

*Who is Leroy Farnsworth anyway? Daniel resolves to find the answer to that perplexing question. Will his pursuit of the truth cost him the valued friendship of a family friend?*

## **PAPA'S GIRLS**

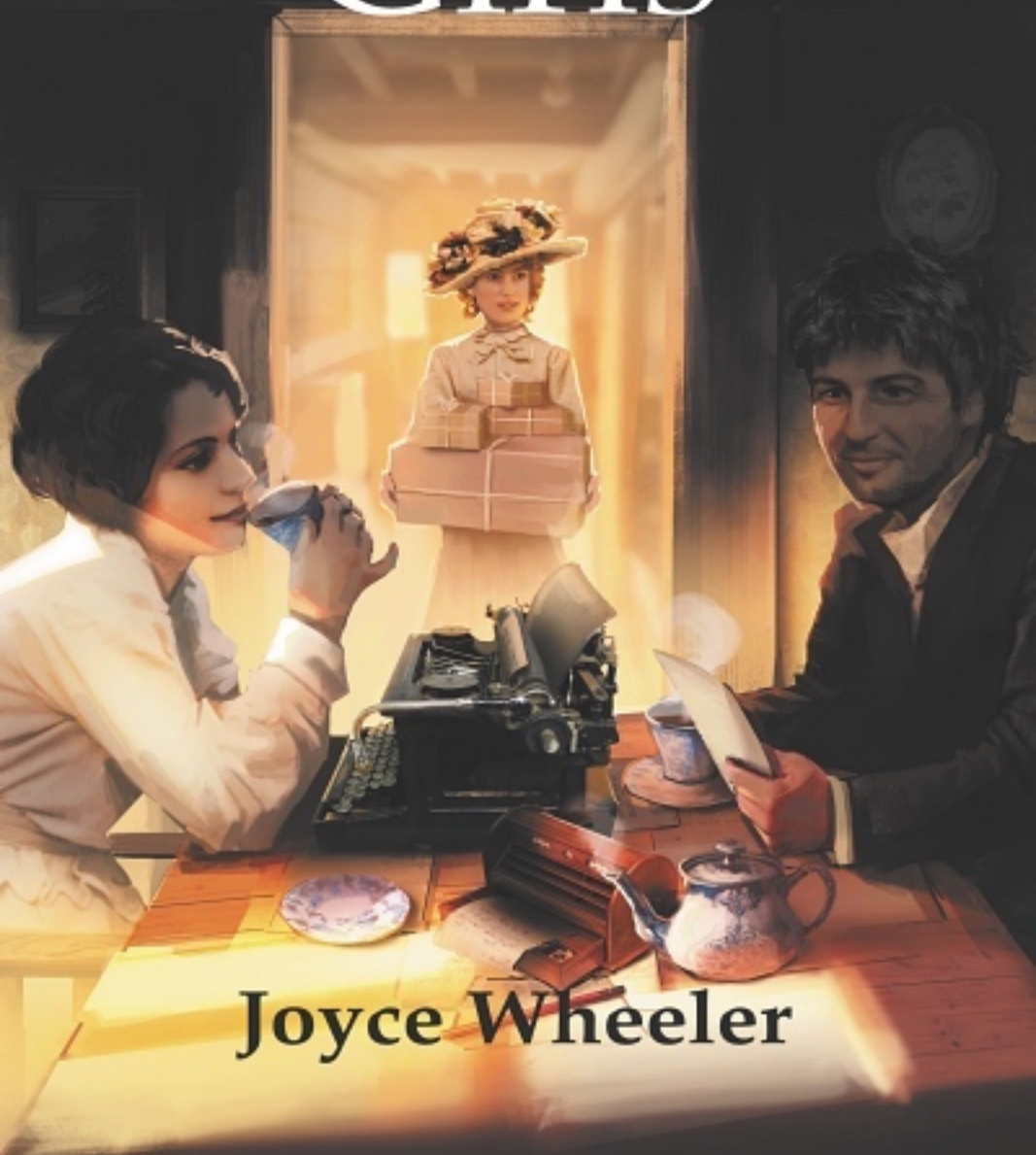
By JOYCE WHEELER

**Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12519.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

# Papa's Girls



Joyce Wheeler

## PAPA'S GIRLS

Copyright©2022 by Joyce Wheeler

Print ISBN: 978-1-958877-41-8

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-315-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc.

Printed on acid-free paper

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to events or locales is coincidental.

First Edition

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®

Copyright© 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission.  
All rights reserved.

Edited by Jamison Editing

Cover design by Justena Amiotte

# 1

Daniel Bodenstein was naturally pessimistic. He blamed his Jewish heritage for that character trait, but usually added that the rest of his personality was flawless. He was, of course, being facetious as his cheerful and optimistic wife, Rosalee, would say. In Daniel's opinion, Rosalee was never wrong.

