

BOW MOUNTAIN

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Forward

I don't consider myself to be a psychic, nor do I believe people when they call me schizoid. I am a dreamer; I will admit that. I love to sleep and dream. I have had so many traumas in my life that dreamin' durin' sleep becomes a welcome escape. I daydreamed my way through childhood, through school. It's a wonder I survived High School, even a greater wonder that I survived Viet Nam. I was very timid. I led the life of Tom Sawyer and Peter Pan, never growing up. My mind, while in the Navy, was only ten years old. I then went through eight years of college trying to decide what to do with my life. I had six majors. Marriage was another trauma. My wife and I are still together though after eighteen years of growing up. And during all this time, since the sixth grade, I have been writing.

There have been occasions in my life where a particular dream would come back and haunt me. Bow Mountian is one of those dreams. I woke up one morning having a girl speaking to me, pouring out her heart. What she was saying was so beautiful I wanted a record of it. There was a story there, and I told myself that "I" was going to write that story, and so I proceeded. I got just into the second chapter when the story stopped. I could go no further. I pondered on that for several days...what to do. Then the girl came back to me. She had to be the one telling the story, not me. So, I let her tell the story in her own words as though there had been a ghost come out of the past and speak to me. I have never had that happen to me before nor since.

Her name is Tess. She had seen a vision of the most beautiful boy, and she had fallen in love with that vision. But part of the vision was that the boy would die before she would get to marry him. From the beginning of her words she bewailed that fact. She tried to cheat death, but the inevitable happened. She never forgot him (another story), yet, as things turned out, she had a wish come true that she would leave those mountains, even if she had to marry the young missionary that had come to preach. It was an arranged marriage. Her father had arranged it and made sure it took place ... something she couldn't get out of unless she ran away. At the end though, there was no one to run away with, so she succumbed to her fate, and getting to move away and see new places, she accepted it. It may be a romance, but to me, it's the haunting of a ghost. She would like her story told.

CHAPTER ONE

Evergreens covered the mountains like a warm comforter, and the mountains lay across the sky like a bent bow. Events would happen in these mountains that would loose that bow string and send a soul shootin' up into the starry night sky like a fiery fallin' star goin' backwards, back to where it came from.

I saw it all happen, and I wish a boulder could fall down from a high cliff and crush the stones in the stream-bed of my soul and let out all my blood to flow back to Mother Earth. My body would lay there in the creek and become all see-throughly like the water and dissolve back into my mother. My spirit would join the creek like the one near our home and flow down to meet the world.

My daddy says to me, "Tess, thar's a missionary heer what wants ta marry ye!"
But I says to him, "Let Lizbeth marry him. She's purtier than I be."

I know what he wants, and what I want is that a boulder should come down and fall into that creek bed and break a hole in it...break a hole in my world so's I can escape out of it. You see, that missionary would never ask for my hand straight out. He has to come sneak around here and talk to my daddy as though I were a prized hen he's spotted and wants to buy. He wouldn't ask for my hand if Jeffery were here...and now, as the situation is, I am stuck here with the choice of marryin' him or runnin' away.

* * *

Jeffery Dawson...that was his name, the one I saw on that dreadful day, and I am in love with him. His family has moved over above our holler on that nice piece of shelf-land. They think they are goin' to be *farmers*! What do they know about farmin'? Mama says that they come from the *city*.

She comes in here all excited, sayin', "Ye gotta come see this! Somebody's movin' over to the ol' Jameson place! They's a comin' up the road now, makin' the biggest dust cloud!"

Grabbin' me, Lizbeth and Todd, we all go out to the road through the trail in the brush. We almost choke on the dust. Sure enough, there is this old black truck filled with boxes and bags. I can make out some farmin' tools. It's turnin' around the bend into the old place.

Mama's old hound dog follows us up there and barks a mite and trails off somewhere. He never follows daddy and the other hounds on account that he's too old and can't run...has stiff legs. He can't follow the hunt nor go up with daddy to the still and get drunk.

"It takes us women folk ta keep thangs neighborly," says Mama. So she shoos us outside to pick berries and then home again to bake a pie for the new neighbors.

"Why," says Mama, cuttin' in the flour, "thar won't be no news git around if it t'weren't fer the neighborliness of us women." What Mama really wants is to know what the people have and how they live so she can tell everybody else.

