

An oil painting of two young women. The woman in the foreground has long, wavy reddish-brown hair and green eyes, looking directly at the viewer with a slight smile. She is wearing a blue top with white polka dots. The woman behind her has dark hair and blue eyes, looking off to the side. She is wearing a pink and white checkered top. The background is a mix of blue and yellow.

Hope on High

by Lindsay Koch
Illustrated by Bethanne Andersen

ABRAM AND SELA Hayes came to America looking for hope in a new world, and they found it on a patch of gray land in the West. They built a squat two-room log cabin, then raised up a sad and sagging shed to shelter their horse and cow. The only thing with any gumption on their place was a rickety, tickety windmill, and it shrugged to one side in the high wind that swept the prairie like a broom. The Hayeses lived alone in their log house and scratched in the dirt for years before prayer finally brought the hope of a child. Sela Hayes knew in her heart that it would be a beautiful baby girl.

“Abram,” she said as she watched him hollow out a log for a cradle, “I think we should call our little one Hope. Doesn’t that sound rightly to you?”

“It’s a goodly name, if it’s a girl,” he agreed.

Neighbors out there in the open country were few and far between, but Abram and Sela did have a neighbor of sorts, an old witch woman named Agatha Pride. It seemed as if she’d been on the land ever since grass grew and wind blew. Lordy, she was an ancient specimen of womankind. It was said that the witch woman got her power from living on top of an Indian burial mound, and indeed her house did sit on the only rise for miles around. It wasn’t hard to imagine that little hill full up to the top with bones and other leavings of the dead and gone.

One summer afternoon, not long before their baby was due, Abram and Sela were driving their wagon back from town. They drew near Agatha’s place and would have gone right on past, but Sela Hayes spied something in Agatha’s garden, something she could hardly believe was thriving in the dusty, drought-stricken days of July. There in the dirt,