

*Witted  
Dandelions*

CATHERINE ULRICH BRAKEFIELD

WILTED DANDELIONS

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This book is dedicated to those early missionaries who sacrificed wealth, comfort, and life for the gospel of Jesus Christ. To my modern-day readers and missionaries, may God grant America another Awakening that will set ablaze His Holy Word.

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matt. 28:19-20)*



# acknowledgments

**F**or whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” — Romans 15:4 (NKJV)

For a struggling, hurting world, no one but our loving Savior, *Jesus Christ*, will do. To Him belong the glory, honor, and inspiration of *Wilted Dandelions*.

If not for the insight of my publisher, *Tamara Clymer*, *Wilted Dandelions* might have laid within the dark crevices of my drawer gathering dust for another year.

Editor, *Debra Butterfield*, thank you for your dogmatic endeavor to wrestle out the best my writing could be. Not being content until it sparkled with its own vitality.

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“A friend loves at all times . . .” Prov 17:17 (NKJV)

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conferences and adrenalin-pumping enthusiasm, especially when *Wilted Dandelions* won second place in the 2010 HACWN Writing Contest.

“. . .come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 10:21 NKJV)

These were the words my husband and I thought of as we traveled the dedicated footsteps of our American evangelists. The love and encouragement found in the Scriptures encouraged our former evangelists, and I pray will give my readers hope during these trying times.

My utmost respect and appreciation goes to the people I met traveling the *Wilted Dandelion* route. Thank you for your stories, experiences, and friendship.

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.” (Ps. 33:12 NKJV)

Most importantly, I want to thank my husband, *Edward Brakefield*, for his continued support and willingness to travel out west with me, just like Rachael and Jonathan. Well almost. We traveled in a comfortable car, stopped at plush motels, and panicked when we lost our cell phone power going through the Rockies.

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Lastly, thank you, my loyal readers, may *Wilted Dandelions* inspire you to endure through life's trials, and grant hope to your future. Never stop being the missionary that our Savior, Jesus Christ, has called us to be. God Bless!

# chapter one

*Buffalo, New York*

*April 1837*

*S*pinster Rachael picks weeds, hoping someone will pick her.” Rachael Rothburn glanced over her shoulder and into Bobby McGuire’s gleaming eyes. His infatuation for her bordered obsession. Bobby elbowed his buddies and whispered.

She hurried onto the wooded footpath that edged the dirt road, then ducked behind a budding lilac bush and waited.

Bobby, Davy, and quiet Ralph walked past her poking each other and laughing. Like a reverberating sonnet, Bobby’s words bespoke what her friends and family whispered behind her back. *Spinster Rachael hoped someone would pick her...*

With the prattling tongues of every matchmaker from Buffalo to New York gossiping over her unwedded state, Father wanted to hire an escort for her. If he learned of Bobby and his bullies hounding her heels, Father would put his threat into action.

She didn’t want an escort or a husband. She wanted to become a missionary and bring the salvation message to the Indians west of the Rocky Mountains.

Walking down the hill through the mist, she spotted some flowers. Like misplaced stars, over twenty dandelions shimmered in the green grass, bravely cheering the dismal overcast day. “Lord, let me be like those little dandelions. Grant that my remaining years will be my finest years and that the trials of life will not conquer my joy for the Lord.”

The dandelions stood in two inches of rainwater and the only way to

reach them was across a fallen tree trunk. She set down her basket, gathered up her skirts and petticoats, and started across the makeshift bridge.

Whispered shushes and the scampering sounds of three pairs of boots running down the hill met her ears.

Rachael ignored them, bent over, and plucked the largest flower. She wove the dandelion onto her hatband and placed the hat on her head.

“Here, Spinster Rachael, here’s one for your bonnet.” Bobby’s fingers closed around a whittled-down branch, and wedged at the fork was a wilted dandelion. He stretched out his arm and chuckled with glee as he jabbed her full bodice with his crude stick. Bobby’s hard working mother would be mortified at his actions. “I can just imagine what it would be to feel them.”

Rachael’s temper ignited like gunpowder, and she thrust the stick away. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”

“Child?” Davy snickered. “Child? I don’t think we should tell Mommy what Bobby’s doing. Do you, Ralph?”

Bobby’s face went crimson, his lips twisted into a snarl as the red freckles peppering his nose grew more predominant in the hazy light. “I’ll show you.”

