, is soaring above sore shores of shambles when
all else fails ;
Hope, is forgiving today its flaws and pursuing
tomorrow's promise of peace.

Hope is my law, my love, my leader ;
 Hope unfolds before me
 an unfathomable fullness of faith,
unrivalled root of mirth, and rejoicing,
 I am returning home.

Eve's diary

4 June, 1699, in the beginning of the afternoon – This is it. I have arrived in Fort Albany a few weeks ago. But still I want to come back to those events of our journey home and write the end of the story, my story. To be able to feel like it's over.

In the evening of the day after the massacre, which had consisted of long hours of tiring walk in the irregular forest, I read once again that poem, written as Nehemiah was contemplating the possibility of his death, and his peaceful words submerged me. I thought that maybe, yes maybe Nehemiah told the truth after all.

Against all odds, he had found hope in captivity! Perhaps hope was a guide that could be trusted. Perhaps love could still be sought out in this grieving world, perhaps this bewilderment could be reduced to dust through faith, perhaps I could determine the winner of my life and choose who, between hope or despair, would be sovereign over my existence. Anger, rage, all those gluttonous lizards inside of me had worn me out. I was disgusted, and so tired of being angry. Exhausted of hating. Exhausted of accusing,

resenting, closing up to this world to protect – protect what? My wounded pride? A pitiful, miserable human pride in a proud woman, who thought she was placed higher than God to judge him and decide who should die and who shouldn't? How ridiculous. I was fed up with this ever-demanding fire of arrogance that would leave me in a desert of ashes anyway once everything I was made of would have been consumed. I was just so tired.

The next morning, when I woke up, I felt so sorry. Not for myself; I had been sorry for myself for long enough now; but because of all the people I had hurt. Who could give me a second chance? Were second chances even available for such a harmful heart as mine?

The following morning, completely by chance and an incredible relief, we met the old merchant with his two mules who used to be the messenger of Clara's letters to me and my answers. When he learnt about Fort Hope's wipeout, he shrugged and told us in a dull tone that since he had no more business to do in the fort, he was going back to Fort Albany with us. There was no emotion in his voice, and I wondered if he really didn't care, or if he was just hiding it well. His presence meant a huge security for us because of the food and ammunition he had and indeed, we couldn't have made it until Fort Albany without him.

So far, we had been surviving thanks to the little food Coalman had taken before leaving Fort Hope; Matisoon had also shown me how to wrap Andrew in a cloth to carry him on my back and free my arms. We weren't followed by the Indians from Sahale village. But we were starving and exhausted.

For two days I had been observing Matisoon. She was not a very talkative young girl, but I could hear her at night muttering for herself songs in her language. She obviously didn't know that I was listening to those round words, those words that sounded like a fawn's light gallop, and I felt bad for invading her privacy ; but I couldn't help it, she fascinated me. She was such a mystery. At that moment, I realized that after all, she was not a reflection of myself as I had thought. We were alike because the circumstances imposed on us by life had been the same, but the measure of love which we had been able to demonstrate in return was incomparable.

I had responded with fury, I had built around me a wall of self-pity and resentment that had devoured me from the core, and that had consumed anyone who had cared enough to step inside my fortress. I had perceived all the love received as a mere warmth ; I had been ravenous for love, though it had been impossible for me to give any.

Matisoon had answered to this wound by forgiving again and again, perseverant to understand the reality of my grief with more love than I had ever had, although all she had seen of me were insulting wincings and violent gestures. Never had she let out either a complaint or a word of reproach. She had not given any room to anger. Ashamed, I knew that if I hated her, it was for having been so much meeker and more graceful than me. But how hard had it been for her, to suffer such a loss as loving parents, and to have been thrown into a fort without any familiar face to show friendship, no familiar place to contemplate the priceless memories of the past, no peace to pull together the stampede of sore feelings? She was a matchless example of forgiveness.

