

## EXCERPT FROM "OUR ELIZA"

Loomis goes out to his porch.

Eliza: What does he know? Doesn't know anything. Knows how to get drunk and play the fool with Uncle Ralph. Knows how to drink too much on New Year's and fall through the bannister. Oh yes, he knows some lot indeed. Daddy do. Gonna teach us all how to jig, jigged his way right through the porch bannister, right down over the wood stairs. Then blamed it on food poisoning, yeah, oh yeah, my turkey was the blame for his "spells". Whiskey spells! Daddy, turn a party on its head.

Loomis: Eliza, come out here. Sit down, I needs a word with you.

Eliza: What daddy? I got a bread in the oven.

Loomis: Sarah Fanny said you weren't going to da time?

Eliza: The time?

Loomis: You know, over at da hall.

Eliza: Oh. Well, I'm not much interested in going. I'd rather stay home and read.

Loomis: Stay home and read! Eliza! You're never gonna meet any fellers at home, you can't marry dose fellers in da Reader's Digest.

Eliza: Unfortunate.

Loomis: Now, come on Eliza. Dere are lots nice boys in da cove your age. I'm not saying you got to get married tomorrow but you do have to go to da time. Get out from underfoot once in awhile.

Eliza: Underfoot?

Loomis: Listen, you go on with your sister tomorrow. You never know, you might have a bit a fun. Might have a lot of fun.

Eliza: I doubt it.

Loomis: Yeah, yeah. Go on now and put the kettle on. (To himself) Jesus youngster, I don't know who she takes after.

Eliza: Sarah Fanny and I went with Albert and Matthew and our cousin Rufus. The boys ran off as soon as we arrived. Sarah Fanny stuck around for about a half hour before roaming somewhere with the girls in her class. So there I am, alone by the sandwich table. I ate an egg sandwich and wondered if I could go home yet. Probably couldn't go home without Sarah Fanny. I ate another egg sandwich. They didn't have enough butter, they were dry, stuck all over the roof of my mouth. I just couldn't seem to get the eggs down. Who makes egg sandwiches for a dance anyway? I hate egg sandwiches. They smell horrible. (Huff) So why, then Eliza, did you eat two?

Aloud to Hank.

Eliza: I don't know!

Hank: You don't know what?

Eliza: (Swallowing) Where the boys are.

Hank: Oh, I'm not looking for the boys.

Eliza: Oh. Well then, I don't know where Sarah Fanny is either.

Hank: I'm not looking for Sarah Fanny neither.

Eliza: Oh.

Long, awkward pause. Eliza wants to die.

Hank: You want to dance Eliza?

Eliza: I don't like dancing much.

Hank: Ahh...come off it. I'm a decent dancer.

Eliza: I'm not gone on dancing Hank, really.

Hank: Just one dance.

Eliza: (Yelling) Hank! I don't like dancing!

Eliza is severely embarrassed by this outburst. She feels like a proper idiot.

Hank: Oh, well, then, that's fine too.

Eliza: Are you the judge and jury then on what's fine or not?

Hank: I dare say I am.

Is this an awkward moment, maybe?

Hank: Well than, what is it you do? If you don't dance, I mean.

Eliza: I read.

Hank: Regular bookworm.

Eliza: I wish.

Hank: I was never much good at book learning but I'm handy around a boat. Good in the country too. Still working on my carpentry skills but they're improving.

Eliza: Oh, well good for you.

Hank: Thinking about building a house, starting a family, yeah.

Eliza: Yeah?

Hank: Yeah.

Eliza: I... I got to go home. The, the twins are crying, hungry, wet!

Hank: What?

Eliza makes a rushed and not exactly smooth exit as Hank chases after her. She runs into her kitchen\dining room, into another day though Hank is still chasing her, so to speak. Eliza is scrubbing when Hank walks in.

Hank: Good day Eliza Joan. Albert round?

Eliza: Hi, no Albert's still out in boat.

Hank: Oh. (Beat) Sorry about tormenting ya at the time.

Eliza: You should be.

Hank: How were the boys?

Eliza: Excuse me?

Hank: You took off...cause of the twins. They were crying or hungry or wet. Something?

