

Through the Storm

by Judith Bauer Stamper • illustrated by Amerigo Pinelli

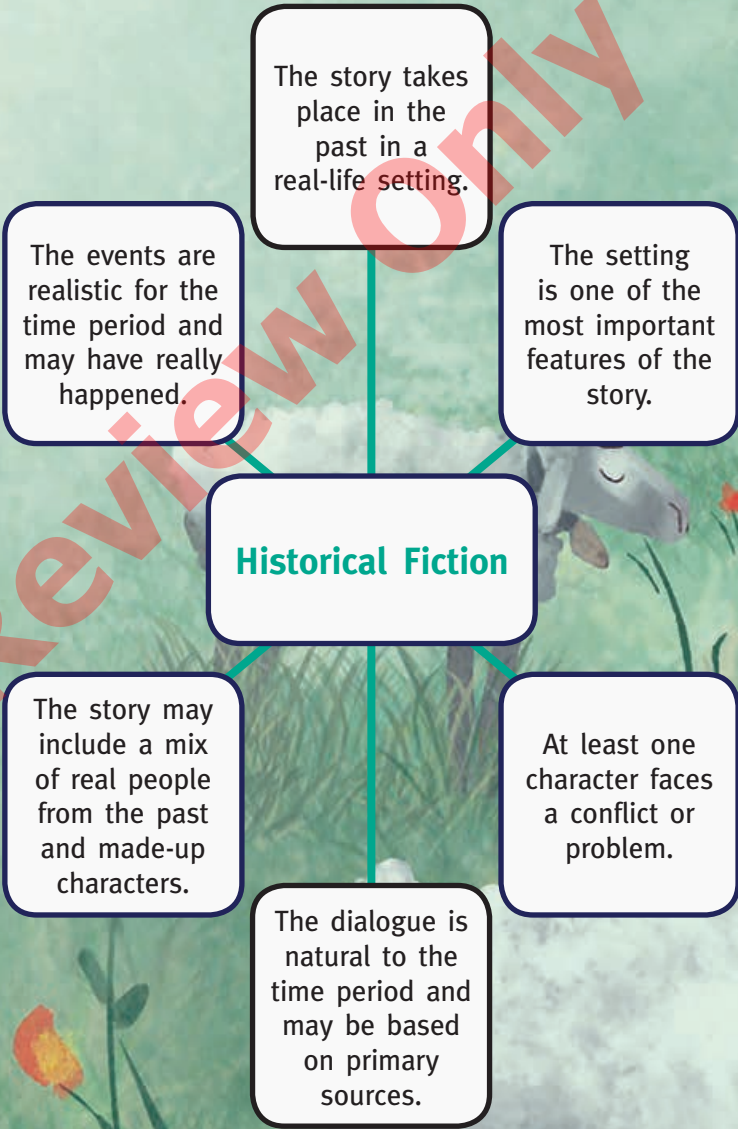


**HISTORICAL FICTION
LITERATURE**

Level	S/40
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Historical Fiction

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A Troubled Message

The telegram was the beginning of all the trouble. Pa received it on a spring morning when he rode into town to get more supplies. Ma, Henry, and Clara were starting the day's chores on the farm when he returned home with the piece of paper still in his hand.

Telegrams seldom brought good news. Clara and Henry watched their father's face cloud over with worry as he read the message.



“Pa, what does it say?” Clara asked, although she was afraid to find out.

Her father slowly folded the telegram into his vest pocket and turned to them.

“The telegram is from your uncle Edward,” Pa said. Pa’s voice was shaking. “Grandma Jenny has pneumonia, and the family needs me there right away, as soon as I can ride to Ohio.”

Clara squeezed her eyes shut, but a few tears escaped and trickled down her cheeks. Grandma Jenny was her favorite person in the whole world, and she was frightened to think that anything could ever change that.

“Pa, what about the livestock and the crops?” Henry asked.

“I’m leaving at a difficult time, I know,” Pa said. “More crops need planting, and it’s lambing season.”