Rosalee was opposite of Daniel in every way. Tall and willowy, with laughter in her eyes and a kind word for everyone, she contrasted his brooding manner and critical comments. He was dark skinned, curly haired, and addicted to cigars and pipes. She was blond and fair, and her only addiction was loving her husband beyond rhyme or reason.

It was Rosalee who dreamed of becoming homesteaders in raw and untamed western South Dakota. Daniel was incredulous when she shared her thoughts with him on a balmy Georgia afternoon. He was sure she wasn't serious, but after listening to her soft voice telling him all the reasons why they should pursue a different lifestyle in a different state, and after all, the land was free, he began to worry that she was, indeed, very serious.

For every valid purpose he gave for staying right there in Georgia, she countered with a valid purpose for leaving. After months of cussing and discussing the matter, he

demanded to know why she ever got the idea in her mind in the first place.

“Because, darling, you are so very unhappy here.”

He wanted to deny those words, but found that he could not say anything. He was a Yankee in Dixieland. He was notoriously non-committed to either slave owners or slaves. He was not liked for his religion, or his sarcastic wit. The only reason he was tolerated was because his wife was Southern, and because he, Daniel Bodenstern, was unsurpassed as a court reporter. No one could transcribe as fast and as accurate as the stocky guy with a limp, who could bring the court up short with his piercing dark eyes and his admonitions to ‘speak up or I’ll have to sit on your lap to write this’.

He had patiently explained to Rosalee that even if that were true, the two of them together knew so little about homesteading that it could be put on a pin head with plenty of room to spare. He thought his logic would end the matter. Rosalee was as dainty as a butterfly, and he couldn’t picture her, their two daughters, or himself roughing it in the wilderness.

One year later they were on a train to South Dakota. Rosalee’s cousin Jeb had let her talk him into going ahead of them to file a claim and get a home ready. Jeb painfully wrote of a house that was not at all like she was used to, but

it was practical. The description made Daniel shudder. Dirt, built into a hillside. A barn half buried in the sod. Few neighbors. Miles from anywhere. Situated on the Bad River.

“It’s an omen. I’ve never heard of a river named ‘Bad’.” He grumbled throughout the days it took to get to the end of the railroad line in South Dakota. The country was unlike anything he’d ever seen before. The slow wagon ride with Jeb to the homestead left him speechless. There was nothing in western South Dakota in 1898 but earth and sky joining together for eternity.

Rosalee and his daughters loved it. They soon became sun browned and lean, riding their horses over the endless prairie, listening to the ceaseless wind, charming their few neighbors with their southern drawl and gracious manners while bantering with Daniel over his obvious dislike of mosquitoes, wind, heat, and the absence of his daily newspaper.

He was loath to admit that he found himself more dependent on God than ever before. He blamed it on the sense of smallness he felt under the domed sky. Who was man, after all, in comparison to the Creator? Nature, he discovered on his frequent sojourns over Bad River breaks, was an amazing teacher.

It was on their fall trip to Pierre for supplies that he noticed Rosalee was quieter than usual and occasionally pressed her

hand against her side. He insisted she see a doctor, and was shaken when she readily agreed. By the time the doctor decided the problem was her appendix, it had ruptured. She lived a short week after that. Before she died, she made him promise he would live a Christian life, and raise their daughters to read the Bible and continue with their faith. She insisted he find them young men who loved God. She urged all of them to be happy without her. She wanted them to live in peace and someday they would be together again in Paradise.

His teenage daughters wanted to return to the homestead— where their mother was happiest— immediately after the burial. He could hardly bear to leave the cemetery in Pierre; much less travel all the miles back to the Bad River. Yet he knew that's what Rosalee would want, and so the weary miles settled into a weary life, and for the next two years he woke up to dreariness, and went to bed the same way.

Rosalee's cousin Jeb left them two years after Rosalee's death. He said he couldn't handle another South Dakota winter, when in reality, he couldn't handle Daniel's consuming grief. He packed his few belongings and headed south, and promised he would write when he settled down.

The day after he left, Daniel walked along the river, lost in his usual morose thoughts. His foot became entangled in some wild cucumber vines and before he could catch

himself, he stumbled and fell into a waterhole. It was deep, and the sides were steep and slippery. He floundered for footing and to stay afloat. Finally, the horrid realization that he could very well drown before anyone found him caused him to panic and thrash about even more frantically.

“Lord! Help me!” But every time he reached for a low hanging branch to pull himself up, it would give way and send him back to his watery purgatory. Prayers, laments, and promises poured from him.

His efforts had left him exhausted, and once again he sank to the muddy bottom. With the last of his strength, he pushed himself up with such force that he was able to grab at a scraggly bush on the bank. With whispered pleas he begged God that it would hold his weight. With a momentum of unexpected strength, he agonizingly crawled onto the bank.

For long moments he lay on his back with the autumn sun feebly warming him and his chest heaving with emotion.