“Look at this basketful of goodies, Ralph.” Davy opened the lid, elbowing Ralph. “That drumstick looks good.”

“Leave that alone,” she demanded, but Davy bit into the chicken anyway. She gritted her teeth, and the soft flesh of her fingers felt the rough edges of the branch as she wrestled against Bobby’s continued jabs.

Davy held up a large glass jar. “Tea. Yuck.”

“Don’t you know that’s what old maids drink?” Bobby kept his eyes fastened on Rachael’s bodice.

Davy stuck the half-eaten drumstick in his mouth, then kicked her wicker basket into the water.

“You ruffians.” Her anger spilled out like the contents of her basket had in the murky rainwater. “I wish I was a man. I’d show you a thing or two.”

“What’s going on here?” A tall, well-built gentleman stepped from the footpath that led to the road. In one fluid motion he grabbed at



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Bobby's stick, but missed. Bobby jumped back and forth, lithely dodging the man as if in a boxing match, and then threw the stick at him. "I claim first rights." Laughing, Bobby and his cronies ran up the hill with the stranger running after them.

Reaching the hill, the stranger watched the boys run toward the road, then he stopped and turned back toward Rachael.

No, don't come back. "I must resemble an oversized pelican perched on this tree trunk," Rachael muttered and straightened her bonnet. Oh — here he comes.

With her first step, the heel of her boot caught on a branch. Bending over to free herself, the hem of her petticoats wedged in beneath the toe of her shoe. She began to lose her balance and fanned her arms backward looking for something to grab onto.

"Hang on, I'm coming," the stranger hollered.

"I... am..." The rainwater slapped her face like a misplaced wave off the Atlantic. She gasped... the warmth of the stranger's arms encircled her waist, locking her into his tenacious grip and sweeping her up in his powerful grasp.

"Are you all right?"

She tilted her head back and looked at him through the drenched brim of her bonnet. A strong jaw, a rugged cleft chin, and the brightest blue eyes she had ever seen smiled into hers. "Yes," her voice but a whisper. Her heart skipped a beat when his eyes swept her face a second time. *Who is he?*

He carried her to a budding cherry tree and set her down beneath the spreading branches.

Rachael's wet bodice felt like a frozen dishrag next to her skin. She shivered. At least only the front of her was wet. She removed her bonnet and wiped a ringlet of curls from her eyes, then peered at him through wet eyelashes. "I... lost my balance."

He pulled a clean handkerchief from his pocket and leaned toward her. She tried to back away only the tree was in her way. "I'll get your handkerchief dirty."

He hesitated, and with gentle strokes wiped away the mud from her

cheeks. "I almost made it to you in time," he said, his voice low and soothing.

Rachael bit her bottom lip. "You were only an inch —"

"Short." The stranger's lips parted to display even white teeth, his grin widening, he handed her his handkerchief. His fitted, black cut-away and white shirt displayed the fashionable white cuff a half inch beneath his sleeve, and bespoke of his gentry, his impeccable dialect, and his upper social status.

Rachel guffawed. "You act like it's a part of your morning routine, rescuing distraught women wallowing face down in yesterday's storm water."

"Actually, you are my first damsel in distress this month."

He made light of rescuing her. But for her, it would be a moment she would never forget. The man of her dreams now had a face. All that was missing was his prancing white horse and shining armor.

The sounds of carriages and horses from the road leading to Cheek-towaga and the revival brought her back to reality with a sodden dress chilling her skin. What self-respecting knight would give a sloppy wet spinster a second look? She stuttered a half-hearted explanation, attempting to divert the stranger's eyes from her soiled brocade. "I... I mean, I am on my way to the revival."

"Indeed? Most everyone on the road this morning is, too."

"Only I became distracted by the dandelions." Rachael reached for her bonnet and placed the hat on her lap. Did Bobby McGuire's words hold some truth? Did she hope the right someone would pluck her? She shook her head. Nonsense. "Perky little things, aren't they?"

"They give a touch of brightness to your bonnet on this overcast day."

Laughter bubbled from a place deep within her as she placed the bonnet back on her head. "I spotted one immersed in rain water and decided it needed to be woven with my other flowers."

"And how do you determine which flower deserves that honorable recognition, to ride on such a beautiful head?"

