
A LEGACY BOOK
The Long Way Home
The battles of Ruth Ellery, in her own words
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This is a sample Legacy Book. Ruth Ellery, Cedar Hollow and everyone in these pages are invented, so you can see what a finished book looks and reads like. Your book is written from your own answers, in your own words.

The Long Way Home
Custom made for you by The Two Battles
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The Long Way Home

The battles of Ruth Ellery, in her own words

RUTH ELLERY

For Lucy, who asked.

And for Walt, who stayed.

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A NOTE FIRST

Before the story

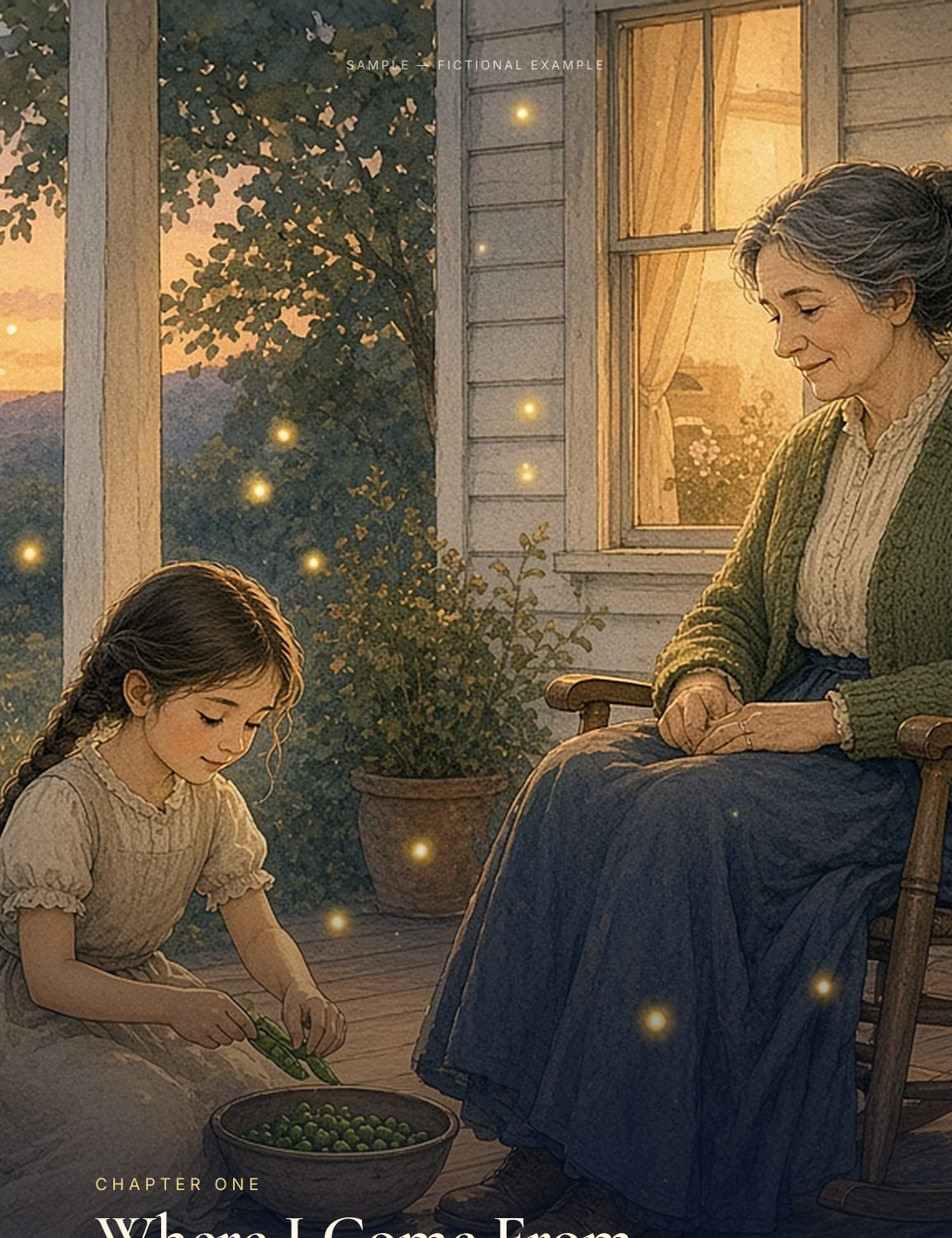
Lucy, you asked me once, on the lake path, how I got from there to here. I told you “the long way,” and you laughed and said that wasn’t an answer.