After the pie is done, Mama marches us back outside and up the road to the new neighbor's house where they're unloadin' their truck and immediately starts introductions.

"Howdy neighbors!" Mama rings out, offerin' them the pie and then her hand. Shaken hands, she says, "Sary McClair's the name. My chillen's is Tess, Lizbeth, and Todd. What be yer names?"

Mama starts gabbin' away as I look about. The man's name is Witherford Dawson. I see such light and intelligence flowin' from his eyes, and such a smile as I've never seen in these mountains! His wife Mary looks humble and sweet, and seems so thankful for a friendly welcome. She looks so soft, and seems to care about all the thangs comin' out of the truck. Their furniture is so rich and velvety, and there are the shiniest chest-of-drawers.

It bein' their turn to introduce their children, the ma point to Dade, small and thin, and white-lookin', like a ghost. Then I shake hands with pretty Nancy with her blond braids and dimpled chin.

I tagged along just to learn how to be neighborly, as I am gettin' on in years. I am sixteen already. Well, I wished I hadn't. When they turn to introduce their oldest, they call him, he not bein' here. I turn as they call out "Jeffery!" towards the house. When I see this tall lanky kid with the deepest blue eyes, my heart sinks clear into the ground and is buried there. I hear this buzzin' in my ears. I imagine a honey suckle vine grow up around my feet and legs and come up to replace the heart I lost. Song birds come and nest there. My tummy turns a flip-flop, and I squeeze my hands together. Mama is shakin' me. I wake up. She apologizes to everybody, sayin' how much of a dreamer I am. Then I notice how better dressed they all are and I cross my legs in shame, like a dog puttin' its tail between its legs. I feel naked in front of them, me in a hand-me-down cotton sack dress...got it from Flora who just got married. It's white flowers on faded red.

I glance back at this Jeffery and notice that he can't take his eyes offen me. I can't take my eyes offen him neither. I want to scream an' run up the hill and go hide and sing at the top of my lungs!

Mr. Dawdson is no farmer. He is a school teacher. He has opened up a school in one of the sheds near the road, and now, I go to school with Jeffery. We sit beside each other and giggle mostly, instead of listenin' to his daddy. His poor daddy tries to break us up, but he's too fond of us, I reckon, but he's smart. He puts us to teachin' the younger ones. That controls our shenanigans a bit. Some days, he lets Jeffery take over while he sets his hand to plowin' the ground. He's doin' a pretty good job of it too, for a city feller.

I'm doin' pretty good at my readin' and writin', but figurin' with numbers doesn't come naturally. I figure, but in my own way, not like how they show it in the books, but how my Mama showed me. It's done with the fingers, and with the tongue stickin' into the cheek.

I sometimes can't concentrate on my schoolwork, not just because of Jeffery, but because of these visions I have, sittin' at the window, daydreamin'. Oh! I know I'm goin' to be the cause of his death! I wish I could turn away from Jeffery, but I am bound to him like the mountain is bound to the earth. I can't help myself. I figure, maybe, I can do somethin' to persuade Death to stay back and let us live a happy life. I am always lookin' for a way, but it seems to me more than likely, I can't.

People die of two thangs in these mountains. There are seasons where a lot of people get sick and die of either the consumption or fever, and then there are seasons where it seems that people go mad and get all riled up and start shootin' each other. Mr. Dawdson will die of the fever and Jeffery will die of a bullet. Mrs. Dawdson will be left all to herself. I'm sure her daughter Nancy will get married up pretty soon. I know she's almost my own age in a couple of years, anyway, but we get married young in these mountains. They have too. They die so young.

Look at little Dade Dawdson. He's lame, and he's just wiltin' away like a plucked flower. There are some that die that way too, I reckon. They just dry up like the branch of a tree that gets no nourishment. I feel my soul will dry up that way and die if I stay around these parts much longer.

Jeffery is like one of those aggressive little hound puppies that's always shovin' and pushin' to get his ninnie, even if he has to shove and push out one of the runts to get his. He has so much rambunctious energy in him that he seems to be stealin' it away from Dade. But Dade loves his brother, and doesn't care if he is wild.

Jeffery grew up in the city. He tells me all about his escapades with all his friends and the wild drinkin' parties he would go to. He was always in trouble with the law for somethin' just tryin' to have a good time. His folks thought that livin' out in the country would slow him down and cool him off, but the mountain boys are just as rowdy and always drinkin' and shootin' up thangs. There is no real difference between city boys and our mountain boys.