Eliza: Oh, right. Yeah, daddy's not used to them. They're not used to daddy. Daddy and the twins, they're not used to each other.

Hank: Umm, so I suppose you won't be going to Benny Noseworthy's wedding then. With the twins and there being so much dancing and so few books.

Eliza: Probably not.

Loomis arrives home from the wharf.

Loomis: Hello dere Hank. What's on da go here?

Hank: Hello Loomis. Not much sir. Just making my way out to the graveyard. What kind of day did you have?

Loomis: Oh miserable. Blowing a gale, slow b'y today, just miserable. You?

Hank: Quick day. Father had to take mother to see the nurse over around the harbour so we came in after lunch.

Loomis: Right. Is dere something ailing your mudder den?

Hank: No b'y. Just an over active imagination.

Loomis: Right on. Right on. Well, I must go get cleaned up for supper. Eliza, da boys will be along shortly, get us some supper love. We're a hungry bunch today.

Eliza: And everyday.

Hank: Right, well, perhaps I'll see you at the wedding then Eliza.

Loomis: Course you will. Benny's a relation after all. You gotta go support the matrimonial of your own, hey Eliza?

Eliza: Sure daddy.

Loomis: It's gonna be a fine time, George Henry is coming over from da Labrador and everything. I expect da boys will step her down.

Hank: Sounds great.

Eliza: Yeah. Great.

Loomis: Yeah, yeah, should be. Tell your father to drop over later for a drink. We're quartering a moose over da Ralph's shed.

Hank: Sure thing Loomis. Have a nice evening then Eliza.

Eliza: Yup, sure thing Hank Campbell.

The men go about their business.

Eliza: I didn't know George Henry was coming over for Benny's wedding.

Loomis: Sure, your Aunt Gert called weeks ago. I suppose I forgot to tell you.

Eliza: Forgot. Where's George Henry staying then?

Loomis: What do you mean where's he staying? Here, of course!

Eliza: Here? Where here?

Loomis: Somewhere here is all you need to worry about.

Eliza: Fine.

Loomis: Yeah. (Beat) You and Sarah Fanny should have something new for the wedding. Perhaps some leggings or something, you decide what you need. Go over da Coles' and write a couple tings down, nothing ridiculous. Just new. Don't want people to tink we're in da rich house or da poor house. Yup b'y, sure it won't be long now before we starts having weddings around here. I'm looking forward to some grandchildren, heck maybe a few more girls. Get things moving a little quicker round here. What do you think?

Eliza: Daddy, I don't want to go to Benny's wedding.

Loomis: Go on. What are you talking about? Benny's your cousin.

Eliza: I don't feel like all the noise and the people. I think I have reactions to crowds.

Loomis: Reactions to crowds? My Jesus! Who do you turn after? I tell ya Eliza, it's stuff like dat

gives me queer thoughts.

Eliza: But daddy, I won't enjoy myself. It's too hot over in the church basement. I can't stand it.

Loomis: Now Eliza, your Aunt Beat was your mother's only sister. Your going to dat wedding regardless of any reaction you may have to da noise, crowds, church basement or whatever. Do you hear me?

Eliza: Yes daddy.

Loomis: We're going to all go to dat wedding together as a family and we're going to have a good time, God damn it!

Again Loomis heads to the porch to rest in his aggravation.

Loomis: My Jesus, Mary and Joseph. You'd swear that child was born in da dark. Like a cloud floating round da house. Colourless, no spark. Not like her grandmother Hodges' a t'all. Now dere was a bright woman, she knew how to have a time, a real conversationalist. My Eliza Joan, reaction to crowds! Bess would have gotten a real kick outta dat.

Someone is approaching, Eliza eavesdrops from the kitchen.

Loomis: Well, Hank b'y. You're all around dis evening, ain't ya?

Hank: Sorry to bother you again Loomis but the sister-in-law just told me father and mother is staying round the harbour tonight so dad won't be round later for a drink.

Loomis: Right, well, thanks for letting me know. I'm gonna have to find someone else to help with da moose.

Hank: Sure Loomis, I can drop by for a bit after supper. Just to heist her up and stuff.

Loomis: Don't you got to finish your lessons dis evening?