There was still a long way home, but from that moment, days went by faster because I didn't nourish such heavy feelings of rage anymore. I was able to laugh for the first time when one morning, as I was packing our stuff, I saw Coalman completely focused on making faces at Andrew. He smiled, and then began to giggle. I ran to them, and Matisoon arrived at the same time, amazed. My whole day seemed brighter. It was Andrew's first laugh.

That evening, I opened Nehemiah's Bible for the first time after his death. I had left it on the little night

table in my room in Fort Hope, but I hadn't wanted to read anything from it. I searched for our favourite verse and as I moved the fine pages apart, two crumpled papers fell on the grass. It was a letter, from Nehemiah. To me.

Reading it sealed the past and unfolded before me a future where hope could be found.

To Eve Cox

My precious Eve,

After all those sunrises and sunsets that I have watched in silence, I feel lost in time. Hours come and go, the colours of the skies change, and I stay the same. But I know this place is not eternal. My destiny is not in my own hands, and the thread of my life weaves a much greater plan than my existence alone.

If you read this paper, then the strong emotion that I am feeling at the moment will have proven right. I gaze at the heavens, those heavens that ignore all pain or all joy and are the same, day after day, offering as much light to the evil people as to the good ones.

I feel like I have no hold on my existence anymore, and I will soon be leaving for another place. I don't know when, but it's arriving soon. I am not afraid at the coming of my time, and the only anxiety I have is about you and our children.

You have been my greatest pride. Your look stirred me, you moved my heart. At night, I used to whisper to myself "Eve Cox", because I loved the sound of your

first name and my last name united so much. I made drawings of you and our children, to try and catch one of those instants of beauty; although I can't take them with me, the memory of you remains. From the instant that I saw you, you have owned me, and this will never change.

Whatever the circumstances in which my life is taken from you, there is something that I ask you to do. It will not be easy; it's never easy. I want you to forgive. Whoever is implicated in my death, forgive them, because I have already forgiven them. They stole my time with you and with my children, but I am immensely grateful for the invaluable gift of what my life was made of. No one will ever steal that thankfulness. Forgive me also for leaving you so suddenly.

Life is too short to let bitterness steal it. I am not there to sustain and protect you anymore, so you will have to open yourself to love again, because love is the key to life. In love you find hope.

The only thing I am certain of now is that I have always cherished you and will never stop to.

Eternally loving you,

Nehemiah Cox

To Nehemiah Cox

4th June, 1699

Beloved Nehemiah,

It is done. This journey has been the longest and the most withering that I have ever had to go through, but I am back home now. Forgiveness is a double sided sword. With it, I ended anger's devastating chase, but I also rent myself to discover a nest of sorrow. By forgiving, I hurt myself instead of hurting the guilty ones. By forgiving, I renounced to do myself justice.

This was unthinkable at the beginning; but then came this thought : "If I don't do it, who will ?" and you were right: forgiveness is the key to life; everything has a purpose, nothing happens by accident. There is a reason behind every event in life, behind the good ones as well as behind the bad ones. The reason for all this was to save a young girl from despair, and she is now part of our family. Matisoon would be wandering in the forest by herself, if not dead already, if it weren't for this unfathomable and indestructible plan of life.

I want you to know that I have forgiven. Forgiven myself, for reacting in such a selfish way ; forgiven the Indians ; and I have accepted the fact that you're gone. The feelings might take more time to establish themselves in my heart, but the words have been pronounced.

I am the most blessed woman for having been your wife; it is an honour that I won't ever let go. Your love has turned me upside down, it has changed me because it was so deep, so loyal; and it endures forever. It was a reassuring embrace to which I could hold on without ever fearing to feel it slip out of my hands. You showed me the truth. I thank you and I thank God for every moment that was given us to spend together, and I treasure the memory of each one of them, so that they last longer than life; and I am rejoicing for the day when we will be reunited. This is my hope.