Rachael felt the warmth of a blush creep into her cheeks. Her tall stature and well endowed figure always attracted the wrong response from the opposite sex. Usually the opposite sex's roving eyes stopped two inches below her neck. "I picked the dandelions that stood in defi-

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ance to last night's storm without wilting beneath the adversity."

He chuckled deep down in his throat. "As you did with those ruffians. The only thing I can fault you for is wishing you were a man. God knew what he was doing creating you a woman. You are the first brave gentlewoman I have ever met."

He reached for her arm to help her up. Her heart pounded wildly at his touch. She wasn't used to such kindness coming from a man of his social status.

His eyes were so blue... as blue as the Atlantic Ocean... as blue as the Niagara River after the morning fog burned off. "I... I need to retrieve my basket."

He kept her hand in his, stilling the trembling of hers with his touch. "I cannot allow you to leave until you answer me honestly." His voice had a melody all its own.

She shook her head attempting to clear it.

"No?" he asked.

"I mean, no... I mean... Sir, what is your question?"

"What is your name?"

"Rachael Rothburn," she said, her throat dry as a hot summer day in July. She didn't know how she managed to say her name at all. No matter how tightly she fastened her undergarments, her stays never flattened her bosom enough. Yet this man scarcely gave her figure a second glance. As if he saw beyond her outward appearance to the woman within.

Wading into the water, he scooped up her dinner and her mother's china, carefully placing them in her basket. "Miss Rothburn, my carriage awaits your bidding." He bowed, carrying her basket on one arm, as he placed her arm safely within the crook of his elbow with the other.

As they walked to the carriage, her only awareness was of him. His horses' neighs broke the spell. Startled, she looked up into his gleaming ebony carriage. Within its shadowed interior sat a lady adorned in a light blue dress with matching hat carefully poised to one side of her golden curls. The lady turned.

Rachael blinked. Isabella DeSimone. The belle of New York was sitting in his carriage. Standing alongside Isabella, who resembled their

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dainty, high-stepping and sleek-lined hackney ponies, Rachael felt like one of her father's oversized draft mares.

Isabella's gaze swept Rachael's soiled appearance. "You don't need to say a word, Jonathan," she said with a disdainful lift of her arched brow. "Rachael, I see you're up to your usual antics of collecting weeds."

"You have had such mishaps before?" Jonathan asked.

"Really, Jonathan, sometimes your sense of chivalry goes too far. She's been roaming the swamplands like a gypsy ever since grammar school." Isabella patted the carriage seat. "Sit next to me, Jonathan."

Jonathan reached up and squeezed her lace-gloved hand.

Rachael bit her lower lip. Jonathan, the name fit him.

"Rachael will add a bit of color to our drab day, my dear."

So that's it. She was an amusing diversion to his quintessential life. She wrapped the remnants of her dignity around her and chastised her foolish heart. She'd been foolish to think anyone from his social class could be anything but a snob.

"Rachael, won't you join us?" Jonathan said.

"My shirtwaist and part of my skirt are still damp. I might get Isabella wet. I have not far to travel. The walk will do me good."

"I did not mean to imply —"

"Thank you, sir." With a proud lift of her chin, she continued, "Your kindness is greatly appreciated." She gave a lighthearted nod toward Isabella. "You're as lovely as ever, Isabella. I do not believe you've aged a day since the last time I saw you."

A smug smile escaped Isabella's thin lips. "Thank you, Rachael. I wish I could repay the compliment. To do so, though, would only give you false hopes."

"Then I thank you for your frankness." Rachael squared her shoulders and turned into the wind, her skirts billowing around her legs.

She heard Jonathan's horses neigh and then the rhythmic notes of hooves on the dirt road. Her slender fingers caressed the dandelion on her bonnet, and soon her laughter echoed in the mists around her. Jonathan was no different than any other man of her acquaintance, and she was better off knowing it.

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“Rachael?”

The noise of heavy footsteps, murmurings, and laughter swelled like the tide. “Rachael,” the voice said again. Rachael turned, craning her neck, and then stepped up on her log seat.

She watched a woman’s figure, round as an apple, zigzag toward her through the throng of people past the entranceway. “I’m so glad I found you before the revival began.”

“Mrs. Rumpson, how good of you to invite me into your home for the evening. Mother has provided our supper.” She lifted up her basket. “Moist, but nourishing.”