Hank: No, I haven't been to school in years.

Loomis: Oh, yes, certainly, you're a bit older dan da boys hey? Well fine enough den, drop by around duckish and we'll get her hung up.

Hank: Right.

Loomis: Oh and Hank....

Hank: Yeah Loomis?

Loomis: Did you happen to see my Eliza at da time dere last weekend?

Hank: Yes sir.

Loomis: Was she enjoying herself?

Hank: Hard to say sir. I can't really tell with your Eliza.

Loomis: No hey, well, was she dancing with anyone or talking to da girls or what?

Hank: Dancing? No sir Loomis. Your Eliza doesn't dance. Says she's not the dancing type.

Loomis: Did she? Well, maybe da mood didn't strike her. Anyway, see ya around dusk.

Hank: See ya then.

Loomis: Eliza! Eliza, come here I haves a word with you.

Eliza: It's not ready yet.

Loomis: What? Oh dat's not what I want to talk about.

Eliza walks onto the porch.

Loomis: What's dis I hear about you not being da dancing type?

Eliza: Where'd you hear that?

Loomis: You never mind now. It true? You don't like dancing?

Eliza: I suppose.

Loomis: What do you mean you suppose girl? Dancing? How can a young woman like yourself not know whether or not she likes dancing?

Eliza: I don't know.

Loomis: I can bet you loves to dance. Sure your mudder and I, we would kick em up at da times. Your ma was a fine dancer and I a proper light foot. Sure Eliza, dancing is in your blood.

Eliza: Oh.

Loomis: Now tell me, how is it people tink you don't like dancing?

Eliza: Well, I guess that is because I told them so.

Loomis: And why is it you suppose you don't enjoy dancing?

Eliza: Well, I guess I don't know either way Da, on account of never having danced before.

Loomis: Go on with your foolishness, you know you've danced before.

Eliza: No Da, I know I have not.

Loomis: Sure what about at da other weddings, you must have danced den. Sarah Fanny loves to dance.

Eliza: Yes but Nelson and Lloyd don't and it's a bit difficult to dance with cranky twins hanging off ya. Who wants to dance with someone covered in youngsters? And then, there's no time to learn to dance, everyone else already knows how. Left behind, I've been left behind the dancing and then you made me go to that time and everyone my age was dancing even Sarah Fanny and

she's younger than me and I didn't know how so I ate these egg sandwiches, got stuck in my and that awful Hank started hounding me to and I couldn't cause I didn't and I got so hot in the face and all I could do was scream at him that I don't and now I'll never get to cause he's telling everyone I can't....

Loomis: Eliza, Eliza Joan Hodges' calm down, it's okay. It's okay. Listen, it's not your fault and it certainly ain't poor Hank's fault. It's...my fault. I never thought you might need someone to teach you, I guess I just thought. There's only one dance that a woman needs to know. Is so easy. You just follow your old father and we'll get you up and dancing.

Loomis: You put your hand in my hand and yeah, and one, and two...and ow, Jesus.

Eliza: Ouch! Sorry. This is hopeless.

Loomis: Go on, it's not. We takes of our shoes now...fur safety's sake.

They step out of their shoes.

Eliza: Oh God...

They waltz.

Loomis: See nothing to it. Certainly nothing to get so worked up about. Dere see, you're a natural just like your ma. Your ma loved to dance. Didn't matter the time of day or us not having any music. No b'y, your ma was a born dancer. Had an accordion inside her chest just turning out music all day and all night long. She liked to dance with you in her belly. I would get back in the evening and you'd be dancing together. Have her arms wrapped around her middle, hugging herself, she said she could feel you floating along inside. She said you were as light a sunshine on your feet. She didn't dance as much after cause there was so much to do but oh my didn't she dance da first time. Said she knew you was a girl, said you were too graceful to be a boy. I didn't believe her but she was right. Light as sunshine, light on your feet. A fine dancer, you are.

Eliza: Thanks Daddy.

Loomis: Thank you Eliza. (Clears his throat.) Now go on an check on supper, the boys will be here soon and I tell you, Dey are a hungry crowd tonight.

Eliza: And every night.

Eliza rushed inside to answer the ringing telephone.