“Rosalee.” And finally, Daniel Bodenstein sobbed like a heart-broken child. He wept for his wife, and for his motherless daughters. He mourned for his own loss, the love of his life, and the one who could always make dark days brighter. He was heartbroken and distraught that he had made promises to Rosalee and had never kept them. He would do better. He would accept his responsibilities that



she had asked him to. His tears rolled off his cheeks and onto the ground as he surrendered his heart and life to the One who could heal his broken spirit. When his inner storm had passed, and his strength returned, he slowly limped back to the homestead. For the first time, it seemed to welcome him.

His daughters were horrified at his sodden appearance, but as they fussed over him, they noticed their drenched papa was noticeably different. He chuckled for the first time since their mother had died. He gave them each a hug and wondered what was cooking for supper. Daniel Bodenstein had come home a changed man.

\*\*\*\*\*

Some sixteen months later, when the early morning January sun promised relief from the preceding cloudy days, Daniel brought an armload of wood into the house and announced that a storm was brewing.

Ellen, his oldest, frowned as she took her eyes off the sizzling bacon. "Is that what your grumpy knee is telling you?"

"Yes ma'am. When it hurts like this it means bad weather is coming." He brushed wood particles off his hands and pant legs and winced as he rubbed his knee.

“The sun is shining now, so maybe it won’t blow in until tonight.” At nineteen, Ellen had her mother’s optimism, along with Rosalee’s height and blond hair.

“Papa! Happy birthday!” Dixie burst through the doorway with her customary energy. Her cheeks were rosy from the fresh winter air, and the dark curls that framed her slender face seemed to bounce with vigor. She set both her egg bucket and milk pail on the floor and bounced toward him with smiling mischief on her face.

“You forgot it again, didn’t you? Papa, how can anyone keep forgetting what day their birthday is on? It’s always the best day of the year!” With that, she threw her arms around his stocky frame and hugged him.

“Dixie, you’re as strong as an ox, and I’m an old man. Someday I’ll break in two when you hug me like that. I hope you find a strong man to marry, or else the poor devil will be forever crippled.” He cuffed her lightly on the chin and his eyes twinkled with almost as much merriment as his daughter’s.

“But forty-five isn’t old. You told us that when you insisted on cutting wood yesterday. Of course, then you were only forty-four.” Ellen’s quiet laughter floated towards them as she placed pancakes on the table. “Hurry, Dixie. Take off your coat so we can eat. I have a million things to do today and need to get started.”

“And I,” Dixie said, as she shrugged off her coat and hung it up, “am going to saddle Jack and get our mail at Recluse.”

“No. No, you are not, young lady. The weather is going to change and I don’t intend to be pacing up and down worrying about you.” Daniel pulled his chair toward the table and gave an emphatic nod.

Dixie held her peace until after breakfast. Coffee was poured, and as was their custom, Dixie read her chosen scripture while they prepared their hearts and minds and duties for the rest of the day.

“I’ll hurry, and I promise I won’t stay to chat with anyone. It’ll take less than half an hour, and if I get started right away, I’ll be back before you have time to pace and worry.” This was stated as soon as the reading was finished. She was ready to bolt from her chair to add warmer clothes for the mile ride down the Bad River.

“I didn’t think we were finished with that conversation.” Daniel ran his hand through his hair. “Ellen, don’t you need her here to help you with your millions of things to do?”

Ellen threw a perceptive glance at her younger sister. She knew the importance of Dixie’s mail run and it had everything to do with their father’s birthday gift. “Oh,” she said lightly, “I’ll get by. It would be nice to have the mail before this knee forecast hits.”

Daniel muttered under his breath about fathers being bossed by their daughters, and while he was rumbling to himself, Dixie found her needed clothing, and blew him a kiss as she left the house.

Minutes later she rode past where her father stood on the porch. He yelled instructions for her trip to be quick and she waved in acquiescence. Her gentle nudge sent Jack into a fast-clipped trot as they headed toward the post office called Recluse. Just last year it had been relocated from the Deadwood to Chamberlain trail to the Goodrich log home along the fork where the waters from Three Point creek fell into Bad River.

Daniel watched her until she disappeared from his view. She was almost eighteen, his headstrong and stubborn little Dixie. She was as different from Ellen as night from day. In spite of their different personalities, the two girls had always been close and their sister-bond was strong. He and Rosalee had marveled that their daughters' opposite characteristics seldom clashed. "Bring her back safely, my Great God." He hadn't realized he said his thoughts aloud until Ellen spoke from the open doorway.

"It isn't far, Papa. She'll be back before you know it."

He gave a short laugh as he followed her into the house. "Let your words be full of truth and wisdom. And now, busy Ellen,

what are your millions of chores, and what can I do to help you?"

He found if he really wanted to help, he could wash the breakfast dishes. When that was finished, she hinted broadly that he should probably get things in order outside for this forthcoming storm.