Mrs. Rumpson scanned the gathering people and clicked her tongue. “Have you ever seen such a crowd? I doubt we’ll get a bit of sleep. Oh, how I wish my house wasn’t next door.” Her bird-like gaze landed on Rachael, and she gasped. “Why, child, what happened? Your shoes are caked with mud and your dress.” She clicked her tongue again. “And, oh my, that hair.”

Rachael stepped down from the log, feeling her ringlets in what she imagined in tangled disarray, dampening her shoulders. She removed her bonnet and handed it to Mrs. Rumpson.

“Did you check for ants before you placed this on your head?” Mrs. Rumpson stared in disbelief at the sodden dandelions hanging limply on the brim.

“It’s much too cold for ants.” Rachael maneuvered her heavy tresses back into her chignon and reached for her bonnet. “I thought to bring a bit of spring with me. Don’t you think the flowers add a bright and cheerful contrast to my dowdy straw hat?”

“Well, when you put it that way...”

Rachael placed the bonnet on her head. “Propriety is all the way one looks on it — as with life.” Jonathan proved a disappointment, but God hadn’t. He’d provided a rescuer the precise time she needed one. Her gaze landed on a dainty form adorned in blue standing not more than four feet away. Isabella? Here?

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“Really, Jonathan, why your sudden desire to change our plans is baffling. Revivals are for commoners. The inside of this tent smells foul. Oh, this is too absurd.”

“I found my way again at one such revival. It will do you good.”

Then Rachael saw Jonathan. His back was to her, but she couldn’t mistake that voice or those broad shoulders — an arm’s length away. What is he doing here? She dove, kneeling beside the half-hewn log seat and hunched her shoulders behind the ample Mrs. Rumpson.

“We shall leave if you wish, Isabella.” Jonathan turned, gazing at the crowd. “But why not give this revival a chance? Being born-again is a choice only you can make. Come, let us find some seats.”

“What are you looking for down there?” Mrs. Rumpson whispered.

“I, I, well, I dropped something.” Suddenly, a shadow fell over Rachael. She gasped. How would she explain her actions to Jonathan this time? She looked up.

Saul Spiker’s hair shone in ebony waves across a generous forehead and in strict opposition to the rest of his countenance. He pushed it back impatiently and smiled into her startled eyes, offering his hand to her.

“I thought I saw a coin,” she said.

“No need to explain. I am well aware of your... interests, Rachael.” Saul picked up her bonnet, his gaze sweeping the flowers on her hat as he handed it to her.

Rachael frowned back into Saul’s teasing face, then scanned the area for Jonathan. Not seeing him anywhere, she got up and dusted off her skirts. “As I recall, Mr. Spiker, you have a few oddities of your own.”

“That is why it is so easy for me to understand yours, Miss Rothburn.”

Rachael sat down on the log seat, sniffed, and glanced at Saul.

Saul Spiker’s frame was bone-thin, with knees that jutted beneath his trousers and long thin fingers that never relaxed. His one desire was to seek God’s guidance as to the purpose of his birth. Rachael often wondered if he might not be too edgy to wait long enough to hear God’s reply.

Mrs. Rumpson leaned across Rachael, extending her plump hand. “How do you do? I’m Mrs. Rumpson. And how did you come to meet Rachael?”

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“Rachael is a former classmate of mine at Pratt Academy.”

Rachael noticed Mrs. Rumpson’s change of attitude. With every extra candle on Rachael’s birthday cake, Mother brought another matchmaker into her life. Her face grew warmer. All she needed was to have Jonathan and Isabella within hearing distance. She glanced around. Oh, why should she care what he or Isabella thought?

“Rachael, who are you looking for?” Mrs. Rumpson asked.

Rachael turned to study the stage as if diverting her eyes would induce Mrs. Rumpson’s eyes to follow. “Shouldn’t the revival have started by now?”

“I wish it would never begin — at least not next door to my house. The noise and people trampling my roses is such a nuisance!” She gasped. “Oh my, I can’t believe... I don’t mean a word. Not a word. We need revivals, only elsewhere.” Mrs. Rumpson placed a hand to her open mouth. “Oh, dear, I declare, my mouth flows like stale syrup, not at all to my liking.” Mrs. Rumpson fanned her flushed face.

Rachael laughed. Saul joined in. “I don’t believe I’ve ever heard you laugh before, Mr. Spiker.”

“It is a welcome relief, Miss Rothburn. A good laugh certainly relaxes the face muscles, does it not?”