Ma squeezed Pa’s arm. “Henry, Clara, and I will cope with the responsibilities of the farm. You go and help your mother recover from her illness.”

Then Ma rushed off to the kitchen to ready provisions for Pa’s journey to his parents’ homestead.

Clara and Henry stood by helplessly as Pa began to pack clothes in a saddlebag. After he finished, he turned to Henry and announced in a serious voice, “You help your mother with the milking and the animals while I’m gone, Henry.”

Henry nodded, but Clara couldn’t remain silent any longer. “Pa, I can help with the animals, too,” she said eagerly. She was thinking about how her pet sheep, Annabelle, was about to have her first lamb.

Pa shook his head. “I know you like outside work better than housework, Clara,” he replied, “but your mother and brother will have the burden of extra work in the barns. You have to take on the duties in the house.”

Clara swallowed her disappointment, even though she despised housework. How could she argue with her father now?

A few minutes later, Pa hurried to the barn to prepare his horse for the long and arduous ride. Clara and Henry stood beside their mother and watched as Pa mounted his horse and slapped the reins.

“I should arrive there before nightfall,” Pa called out. “I’ll send news back when I have some.”

As Pa galloped off, Henry and Clara stared at each other, apprehensive about the coming days.



Two Dreamers

Clara spent the next hours churning the thick cream from the morning's milking into butter. As she worked, Clara thought about her grandmother. "You are just like your grandmother, out and out," Grandpa would often say. "Tall and strong."