He carried extra hay into the barn and added fresh straw in the chicken house along with a dozen other preparations. Dixie returned and seemed exceedingly pleased with her trip. She helped him carry more wood into the woodshed, and by the time they headed to the house the sun had disappeared behind a grey layer of clouds.

Ellen looked at them in evident dismay as they walked in. She had a smudge of flour on her nose coupled with evidence of chocolate on her chin. "It's been a most exasperating morning," she said flatly. "Everything that could go wrong, went wrong. Dinner isn't even started."

"That's good." At their obvious disbelief at his remark, he wagged his finger at them. "Ellen, put on some warm clothes and we'll all go and get our animals in. We can eat later but for now let's hurry!"

Even as they returned to the barn, the air seemed colder, and the breeze was stronger. They scattered to go about the chores, and finally, the last horse was in the barn, the milk cow and her always hungry calf were in, and the surprised

chickens found themselves cackling to each other in a darkened chicken house with the door slammed shut.

In the time that it had taken them to accomplish this, a light snow had begun to fall. The breeze had become a worrisome wind, and the low and fast-moving clouds were already at the crest of the west hill.

It was while they were hurrying to the house that Daniel's wretched knee gave out. He lost his balance and lurched against Ellen, and she, in turn, stumbled. For a while it seemed they would both fall to the ground but she managed to regain her footing and steadied him.

"Papa! Someone's coming!" Dixie had missed the whole episode because her gaze was on a horse and rider racing toward them as if the devil himself were chasing them.

By the time Daniel caught his breath, the ugliest horse he had ever seen was snorting a few yards from them. The rider barely reined him in before asking if he could put his horse in Daniel's barn. Daniel merely pointed to the barn and nodded his head. There was no time to say more---the rider was already halfway there.

Daniel's progress to the house was painful and slow. It didn't help that both Ellen and Dixie kept looking back to see what was happening with the stranger. Finally, they shuffled through the door, and Daniel hobbled towards his chair by the potbellied stove. It seemed as if the storm had waited

until this moment to unleash its fury. Both wind and snow increased, and the world disappeared in layers of grey and white.

“Look at him run!” Dixie peered out the window with her brow furrowed in anxiety. Ellen, on the other hand, lit the lantern on the table, and hastened to the door. In seconds she stood outside and waved her light like a beacon.

“He’s on the porch!” Dixie informed her father, and before she could say more, the stranger had ushered Ellen into the house. He shut the door with a forceful slam that seemed to rock the walls, and then leaned against it as he caught his breath.

“Thank you, young lady,” he gasped, looking at Ellen.

For some reason, no one could think of anything more to say. At last, Daniel cleared his throat. “Well girls, maybe you could take off your coats and make us some coffee. We could use a drink of something hot.” They sprang to life immediately, laughing lightly as they hung their coats up.

“And you sir, may as well take off your coat and have a chair here by the fire. Our Great God was watching out for you, and us too.” Daniel rubbed his knee absently as the man shrugged out of his fleece lined coat. He started to toss it to the floor, but Ellen pointed to an empty hook. He gave her a quizzical look before he turned and hung his own coat amongst the others.

“And, if you don’t mind humoring me, would you also remove your gun and holster? We are a harmless trio, my daughters and I.” Daniel raised his eyebrows and shrugged, an act he had mastered as a young man to take the sting away from his often-sarcastic words.

The man flashed a grin at Daniel, showing white teeth under his dark mustache. “Well, I could, I guess.” He pulled his vest open to reveal a silver star pinned to his shirt. “I’m a United States marshal, and folks generally don’t ask me to.”

Daniel nodded as though he were impressed. “A marshal? Are you looking for someone in this neck of the woods?”

“I am. I was close, but now I bet I’ve lost him again.” It didn’t escape Daniel’s attention that he sat down without removing his pistol. He reached toward Daniel with outstretched hand. “I’m Clancy Smith, and I’m more grateful for your barn and home than you’ll ever know.”

Daniel had visions of his hand being crushed. Clancy Smith stood over six feet, with big hands, big shoulders, and the look of rugged vitality. However, his handshake was firm but not bone crushing, and his words and smile seemed sincere.

Daniel introduced himself and his daughters. At least, one of his daughters. Ellen had disappeared into her bedroom, but Dixie nodded at them as she measured coffee grounds. She was rewarded with a smile and a ‘pleased to meet you’ from Clancy Smith. For some reason, that simple



acknowledgment made her forget her count, and rather than have either man see her blunder, she continued on as if she knew what she was doing.

Before long, Daniel learned that Clancy had left the Ft. Pierre to Deadwood trail mid-morning because he was sure the outlaw he was hunting would head to the Badlands. As they headed south, he realized the wind was picking up, and his horse, Brutus, acted as if he knew by animal instinct that they should get to shelter. He reined Brutus to head straight south—along with some choice words to his hardheaded mount—but the horse took the bit in his mouth and veered continually to the left. When he finally let the horse have his way, it was a wild, fast ride to Daniel’s place.