Mrs. Rumpson looked hopefully from Rachael back to Saul. “Yes, now where did I leave off? I declare, I’d lose my head if it wasn’t fastened on my neck.” She clapped her hands together. “Oh, I remember. Are you aware of Rachael’s desire to become a missionary?”

“No,” Saul said.

“Her mother and I are always telling her to wait.”

“Wait for what?” Saul said.

“Until she meets a handsome young man like you.” Mrs. Rumpson turned toward Rachael, winking and tilting her head toward Saul. “Then we’ll see where her feet lead her.”

How humiliating. Averting her eyes from Saul’s, she spotted Jonathan sitting five seats down from theirs. She gasped. Had he heard Mrs. Rumpson?

“Miss Rothburn?” Saul leaned forward. “Is there something wrong?”

Rachael shook her head. “You were saying, Mr. Spiker?”

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“I was at Amity and heard a Reverend McCray talk about the church’s pressing need for missionaries in this new Oregon Territory.”

“I was at Amity too.” Rachael couldn’t believe it. She and Saul shared the same passion for missionary work. “Wasn’t it exciting to hear about Marcus and Narcissa Whitman?” Rachael hugged her Bible. “Someday I’ll teach the Indians about the saving grace of our Lord Jesus like Mrs. Whitman.”

Saul’s eyes lingered on her Bible and the mud caked on her bodice, then he placed a finger beneath his high, starched collar. “With zeal like yours, you’ll have no problem finding safe passage.”

Rachael blushed. Then noticing Saul’s heightened color, she felt a stab of sympathy for him. How did men cope with something so tight around their Adam’s apple?

“Uh, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions is planning for another missionary group to leave shortly,” Saul said.

“Really? My name is on their roster. I should be receiving a reply soon.”

Mrs. Rumpson leaned forward, concern written like a map across her forehead. “Rachael, have you told your parents about this?”

“I implore you, do not disclose this to Father.” He would not receive the news well from her, let alone, Mrs. Rumpson. “I shall alert Father as to my plans to become a missionary for this new Oregon Territory as soon as I receive my papers.”

“There is really no need to alarm the Senator or his wife, Mrs. Rumpson.” Saul smiled back at her reassuringly. “The ABCFM is sending missionaries this month to the West. I have already been contacted and am making my plans to leave as we speak.”

“Well, it is a relief to me knowing Rachael has not received her papers. Perhaps this Board of Commissioners considers it as absurd as I that a lone woman should travel to that heathen land. Oh, there’s Mrs. Brown.” Mrs. Rumpson jumped up. “She has my umbrella. Mr. Spiker, will you escort me please? The crowd is so large and the footing so uneven. I fear I might fall.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Rumpson.”

Rachael hardly noticed them leaving. This can’t be true. Why hadn’t the ABCFM contacted her? Jesus, You promised. You said nothing is im-



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possible for You. She closed her eyes, recalling Mark 11:24, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.” The sharp voice of Isabella broke her concentration.

“You look as if you’ve seen a ghost,” Isabella said. “Perhaps it’s the dandelion ghost?”

Rachael looked up.

“I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation, very unfortunate you have not heard from the Board.” Jonathan’s eyes gazed into her face. His look softened, but pity oozed from his lips.

Rachael lifted her chin feeling like a prize fighter on his final round. She would not allow the pity in Jonathan’s eyes to waver her resolve to rise above this temporary setback. “No, Isabella, it’s not the dandelion ghost, but the Holy Ghost I’m seeking.” Then she recalled Jonathan’s earlier remarks. “Are you leaving? Don’t you want to renew your faith? A born-again experience will give your life meaning.”

“I don’t belong with these...” Isabella whined. “I mean, we... don’t belong.” Isabella leaned into Jonathan’s shoulder, declaring her claim to him.

Isabella wouldn’t understand. Rachael didn’t want Jonathan or any man. Her only desire was to go west. She squared her shoulders and smiled. “I will travel west and become a missionary.”

A lopsided grin curved the ridged lines of Jonathan’s lips. “I wish you an abundant crop, Miss. Rothburn.” A wry twinkle filled his deep blue eyes, fixing them on Rachael’s face. “Believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.”

Her face grew warmer beneath his arrogant gaze. Was he mocking her in wishing her an abundant crop? Rachael turned away. Oh, the impertinence.