Jeffery isn't bad. He's just hungry. He's hungry for life. He wants to experience the whole of it. I don't mind him bein' a bit wild. That's what these mountains grow, is wild thangs. But I can see somethin' else that's growin' up inside of him, somethin' in him that's reachin' out to these mountains and trees and water and the animals as well as the people. The mountains are growin' up inside of him

as if he were born here. These mountains are speakin' to him as God speaks to a Bible prophet.

At first, Jeffery asks me where the nearest city is. I say to him, "Why the nearest city is a hunderd miles away."

He's smart. He next asks me where the nearest town is. "Well," I say. "The nearest thang we got to a town is the Corners." And I direct him there so he has no desire to leave. He doesn't know where he is anyway, so I have the upper hand.

Pa's away with the boy's again either huntin' or moon shinin', and Mama's down at the creek doin' the wash, so I take Jeffery for a little stroll down the mountain to show him the Corners.

I tell him, "If'n ye want to take to the road, ye won't get so torn up, but it's a longer way, but if'n ye want to go through the woods, we'll be there lickety-split."

He says, "Okay," and so we go straight down.

Jeffery can't keep his hands to himself. He wants to grab me every chance he gets, so I run ahead most of the time, screemin' and laughin', dodgin' trees and rocks and the underbrush. It's no use. He grabs me anyway when he catches up to me and kisses me and hugs me, and I feel it's so dangerous bein' out here alone with him. I want so much to marry him I could burst. But I push him away, and off we go again.

We reach the Corners and all there is, is the Church, the blacksmith's barn where all the dancin' starts, and the general store. The general store is big enough for a back-room bar, a post office, and a few extra rooms above to house the constable and a few guests.

The general store is what we come to first. The Church is catty-cornered to that, and the big barn is to the left of the Church. I look at that barn and remember all the Saturday night dancin' that goes on there. I want Jeffery to take me there some time. The general store is where all the socializin' and the drinkin' goes on, and Jeffery wants to investigate that first.

We go inside and run into a group of mountain boys who are trainin' to be drunkards like their daddies. I timidly introduce Jeffery to Tom and Bill and Clarence and Bradford and Jarom and Jack. I really don't want to loose Jeffery into this crowd. But Jeffery immediately takes charge of the gang, callin' himself the new kid on the block. They like him right off and change his name to Jeff. I like Jeffery better, but I can't talk to these guys. Anyway, Mr. MacIntire, the owner of the place, gets a hold of me and tells me I can't be in the back here with the boys.

"Not a place fer women-folk no how," he says, "not good Christian girls like ye. Naw, if ye want to do some tradin', then all right, ye can stay in the front. Otherwise, ye'd best be gittin' home."

I wait outside on the front porch for a spell, sayin' "hidly" to walkers-in. Then the whole gang comes burstin' out of the doors, yellin' and hollerin' and singin'. We all head up the mountain the way Jeffery and I came, with Jeffery in the lead and me on the tail end. Tom and Jack try to get me to drink, but I tell them, "I don't want yer ol' booze!" and throw rocks at them. Jeffery laughs and I throw some at him too, but I am not serious. Jeffery and I get into a scuffle, and they all woo-woo us. Jeffery makes them stop it. They all laugh. Jeffery laughs too, and I laugh, because Jeffery fits in so well with these mountain boys. He's so much like one of us.

When we get near Jeffery's place, comin' in from the holler opposite my own, Jeffery asks why everyone becomes silent all of a sudden. We hear the Great Falls fillin' up the holler with its thunderous music. (You can't quite here it until it's almost upon you. It's a mystery.)

"Spooky Holler," Tom says in a loud whisper.

"What's that?" Jeffery asks.

"That's where them witches and devils live," Clarence says reverently.

"Witches, switches," I say. "That thar's whar Dan'l McDougale live."

"I've heard that you hillbillies ar' superstitious," Jeffery laughs.

All of a sudden, every boy runs off in a different direction whoopin' and hollerin' and laughin' like it was a joke. Well, the joke was suppose to be that they left us to the mercy of Daniel

MacDougle's shotgun. Sure, Daniel will shoot at those boys by any chance they step foot onto his property, because they only know how to tear up the place, but Daniel and I have always bein' good friends since the day I happened to stroll up to his front porch. I was only two years old, but was enchanted by his fiddle playin', and I still am. My mama and daddy had a time huntin' for me that day. They dare not go over to Daniel's place. He had to brin' me home himself. He left me there on my own porch in the dark as quiet as a summer's breeze.