Daniel nodded sagely. “Sometimes horses know more than their riders, that’s for sure. Although, to tell you the truth, I’ve never experienced that myself.” He saw his daughters exchange glances with knowing smirks. Daniel liked his horses, but wasn’t keen on riding them.

“Ellen, come here and meet Mr. Clancy Smith, United States marshal.” It didn’t escape Daniel’s notice that Ellen had tidied her appearance considerably, and the flour and chocolate smudges on her face had disappeared.

It also didn’t escape his notice that Mr. Smith quickly rose to his feet and took Ellen’s outstretched hand with the courtesy one would give to royalty. It reminded him of when

he had been introduced to Rosalee. He had known instantly she would be his queen for life.

"I would imagine there's a good reason you named your horse Brutus?" Ellen asked, while carefully taking her hand away from the strength and warmth of Mr. Smith's. She was totally unprepared for the flash of humor in his brown eyes and the appearance of dimples on his manly cheeks.

"Yes ma'am. He's a brute of a horse, and has an ugly disposition. Some might even say he's ugly to look at. But, on the plus side, he's smart and he's tough. Everyone called him Ugly Brute, but one of my learned friends who reads a lot said I should call him Brutus."

"Brutus seems...appropriate," Ellen said, unable to keep her eyes off his face. When she finally looked away, there was a tinge of pink on her cheeks, not caused by wind or snow.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was after they had eaten the late dinner, which actually was more like early supper, that Dixie remembered some gossip she had heard at the post office.

"Mr. Goodrich said there was a lone rider that pulled up to his door yesterday and wondered how far it was to Interior in the Badlands. He said he didn't like the guy the minute he laid eyes on him, a sort of low life that usually causes trouble."

Mr. Smith laid his fork down. “Did he say what he looked like, or what kind of horse he was riding?” He asked quietly, but there was tension in his voice.

Dixie looked apologetic. “I didn’t ask. I was trying to get a—I mean—I guess I just never thought to ask.”

Daniel leaned back in his chair and patted his full and happy stomach. “That was one special supper, girls. I was wondering, is there any dessert?”

“Dessert?” Ellen looked at him in fake surprise. “Why would there be dessert?”

“Mr. Smith, these girls are very deceiving. One of them baked a cake this morning, and the other made a wild dash to the post office. They’ve been harboring secret plots for quite a while.”

“It’s Papa’s birthday today,” Ellen explained to their visitor. “He loves chocolate cake, but I’m not very proud of my efforts. It’s somewhat of a fizzle.”

“Well, bring it on. I seem to recall you said the same thing other years, and it sure tasted good enough for me.” Daniel had his fork ready for action.

Fresh coffee was poured while Ellen served the cake, topped with whipped cream. From the look on Clancy’s face, it was obvious he hadn’t had such an opulent looking treat for some time.

“Ah. Aha! Yup. I knew it would be good.” Daniel ate slowly, savoring each bite, and was contemplating asking for seconds when the girls left the table and shortly returned with a large, odd-sized wrapped gift.

“I thought I told you not to get me anything this year.” In truth, Daniel told his daughters that every year, and would have been school boy disappointed if they would have listened to him.

“I want you to know that I had a terrible time carrying it home this morning,” Dixie informed him. “I had to get on Jack and have someone hand it to me, and then I thought he was going to jump or shy or just plain race away.” She patted her dad’s shoulder. “We hope you like it.”

Daniel picked it up and shook it. “What on earth? It’s sort of heavy. It’s odd shaped. What is it?” It was a ritual he performed every year to create suspense and make his daughters think he was truly baffled. In reality, he usually knew what they got him. However, this year was the exception. He didn’t have a clue, and the suspense was killing him. He tore into the wrapping paper with delightful anticipation of what it could be, while Ellen and Dixie looked at each other with apprehension.

When the paper was off, Daniel frowned at the brown case. He turned it this way and that way and then paused. “What have you girls done?” he asked softly.

Dixie gave a nervous laugh. “Don’t be mad at us, Papa. We sort of took the bull by the horns this year and—” She stopped as Ellen’s finger-to-the-lips and emphatic shake of the head caught her eye.

Daniel slowly unhooked the two latches on the case, and then sat back in his chair and gazed at his daughters. The only sound in the small room was the fury of the wind outside the door.

“Papa, before you say anything, you better look at your gift,” Ellen finally cautioned.

“I think I know what it is. I think you spent too much money on me.” His voice was gruff, and yet it was noticed that he was visibly excited as he lifted the case lid to peer inside. A slightly used stenograph machine greeted his eager eyes. It was the short hand wonder that could record words faster than the fastest court reporter could write, and what Daniel had yearned for before they left Georgia.

He looked at it in wonder, touched the keys reverently, commented on the different features, and then stretched out his arms to his two daughters.

“I want to know how you got this. I want to know how you think an old fellow like me can learn to use it and I want you to know that I absolutely did not have a clue you were getting me this. No clue.”

