

AVON

CAMELOT

"UNFORGETTABLE!"
School Library Journal ★ Starred Review ★

WEASEL

CYNTHIA DEFELICE



I

THE STATE OF OHIO, 1839 . . .

THE dogs were dozing in their usual places by the fire when the knock came.

My sister, Molly, and I jumped. Who could be stopping at our cabin, so deep in the woods, so far from town, so late at night?

Pa! I thought. But, no, Pa wouldn't knock. He'd come right through the door, white teeth smiling through his dark whiskers, brown eyes dancing, and say, "I'm back! Who's got a hug for me?" And I would run and—

Knock knock knock.

Duffy and Winston were fully roused by then and began barking wildly. They jumped at the cabin door, sniffing and whining. Molly and I joined them.

"Who's there?" called Molly.

No one answered. But again—

Knock knock.

I opened the door a few inches and peered into the darkness.

A man stood in the shadows, back a ways from the cabin. I knew it was a man, but he made me think of a wild creature. He was shy of the cabin and the light from the doorway. I had the feeling he might turn and run, like an animal that senses danger.

He was dressed like no white man I had ever seen, in tattered clothing and what looked like animal skins. I could make out a tall hat and long, tangled hair. His beard was dark and so were his eyes, which were looking right into mine.

The dogs stopped barking and stood quietly, staring at the stranger. We stared, too, waiting for him to speak. Finally Molly said, "Who are you? What do you want?"

Without saying a word, the man reached into the leather pouch that hung over his shoulder. He found something and held it out in his hand with his palm open. It gleamed, shiny and golden.

Molly took it and held it up in the lantern light.
She gasped.

"Mama's locket!" I cried.

WEASEL!

The name has haunted my sleep and made my awake hours uneasy for as long as I can remember. Other children whisper that he is part man and part animal—wild and blood-thirsty. But I know Weasel is real: a man, an Indian fighter the government sent to drive off the Indians—to “remove them.” Weasel has his own ideas about removal...

Now that the Shawnees are dead or have left, Weasel has turned on the settlers. Like his namesake, the weasel, he hunts by night and sleeps by day, and he kills not because he is hungry, but for the sport of it...I know what I have to do. Weasel is out there. He could come here and hurt us. Maybe Pa can wait for the day when we'll have the law to take care of men like Weasel. But I can't...

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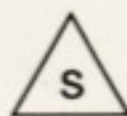
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