Jeffery hears the strains of the fiddle music as if it's a part of the waterfall and the breezes in the giant oak trees. He's enchanted by it and walks towards it as in a trance.

* * *

There is a separation between us highlanders. There is a feudin' separation...a social order no one ever crosses. This mountain has two hands. One hand holds the preacher Zacharey Taylor Davies, and the other hand holds Daniel McDougal. They call his kind witches, sinners, drunkards and gamblers. All the others are Christians. Some of the wives of the drunkards and sinners are Christians on account of the mercies and good grace of the Church. Some of the wives of the Christians are witches to the sorrow of the Church. I guess I stand somewhere in between. But mostly, there is a deep gully separation of Christian church goers and the witches. Now no one calls anybody a witch, but it is understood who is who. The lines are clearly drawn. The mountain is cut in half, and no missionaryin' is tolerated by either side.

That's where a strange thang has come into my life. It isn't right for Jeffery to come into these mountains and ask for my hand because us highlanders will have nothin' to do with lowlanders. Jeffery is a no-good-for-nothin' lowlander, and I love him. Mama was neighborly just out of curiosity and suspicion. I go to Mr. Dawson's school on very thin permission. You will see no real highlander in his school. They are all lowlanders or cousins to some.

Now, that lowlander missionary is Rowan Davies. He thinks he can come up here and weasel his way in by preachin' his religion and sayin' he's a part of us because we are all one body in Christ! He gets my daddy to the alter and then comes over here and asks for my hand all because of his religion. He thinks to increase the body. Well, if he's thinkin' of increasin' *my* body, he has another thang comin'!

* * *

Jeffery sees the high waterfall comin' down into the hollor where the creek is surrounded on both sides by giant oak trees. Down aways, we come to an oaken bridge just big enough for a fat horse, but not a wagon. We were already in church, but crossin' that bridge brought us into Heaven. We only motion to each other to communicate. I keep Jeffery down in the bushes. He wants to see where the music is comin' from, so I show him, but I dare not let him get close. I take him down the trail only far enough to let him see the two oak trees that have grown together, and bein' so old, almost hollor inside, and that's where the old granddaddy MacDougle built his cabin...right inside the hollor of the two oaks. One can't tell where the cabin begins and the trees take over. And there on the front porch, fiddlin' away, is Daniel MacDougle his self. I have to keep hold of Jeffery so he won't go bargain' in. I tell him, "One has ta be invited hear or ye git yer head blowed off...or a curse put upon ye."

Later on, up near the shelf and Jeffery's house, I tell him, "Wait 'till I introduce ye at the dance Saturdee night...if'n ye come. He'll want ta invite ye ta come an' visit fer a spell."

"Why can't we see him now?" he asks.

"Cause we don't! It's not po-light. Besides, he may jes' decide ta blow yer fool head off," I say in a flirtin' way, tossin' my skirt and lookin' away from him.

"Who is he, anyway?" Jeffery asks, just as we spot his house comin' over the ridge.

We walk out of the trees. The fiddlin' stays mostly in the trees. Only a little bit can be heard up here on the shelf. It has become a faint melody like a ghost floatin' and singin' softly on the breeze.

"He's the fidd'ler in these parts. People only live whar they's a fidd'ler. Comes by it natur'ly, too. Never lernt it. He's just full of mountain music. His fam'ly's had that ol' fiddle ever since thar was fiddles, since the time they comes across the sea. His daddy was a fidd'ler, an' his daddy afore him. His daddy died young an' left his Injun mama with three little younguns. She's died now too. Only Dan'l an' his sister Idora left now. She takes care of the house. His mama lernt them the Injun way. When Dan'l was only three, he spied that fiddle ahangin' thar above that farplace an' somehow took it down an' started screechin' tunes out of it that would make a body go mad.

"He lernt how ta play that fiddle all by his lonesome out'n the woods where nobody bothered 'im. Most likely, they shoed him out thar so he wouldn't be a bother. Well, that fiddle, it soaked up the sunlight comin' through the trees, the blowin' of the wind through the hollars...waterfalls...chirpin' of the birds...matin' calls of elk, deer, wolves cryin' out'n the night...ye call it. He can play breezes whisperin' through the trees, water tumblin' o'er the rocks out'n the crick..."