He hugged his girls, and added "And, I want you to know that I am thrilled with it!"

"You'll always remember your forty-fifth birthday as the year you had no clue of what we were getting you. We really wanted it to be something special, Papa." Ellen's voice trembled slightly.

"Uncle Jeb actually found it for us, and before he sent it, he had it gone through and tested, and said it was a good buy for the money." Dixie lifted the machine out of the case. "See? There are instructions in the box."

Clancy Smith watched the family's excitement with an amused smile and no little interest. As a marshal, he was familiar with court reporters, and had seen these new machines, but this was the first time he had the opportunity to see one in action. He was hoping Daniel would take it out of the case and demonstrate, but it became apparent that for this day, Daniel was content to merely look at it and marvel.

"Oh, Mr. Smith!" Ellen suddenly remembered their visitor. "Can I get you more coffee? We seem to have forgotten our manners!"

The dimples flashed again as Clancy replied that birthdays were special and yes indeed, he would like more coffee. And as if Ellen could read his mind, she suggested that he might like another piece of cake, to which he readily agreed.

Much later, as the lamps gave out their warm glow, and the fire kept the room comfortable, Dixie suggested a game of whist. Conversation had dwindled to a few sleepily spoken words, and yawns were prevalent.

“I have a better idea,” Daniel said. “Let’s wait until tomorrow. I think we’re all tired. At least I know I am. Mr. Smith, please take my room and make yourself comfortable. I will take the cot in here so I can keep the fires stoked during the night.”

Clancy protested that he would not take the older man’s comfortable bed, but Daniel was adamant. Not because he wanted Clancy to have the better bed, but because there was no way he was going to have a stranger camping in the main room next to his daughters’ bedroom.

## 2

By morning, the worst part of the storm had passed over the countryside, leaving snowdrifts several feet deep. Light snow continued to fall, and the ever-present wind crept through the stoutest coats and chilled those dutiful souls who considered their livestock more important than their comfort.

Daniel wasn't surprised that Clancy was out and about before the rest of them were up. He wasn't even surprised when the big man came in carrying a small dab of milk in one bucket, and some frozen eggs in another.

He didn't bat an eye when he noticed his daughters had taken additional care with their appearance, and that breakfast consisted of more than the usual fare. It wasn't lost on him that Clancy had spiffed himself up from yesterday's battered appearance, and seemed very comfortable chatting with the young ladies of the house.

He was, however, surprised and not pleased that Brutus had kicked a hole in the side of the barn.

"I fixed it somewhat," Clancy was remorseful. "He always does tricks like that. I've had to fix a lot of barns, which is why I usually let him roam outside. But yesterday was so bad he wanted to be in the barn." Clancy rubbed the back of his



neck. "He's outside now. And unless the weather gets worse, that's where he can stay."

Daniel phrased his question carefully. "What, uh, what breed of horse is he? I've never exactly seen a combination like that."

Clancy started to chuckle, and then his mirth gave way to a hearty laugh. "Well sir," he said when he caught his breath, "Brutus defies description. Who knows what his ancestry could be? His body is lean, but his legs are stocky. His tail is sparse, but his mane is full. His ears are small, his eyes are big, and he's the crankiest horse I've ever ridden. He bites, he kicks, and there's no way you can make him go where he doesn't want to. On the other hand, there's no place he won't go if it's his idea."

"Why did you ever pick a horse like that to ride?" Ellen wondered that anyone would subject themselves to an animal so contrary.

Clancy's demeanor changed from good humor to unhappy reflection. "He was being treated very badly. I couldn't stand it and bought him. Everyone said I was a fool, but the first time Brutus and I had to make a hard ride in rough country, he proved his worth. He's a smart horse. Most of the time he's grateful to me, but sometimes he's like an ornery kid."

"What does he do to other horses?" Daniel was thinking of his daughters' saddle horses and his team.

“He’s more social with animals than with humans.” Clancy frowned. “But I usually don’t put him in the same corral with other horses.”

Dixie asked the last question. “What does he do if someone else tries to ride him?”

“Bucks them off, and then tries to step on them. It’s not a good scene.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The outside chores were taken over by Clancy in the days that followed. He made easy work of chopping ice so the herd could drink, pitching hay off the hay rack, and even, to Daniel’s delight, keeping the wood box filled. His strength and energy seemed endless and his company was pleasant. Maybe, as Daniel silently mused to himself, too pleasant.

Dixie seemed smitten with hero worship, but Ellen’s emotions were more troubling to Daniel’s eyes. She wavered between sweet or sassy, kind or cutting, and was totally unlike herself.

And then there was the day she came in with fire in her eyes and snow crammed into her coat and hair. She exploded as soon as she came into the house. “That wretched horse! He’s the worst animal to ever walk on God’s green earth!”