This is the answer. It took me a while to say it out loud, and longer to write it down. Some of it is hard. I left the hard parts in, because the good parts don’t make sense without them.

Your great-great-grandmother June used to say that everybody fights two battles. One you can see: the bills, the job, the body that gets tired. And one nobody sees: the one inside, where the worry and the sadness live. I didn’t understand her until I was fifty.

I’m writing this so you’ll know both of mine. And so that if you ever find yourself in the dark part of the road, you’ll know someone you love has walked it, and walked out.

— Grandma Ruth



CHAPTER ONE

Where I Come From

Grandma June's porch, Mill Road, summer of 1975.

CHAPTER ONE

Where I Come From

I grew up on Mill Road in Cedar Hollow, in the white house with the porch that leaned a little to the left. My mother worked doubles at the hospital laundry, so most summers it was me and my grandmother June, a bowl of peas between us and the fireflies coming up out of the field.

June wore the same green cardigan from September to May. She mended the elbows twice that I know of. When she died it came to me, and I have worn it through every hard thing since. You'll see it in every picture in this book. That's not an accident.

She was not a soft woman, but she was a kind one, and I learned early that those are different things. She said what she meant. She fed whoever showed up. And when I cried about something small, she'd let me finish and then say, "All right. Now what are we going to do about it?"

I didn't know it then, but that question would carry me a long way.





CHAPTER TWO

Work That Fit My Hands

Hollow Creek Mill, the loom floor, 1999.

CHAPTER TWO

Work That Fit My Hands

I started at Hollow Creek Mill at nineteen, sweeping lint, and I stayed twenty-two years. By the end I ran a whole row of looms and trained most of the girls who came after me.

People think factory work is just noise. It was noise, all right. But it was also the place I found out I was good at something. I could hear a loom going wrong before it went. I could teach a scared new hire to thread a shuttle in an afternoon. Marlene and Tommy and I ate lunch on the same loading dock for fifteen years, and I knew their kids' birthdays better than my own.

I met Walt there, too. He fixed the machines. He fixed mine more often than it strictly needed fixing, and it took me two years to figure out why.

I was proud of that job. I want you to know that, because of what comes next. Pride is a fine thing to have, right up until it starts telling you that you can't ever need anybody.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Outside Battle

The kitchen table, the winter the mill closed.

CHAPTER THREE

The Outside Battle

The mill closed in the spring of 2015. They gave us sixty days and a letter. Four hundred people in a town of three thousand, all looking for work at the same time.

Walt found part-time hours at the hardware store. I found nothing, and then more nothing. I was forty-nine and I could run a loom, and nobody in three counties needed a loom run.

I started doing the bills at night, after Walt went to bed, so he wouldn't see my face. I'd sit under that one lamp with the envelopes in a stack and a yellow notepad, and I'd move the numbers around like they might come out different if I added them in another order. They never did.

That was the outside battle, the one you could see. Money, and work, and the plain arithmetic of a life that had stopped adding up. I could have told you every number on that notepad. What I couldn't have told you was how scared I was. I didn't have words for that part yet.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Holding On

County General, the second floor waiting room.

CHAPTER FOUR

Holding On

The next fall Walt's heart gave him a scare, and then it gave all of us one. There were weeks of tests, then a surgery, then a long, slow winter of him learning to climb the stairs again.

I remember the waiting room better than the hospital rooms. Pale green walls. A clock that ran four minutes fast. Your mother driving in every weekend from two hours away with a cooler of food we didn't eat.

Walt held my hand in that room and said, "Ruthie, we've fixed worse." He was talking about looms, I think. He was also right.

He came home. He got stronger. By summer he was back on the porch steps, arguing with the radio. I should have felt relieved, and part of me did. But somewhere in that year, while I was busy holding everything together, something in me had quietly let go.



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CHAPTER FIVE

The Inside Battle

The window seat, a Tuesday in February.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Inside Battle

The winter after Walt got well was the darkest one I've had. Nothing was on fire anymore. That was the strange part. The emergency was over, and all at once there was nothing to push against, and the sadness came in and sat down like it owned the place.

I'd make a cup of tea and forget it on the windowsill. I'd watch the rain for an hour and not be able to tell you what I'd thought about. I stopped going to church. I stopped answering Marlene's calls. The worry kept me up at night, and in the morning the heaviness kept me in bed.