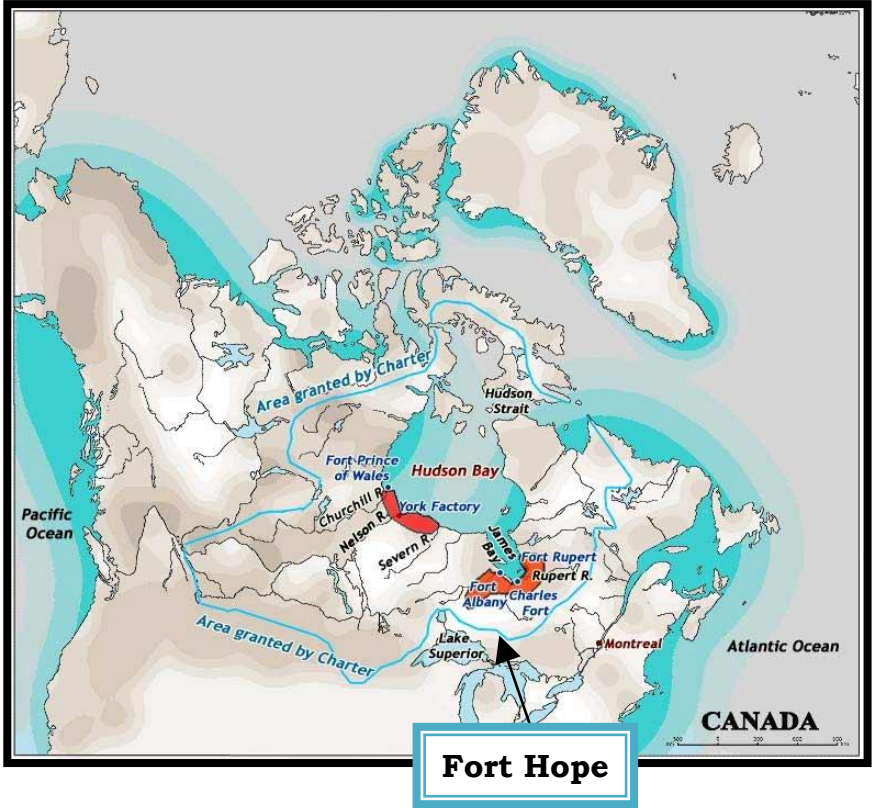
I love you,

Eve Cox

P.S.: I did hear you at night, whispering my name in the dark.

THE END

Annex 1 : Map



Annex 2 : Meaning of the characters' names

Eve

“to live, life” in Hebrew. It represents what she has to hold on to and her final purpose. Life is not present everywhere in her story, but it is what is at stake.

Nehemiah

“comfort, consolation” in Hebrew. He has been Eve’s comfort after her parents’ death and it is what she will be desperately seeking, although she is not always aware of it.

Azel Jacob, Zeli

“noble and supplanter” in Ancient Hebrew. He represents the determination of his mother and the strength of his father combined, as well as the heir of the name.

Susanna

“lily, rose” from Ancient Hebrew or Ancient Egyptian. She’s the flower and the sunshine of the home, the one who makes everyone forget their sorrow.

Clara

“clear, bright” from Late Latin. Clara is the one who will be there to support and enlighten Eve about her situation and what she has to do ; she will be there as a rock for her to be protected in her search for wisdom.

Matisoon

“life” in Cree. Her name has the same meaning as Eve’s, and she is a sort of representation of her ; she lived the same tragedy as her, although they responded to it in different ways, and feels drawn to her. She is a crucial character for Eve’s journey to forgiveness.

Andrew Kenneth

“warrior born of the fire”, names originated in Ancient Hebrew and Greek, and in Gaelic. Eve’s third child born in Fort Hope, he arrived at a moment when she was going through a time of emotional fire and inner war.

Second Lewis / Louis

“famous warrior” from The Germanic name Ludwig. He is a warrior by his dangerous deeds, and famous for them (although not always in a good way). The two names were also chosen because of their resemblance in the pronunciation and come from the same root.

Lieutenant Wilfred

“desiring peace” originated in Old English. It is the very essence of his personality, although he is not able to achieve it at all times and he has been deceived by Soldier Lewis.

Mr Kenway

“royal fighter” of Old English origin. He is Nehemiah’s companion in the Indian’s village, the one who was able to carry their story to Eve.

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