Brutus was, of course to blame for pushing her into the snow with his huge roman nose and dancing around her

fallen frame far too close with his wicked hooves. Just what it was that Clancy did to irritate her was never explained. Daniel drew his own conclusions.

For two weeks the weather made any type of travel impossible, but typical of South Dakota, a warm front came through, which melted the snow, which caused a great deal of mud and soft ground. Then a balmy type wind came, drying the prairie so it was travelable. Clancy rode Brutus to the Recluse post office, and when he came back, he quietly announced he would leave in the early morning.

They knew all along he would have to leave them, after all, he was a marshal, hunting for a killer. But the words sent a sudden chill over them, and that evening, he and Ellen went for a long walk.

The next morning, agonized looks were exchanged between the two of them as he led Brutus to the porch. Daniel shook his hand and wished him God's speed. Dixie cried and hugged him, but it was Ellen who stood silent, and in unspoken communication, walked with him toward the crest of the hill. Dixie started to follow, but was restrained by her papa's hand.

"Let them go, Dixie. They need their privacy."

"She doesn't treat him very nice, Papa. She'll probably say mean things to him. I just want to tell him to be safe." Dixie's tears dripped off her chin.

“You already told him that. Several times.”

“We might never see him again. If some outlaw doesn’t kill him, his horse will.” She dashed away another tear. “I really hate goodbyes!”

Daniel patted her shoulder and guided her back into the house. Before he closed the door, he looked toward the west hill. Clancy and Ellen were standing close together, and as he watched, Clancy leaned down to kiss her. Daniel sighed and shut the door.

\*\*\*\*\*

It did not go well in the Bodenstein household for several days after Clancy left. Ellen and Dixie, who had always giggled and plotted and planned together, were suddenly at odds with one another. There was an eerie silence that pervaded the small home, and when the silence was on occasion broken, the results were snotty snips from both girls.

Daniel thought it would pass and his daughters would realize the silliness of their actions. It did not pass. Each day became more tense, and the verbal snips became more cutting.

“Great God,” he begged, “help me to end this nightmare. What’s a poor papa to do? Should I talk to them separately? Should I confront the two of them together? Should I

lecture, or listen, or ignore it? But I can't ignore it. It's getting too large, like a tumor that's ready to burst."

"I've been reading about Rachel and Leah," he informed the two silent girls after supper the following evening. "Two sisters who shared the same husband. It didn't work very well, apparently. They seemed to hate one another." He peered at them while he raised his coffee cup to his mouth.

Ellen narrowed her gaze at him. "Of course, it didn't work," she snapped. "The laws of God say we should only have one spouse."

"But this was before the law. It seemed to be a more common practice in early Bible times." Daniel smiled at her as he set his cup down. "But the point I'm going to make is that sisters should not hate one another. And the way you two girls are heading right now, you're going to hate one another, and your papa is going to lose his mind, plus his happy household."

He gave them each a searching look, and found two rebellious faces staring at him. "We will talk this out this evening, so Dixie, fill the coffee cups, and let's get started." *And please help me, God. This doesn't look good.*

Once coffee was poured, Daniel opened his mouth to begin his planned opening speech. Dixie, however, beat him to the opening line.

“Papa, I don’t hate Ellen, I just hate the way she’s acting! She’s shut me out of everything, she won’t talk to me, she won’t even look at me, and if I start to say something about Clancy, she jumps all over me and tells me I don’t know a thing about him!” She blinked several times to hold back frustrated tears.

“Because! Because you’ve put him on a pedestal and all but worship the ground he walks on. You don’t know him, Dixie! He’s not the super hero you think he is, and you act all goofy when you’re around him!” Ellen was pale with indignation.

Daniel opened his mouth once again to intervene, but his daughters would have none of it.

“I don’t act as weird as you do,” Dixie shot back. “I don’t get all flirty and silly, and then turn around and act mad. And I don’t tell him how I hate his horse! Good grief, Ellen, can’t you see he thinks the world of that ugly brute?”

“Sure! You can say that! You and Clancy were having so much fun throwing snowballs at each other that you didn’t even notice Brutus behind me. And when he pushed me into the snow and started kicking at me, all you could do was laugh!” Ellen brushed away an indignant tear and slammed her small fist against the table.

“I laughed. Clancy didn’t. He was horrified and went racing over to help. And Brutus wasn’t going to actually kick you, he was just teasing. And then you were yelling about ‘that

stupid horse' and Clancy was apologizing, and by the time I got there, the two of you were both acting—weird."

Daniel leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest. "Great God," he muttered, and was going to say more but Ellen burst out with fresh ammunition.

"You would act weird too if you had snow down your neck, and in your face, and all you could think of was those murderous hooves right beside you, and all you could hear was your sister laughing as if it was the funniest thing in the world! And then Clancy——". Ellen didn't finish her sentence. She bit her lip as two splotches of red covered her cheeks.