And under all of it was shame, the quietest and meanest of them. Shame said a grown woman with a roof and a husband who lived had no business feeling this way. Pride said don't you dare tell anyone. Between the two of them, they kept me very, very alone.

If you are in that place now, I want you to hear this from me: it is not weakness, and it is not forever. It is a battle, and you are allowed to have help in it.



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CHAPTER SIX

The Tomato Seedling

Otis Granger's garden, the spring it turned.

CHAPTER SIX

The Tomato Seedling

Otis Granger had lived next door for eleven years, and I don't think we'd said a hundred words to each other. In April he knocked on the door with a flat of tomato seedlings and said he'd started too many and could I help him find homes for them.

He had not started too many. I know that now. His wife had told him about me. But I didn't know it then, and I couldn't say no to a man holding baby tomatoes, so I followed him into his yard.

I went back the next morning. And the next. We didn't talk about anything important for weeks. We talked about aphids. Then one morning, on our knees in the dirt, I told him the whole thing, and he just nodded and said, "Yeah. I had a winter like that in '88."

That was the turning point. Not the garden, exactly. It was finding out I wasn't the only one, and that a person could say it out loud and the sky didn't fall. That week I called the doctor and told her the truth, too. Telling one person made the next one easier.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Raising My Hand

Room 114, Hollow County Community College, Thursday nights.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Raising My Hand

In the fall of 2019 I signed up for a night class in bookkeeping. I was fifty-three. I sat in the back row the first week with my purse in my lap like I might need to leave quickly.

The third week the instructor asked a question nobody could answer, and I knew it, because I had spent two years at a kitchen table moving numbers around. My hand went up before the shame could stop it.

I finished the certificate the next spring. Today I keep the books for the hardware store, the feed store, two churches and Otis's nephew's roofing business. It is not the mill. It is something I chose, which turns out to matter more.

Every Thursday on the way home I drove past the empty mill, and every Thursday it hurt a little less. That is mostly how getting better went for me. Not a miracle. Just a little less, again and again, until one day it was enough.





“Everybody fights two battles. One you can see, and one nobody sees.”

GRANDMA JUNE, ON THE PORCH ON MILL ROAD

WITH THANKS

The people who helped

Walt, who stayed, and said we've fixed worse.

Grandma June, who asked, "Now what are we going to do about it?"

Otis and Bernice Granger, for the seedlings, and for telling the truth about '88.

Dana, my daughter, for the cooler of food and the Sunday phone calls.

Marlene, who kept calling after I stopped answering.

Dr. Patel, who listened, and didn't rush me.

Lucy, for walking the lake path with me, and for asking.

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WHERE I AM NOW

The lake path, with Lucy

Most Saturdays, at sunrise.

A LETTER

To anyone still fighting

If you are still in it, here is what I would tell you, if we were sitting on my porch.

Tell one person. Not everybody. One. Pick the one who is most likely to just nod. It will feel like stepping off a ledge, and it will turn out to be a step down onto solid ground.

Do the next small thing. Not the whole thing. Make the bed, or water one plant, or walk to the mailbox and back. On the worst days, that is the whole job, and doing it counts.

Watch out for pride and shame. They will tell you that you should be able to handle this alone. They are liars, both of them, and they are not on your side.

And let people help you, even when you suspect they started too many tomatoes on purpose.

It is the long way. But it does go home.

With love, Ruth

FIVE THINGS

What I know now

1 **The outside battle is real.**

Money, work and health can knock anybody down. That is not a character flaw.

2 **The inside battle is real, too.**

Sadness, worry and shame don't show up on a notepad, but they weigh as much.

3 **Quiet is not the same as fine.**

The hardest season came after the emergency was over.

4 **Help often looks ordinary.**

A neighbor, a seedling, a class on a Thursday night.

5 **A little less is still progress.**

Better came slowly, and it came.



I still wear June's cardigan. The elbows have been mended four times now. Lucy says it's hers when I'm done with it.

She'll have to wait. I'm not done yet.

Ruth Ellery

Cedar Hollow, 2026

About this book

This Legacy Book was custom made by The Two Battles from the answers its author gave us: the battles they have survived, the people who helped, and what they would tell someone still fighting. The illustrations were made for this book alone.

The Two Battles is about the two fights everyone has: the outside one (money, work, health) and the inside one (anxiety, sadness, anger, shame, guilt and pride). Learn more at thetwobattles.com.

This book is a keepsake, not medical care, a diagnosis or a crisis service.
If you're in the US: Call or text 988. Outside the US, find a local line at findahelpline.com.

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