

Rueben, not Susannah **by Sara Lewis**

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She was wild. She was British, but she hated the monarchy. She was an aristocrat's daughter and she was Isaac Brock's sister but society had no control over her. Her name was Rueben. Legally, it was Susannah Brock, but that didn't matter. Her name was Rueben because she was Rueben.

And now she was angry. Her cheeks were flushed and her dark eyes fairly danced with passion. Her brother sighed; Procter had once again used his unique talent of making Rueben mad without the least intent to be insulting. It had been an innocent remark on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Procter: "You don't possibly intend to come with us!" Isaac knew his second-in-command had a right to be shocked, for the General knew full well that teenaged girls did not accompany armies into battles. He knew that girls clad in black leather pants did not ride black warhorses bareback. But he also had to admire his sister; for she knew as well as he did that they were riding into the Battle of Detroit horribly outnumbered.

But none of these rules, so obvious to Procter, mattered to Rueben. If she wanted to wear pants, if she wanted to fight a battle, then she would. If her choices made the world say she was crazy, then that was the world's problem, not hers.

"Susannah would stay behind," Rueben's voice was quiet. She was aware that Procter saw no difference between Susannah and Rueben.

For once, Procter's temper was not instantly excited. "Young lady," he began, his voice fatherly and patient, "I simply cannot allow you to endanger yourself in this way."

Rueben was warming up to her fight. "I am not a young lady," she smirked a little as the sunlight glossed her black hair, "but because I am a girl it's perfectly natural for you to decide, for me, that I simply can't go to Detroit with you. Why? Because the world says I can't. And have you ever considered, Mr. Procter, that the world might be wrong?"

Procter had not considered this, did not want to consider this. His face was also growing red with anger. Anger made Rueben look striking and womanly; it made Procter look fat and comical. He gave an exasperated sigh. "Such ideas can harm one so young as yourself. I greatly advise ridding yourself of them at once. In fact I advise--"

Rueben gave a sudden smile, aggravating Procter further. "I don't care what you advise," she challenged. Something in her tone, her air reduced Procter's grand advice to ashes with those six simple words.

Procter opened his mouth, found he could think of nothing to say, and spluttered confusedly instead. Rueben was winning now. Her black clothes, black hair and black horse all suddenly seemed to outshine him. She seemed to grow taller, stretching up to six feet in an instant. She was larger than life, invincible and unstoppable. This could not possibly be Miss Susannah Brock. This was Rueben.

But still Procter couldn't grasp it; couldn't understand that for Rueben rules must be cast aside. "You will not accompany us!" His voice rose in one last desperate attempt to stop this obviously mentally incapacitated girl from completely ruining her chances of ever finding a decent husband.

"You just don't understand, do you?" Rueben knew it was pointless to try to open Procter's eyes, but she couldn't resist the chance to whip Susannah. "You just can't - or won't - accept that my world does not revolve around getting married to the richest

man who will have me. I don't care if every man in England would rather hang me than marry me. I don't care and I don't want to care." Procter was looking at her as though she were talking in a foreign language. But she wasn't talking to him anymore; she was talking to the wind, the sun, and the world. "I'm free! I am going to Detroit. Why? Because I want to. Don't just stand there staring. You can't stop me!" Her eyes caught on fire then, and she faced the sky.

If it were not for her brother, thought Procter, I would say that I am finished with the whole matter; but even though he has a blind spot in regard to his sister the General is a good man; so for him I'll try to warn her. "I know it is not within my power to stop you," said Procter, trying to return his voice to its usual placid tone, "but I feel it is my duty to tell you, as a gentleman, you will most surely regret it. You are only fourteen; and I feel most strongly that you are not in this moment capable of making the decision in question."

Rueben swung up on her horse and galloped a few paces. She felt she had won; and anyway she was tired of trying to force her ideas into Procter's thick head.

But then for a moment she turned back. Her eyes, now that special colour of dark brown that would make so many young men wish in vain for her hand, laughed one final note of defiance.

"I'm fifteen now," she said.