Understanding crept into Daniel's mind, and heart. "My daughters," he said softly, "you are not each other's enemies. Dixie thinks of Clancy as the big brother she's never had. Someone to help her with the heavy chores, someone to tease and someone to admire. Ellen, on the other hand, has far different feelings. She has, as the romantics would say, fallen in love with our marshal. And love, Dixie, can make any of us either completely miserable or unreasonable happy. Am I not right, Ellen?"

"I am completely miserable, Papa." Ellen whispered as tears streaked down her cheeks. "And if he's always going to go chasing after outlaws, and if settling down isn't in his future, I don't see any 'unreasonable happy' coming my way."

Dixie looked thunderstruck as she shook her head as if to clear her mind. "But Ellen, you can't let one guy kiss you and then think he's going to call the parson. And he did kiss you that day, I saw it. And I can't believe you thought I liked him *that* way. He's way too old for me! Papa! Tell her that he's too old for me! I'm just a kid!"

Daniel opened his mouth to agree, but stopped at Ellen's response. She had flicked her tears away with an impatient hand and then gave Dixie a watery smile. The smile turned into a soft chuckle, followed by a louder laugh, and to Daniel's immense relief, both of his daughters were laughing as they reached for each other's hand.

Later, after the table had been cleared of supper dishes and kitchen chores were finished, they gathered around the stove for evening devotions. Their conversation was like it had been for years, before Clancy came. Before they ended the evening, Daniel had some advice for Ellen.

"Men usually feel duty bound to finish the job they start. Clancy wants to catch this outlaw before the guy kills more innocent people. That's his job. I believe that's why he left so abruptly. He knew you had feelings for him, and I rather think he has feelings for you. I also believe he's a man who won't make a promise he can't keep and in his line of work, there's a good chance fate won't be kind to him."

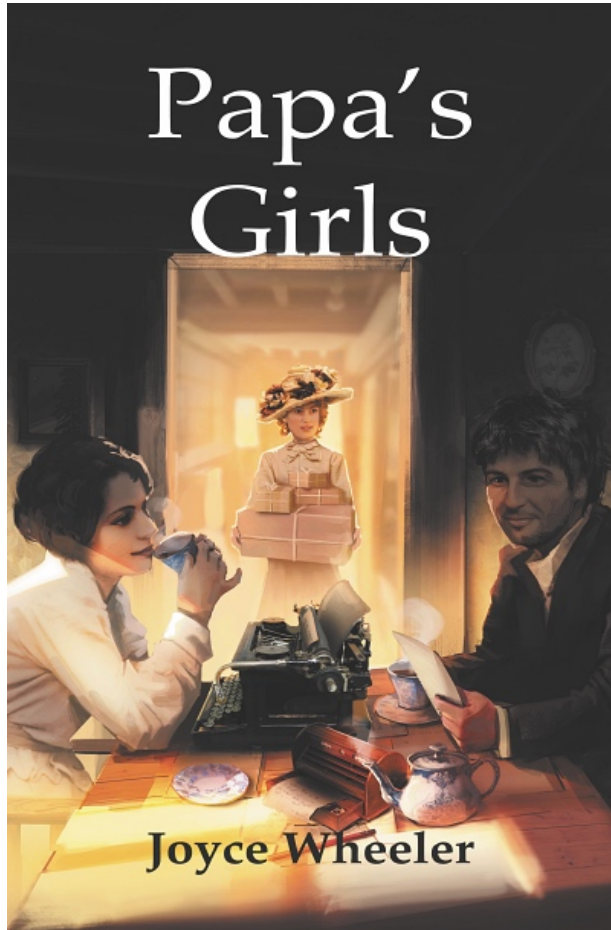


Ellen gave him a wan smile. “Those are almost his exact words. ‘Fate may not be kind; I may not come back.’ I told him, ‘Fiddle with fate. I’ll trust that God will hear my prayers and keep you safe.’ But sometimes, like with Mama, God has other plans.”

Daniel nodded. His Rosalee; once so full of life, and now absent from their family circle. “Well, no one said life was easy.” He stood awkwardly, his bum knee muttering its usual complaints. “But, no one said we had to let it get us down. Tomorrow is a new day, and doesn’t God say to take no thought for tomorrow? And doesn’t that mean that today’s cares are what we need to attend to?” He limped toward the wood box. “And that’s what we did. We took care of a problem that’s been bothering our little family.”

He found the larger log he wanted and made his way back to the stove. “So, we don’t worry about tomorrow for tomorrow has its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Or something like that. Look it up in your Bible to get the exact words.”

He worked the log into the embers and closed the damper. Ellen and Dixie nodded as he turned toward them. “Goodnight girls. Since we now have peace in the house, I can get a good night’s sleep.”



*Who is Leroy Farnsworth anyway? Daniel resolves to find the answer to that perplexing question. Will his pursuit of the truth cost him the valued friendship of a family friend?*

## **PAPA'S GIRLS**

By JOYCE WHEELER

**Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12519.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**