

## Over the Falls

By Frank B. Edwards, 2002

*On October 24, 1901, Annie Edison Taylor, a Michigan school teacher, rode over Niagara Falls in a barrel. She survived the adventure and, when pulled from the barrel, simply told her rescuers, "I want to go home." This excerpt is a fictionalized account of the event written as a test passage for grade seven students.*

I was walking down the Old River Road when I ran into Barth Trundle. He's a big friendly fellow, a real talker, who earns his keep helping folks. This day, he was leading his old tan mare down toward Grass Point, hauling a big round barrel tied onto his rickety old wagon. The road was rutted and he was keeping a careful eye on the barrel which, although it was tied in place, still rocked back and forth with each bump like a lone egg in a farmer's basket .

"What do you have there?" I asked, knowing full well what it was.

"Not what you think." Barth replied. "It's no ordinary barrel. It belongs to an old lady by the name of Miss Annie. She claims she's going to ride it down the river. And I mean, all the way down the river."

He paused for a second, looking meaningfully down at the river as it rushed by and shook his head slowly as if in disbelief. "Mind you, she's going to ride in it, not on it, when she goes over the falls.

When he said falls, he meant Niagara Falls.

I expect that everybody in the whole world has heard of Niagara Falls,. People come from out of state just to stand beside it and watch the water go crashing down into the chasm below. I've lived near it my whole 12 years and still haven't got tired of it yet, although that seems crazy I know. I mean, who watches water for excitement? But I figure that I could go there every day for a year and not get bored of it. Never.

For a quarter dollar, you can walk across a little bridge to Goat Island that is right at the edge of the falls and feel the rumble of all that water thundering past. Sometimes I just sit there for hours at a time, watching it, feeling its power. The water goes all frothy and white when it hits the rocks near the edge of the island; I just look upstream to those rocks, pick out a bit of water to watch and follow its progress over the edge. When it disappears, your breath just sort of gets sucked away with it.

"This Miss Annie. Is she crazy or what?" I asked.

“Don’t seem so. She’s a teacher from Michigan and she’s just got some bug in her ear about being famous. She’s as old as my granny, 60 at least, but my granny sure wouldn’t do anything this foolish.”

“Maybe it’s something to do with this whole new century stuff,” I suggested. The year was 1901 and it seemed there was always someone wanting to be the first to do this or that thing in “the 20th Century.”

“You could be right. But she didn’t have to wait this long to do it now did she?” Barth said. “Ain’t nobody ever done it before. At least not done it and lived.”

As if to punctuate his point, the wagon rolled into a deep pothole and shuddered to a halt, the weight of its load threatening to break it apart. We had been walking down the road together as we talked, not paying as much attention to obstacles as we should. Barth’s mare drew hard against its harness but made no headway.

“This is a fine mess,” muttered Barth. “I’m supposed to get this barrel down to Grass Point before dark so Fred Truesdale can hide it out of sight. The sheriff got wind of Miss Annie’s scheme yesterday but if we keep everything out of sight until morning, he won’t be able to stop her.”

I agreed. Grass Point was less than a mile and a half upstream from Niagara Falls and once the barrel and its human cargo got pushed out into the river there would be nothing the sheriff could do but watch along with the rest of the town. If Miss Annie survived her plunge, she would be too famous to arrest. And if she failed, well a broken law or two wouldn’t really matter.

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