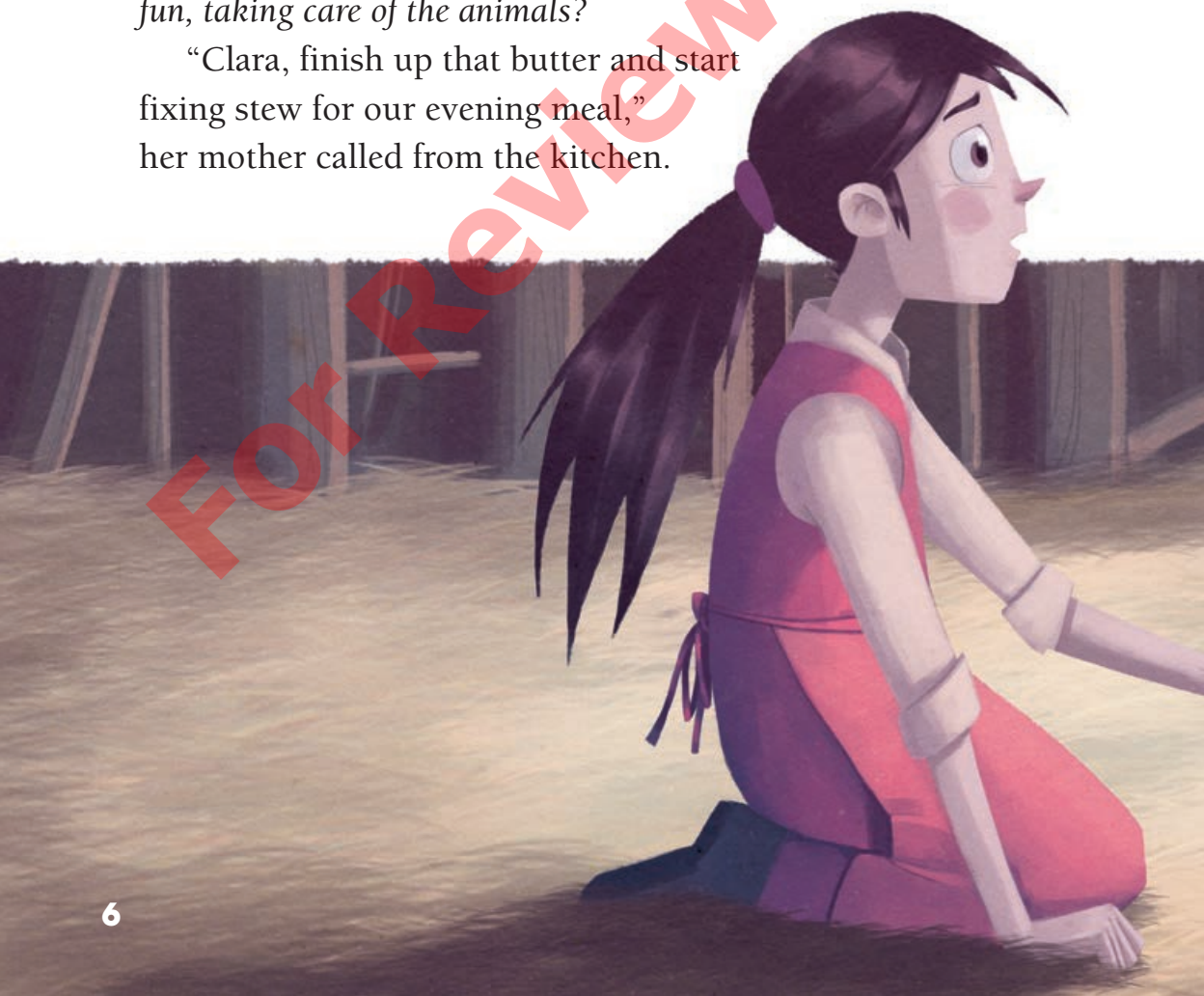


Clara thought about how she resembled Grandma Jenny in another way, too. They were dreamers. Even as she stirred, she could feel the cover of the book of Clara Barton's story that Grandma Jenny had given her. She had read the biography of the heroic Civil War nurse over and over again and had dreamed.

"I'll go to nursing school one day," Clara would whisper when she closed the book. And Grandma Jenny always said, "Women can do just as much as men, Clara. Women should have the vote and be treated equal to men. Don't ever limit yourself, Clara."

Well, how come I've got the housework and Henry has all the fun, taking care of the animals?

"Clara, finish up that butter and start fixing stew for our evening meal," her mother called from the kitchen.



“Henry and I need to take the plow out of the barn,” her mother said.

Clara sighed as she stored the butter away in the cool cellar. Every time she tried to cook, something went wrong. She either baked the bread until it burned or boiled the potatoes until they were mush. Just thinking about it made Clara feel cooped up, so she decided to check on Annabelle.

Clara hurried across the barnyard toward the sheep barn and pasture. The newest little lambs were bleating happily and jumping around in the grass like frisky ponies. Inside the barn, Clara found Annabelle standing awkwardly with her sides still swollen out.

“Hello, Annabelle,” Clara whispered. “Are you waiting to have the last lamb of the season?”

Annabelle bleated and devoured the grain that Clara held out in her open palm. Then Clara and Annabelle were both startled by a sharp scream echoing from outside.



“Clara, Clara, where are you?” Henry hollered.

Clara rushed outside, her heart pounding.

Henry was speeding toward her.

“It’s Ma,” he said. “We were trying to get the plow out of the barn, and Ma twisted her ankle ... and she can’t stand up!”

Clara sprinted with Henry to the barn at the top of the hill. Their mother lay immobile on the ground, her face etched with pain. Clara quickly knelt beside her.

“Ma, how bad are you hurt?” Clara asked.

“It’s just an awful sprain, I think,” Ma said through gritted teeth, “but I definitely can’t walk. Can the two of you carry me into the house?”





Somehow, Clara and Henry balanced their mother between them all the way down the steep hill, across the barnyard, and into the house. After they settled her into bed, Clara asked Henry to soak a towel in cold water from the well. Then Clara removed Ma's shoes and stockings and saw that the injured ankle was swollen to almost twice its normal size.

"Maybe we should call the doctor," Clara suggested.

"No, no, that's not necessary," Ma insisted. "I'm going to try to move the ankle a bit to see if it's broken."

Ma slowly turned her ankle back and forth until her face contorted with pain.

"See," she panted, "it's not broken, or I couldn't move it like that."