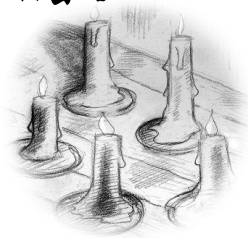
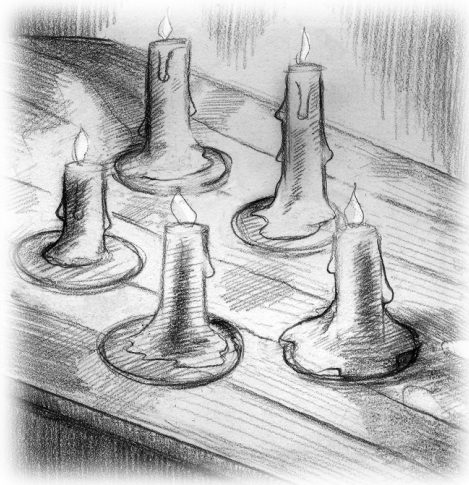


FIVE CANDLES ON A COFFIN





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James F. Robinson

In the summer of 1822 Catherine Ryan, at the age of sixty-seven, was well loved by her family and friends and liked and respected by her neighbours in the Ernestown area. Born in Ireland in 1755, she had come to Canada with her first husband, who had served in the British Army under Wolfe at Quebec and later with Jessup's Rangers in the American Revolution. After the death of her first husband, Catherine remarried and came to the Kingston area with her second husband and a growing family in 1784. After her second husband died, she moved her family to a farm in Camden Township. It is there that our story begins.

That fateful summer of 1822 Catherine set out with

her fifteen-year-old grandson to pick up supplies in Kingston. At this time there were no highways or roads, only trails, which followed concession lines where possible, with many detours to avoid marshy places. They had to cross streams on crude bridges or by fording as they travelled to Camden East and then eastward to Wilton. They then climbed up the east slope of the valley and headed south to Westbrook. After crossing Collins Creek, they continued east along Woodbine Road to the Five Mile House. The tiresome journey had taken most of the day.

As night was approaching, Catherine and her grandson stopped at the Five Mile House. While Catherine was watering the horses, her grandson went to see about a room for the night. When she had finished, Catherine sat down. Looking around, she saw under the inn shed a coffin on which sat five lighted candles. As she stared at the ominous sight, her grandson returned. Catherine grabbed the reins and told him to get on the wagon. Then she whipped the horses into a gallop and raced down the road. At Waterloo, now Cataraqui Village, they stopped and spent the night. She told her grandson what she had seen. He had apparently seen nothing.

Early the next day they drove into Kingston. There they completed their business by mid-morning and started back home. When they reached the Five Mile House, they stopped to rest and water the horses. As the horses were drinking a sudden noise startled them. The horses panicked, jack-knifed the wagon and tipped its platform. Catherine was thrown to the ground. A barrel

of salt fell off the tilted wagon and crushed her fatally.

They saw to it that she was laid in a coffin under the inn shed and that five lighted candles were placed on top of the coffin lid.