I sit on a rock, fold my arms around my legs and rest my chin on my knees. I love to look at Jeffery and talk to him. Then all of a sudden, I say, "...an' all the mountain music ye can dance to! He can do a jig 'er call a reel that'd turn yer heart inside out.

"Zach Davies preachin' can turn yer heart ta God, but ol' Dan'l can place that God right inside yer heart an' brin' all the goodness out outen the meanest creature alive an' show it to him, how good a parson he really is inside...an' they call him a witch fer that.

"Whenever I walk in the dark woods an' smell the pine an' see them streams of light fallin' down through the high branches, I feel somethin' sacred. I feel the same when Dan'l an' I 're alone out'n the woods at his place an' he plays on his fiddle that mountain music. I could walk alone in the woods an' listin' ta his lonely and solemn strains...all the same ta me."

Jeffery stares at me and I gulp down a frog that keeps tryin' to climb up into my throat from my heart. He says to me, "Gosh, Tess, your words are so pretty. You...you're just like these mountains. You're so beautiful, but I can sense somethin' deep."

He sits down on the ground next to me and puts his arms around my hips. I stare off into the trees. He blushes and says, "I didn't know that mountains could be so beautiful or have such beautiful people in them. I like to have fun with the boys and all that, but with you, I just found somethin'...don't tell anyone..."

"Okay," I say.

"...but I feel like I'd just gone to Church or something... you know...learned something deep about the woods and the music."

"I know," I say, pullin' him to my breast. "I go ta Church an' warship the Lard. I love ol' timey religion an' love ta sing the hymns. I love the Bible. Zach...will, he keeps my conscience a goin'...give me God's comman'ments an' all...gittin' me clear of sin, but Dan'l...why, he makes everthang afar off come up real close an' puts everthang in the Big Piture."

"Puts everythin' in perspective."

"Yeah...big city words. Dan'l makes my religion have a deeper meanin'. Not so most folks...fer them, it's on t'other side a thangs. Most can't be enriched. They rather have ta be saved an' git the Spirit an' git drunk on the Lard 're drink spirits an' git drunk with Dan'l MacDougle.

"Zach Davies says Dan'l is a heathen half-breed sinner what knows no god an' ain't got no soul. Say's he makes them trees an' rocks his god, an' the animules an' the birds an' evarthang."

"What does the preacher know, anyway," he says, kissin' my breast. "Who is he to say, anyway?"

"Zach an' Dan'l grew up ta gather. When thay were young boys, thay argued over which ways

were the better, the Injun ways 're the Bible ways. Dan'l says Injun ways ain't too difernt from the ways of ore ancesters afore they was Christainized by the Normans. Thay all warshipped difernt gods, he said, but thay really amount ta the same Christian god as do Zach an' his people, only thay have difernt names like Weden an' Tor. That's where ore days come from in Wedensday and Torsday, ain't it? That's what yer daddy said, ain't it? Well, Zach, he claims he's a Christian an' ever body else's goin' ta hell just 'cause thay don't go ta Church. Dan'l says he gets enough church out heer'n the woods."

"I think I know what he means."

"Dan'l says that Zach comes ta his place often enough an' par-takes of his moon-shine, arguin' over religion. Thay love thar arguments. Will, when Dan'l plays, ol' Zach, he howls an' crys 'cause he love it so, but not when he's sober. Next Sunday come an' he's a preachin' 'gainst whiskey an' ol' Dan'l an' his music."

Jeffery laughs and pulls me off the rock. We embrace and kiss.

Suddenly I am yanked by my arm away from Jeffery. I see my daddy standin' over me with his shotgun. I scream and run. I brush up againt Mr. Dawdson. I run. I can't stand to see Jeffery killed. I can't see my way. The tears blur my way. I brush against trees and bushes as I stumble up the path. Somehow I make it up to the house and grab my mama. I bawl on her shoulder.

"Honey, Honey, what ever is the matter?" she asks as she holds me tight and rocks me back and forth as though she were in a rockin' chair.

"Daddy's gone an' kilt Jeffery! Daddy's kilt Jeffery!" I yell into her shoulder.

"Oh Tess!" she pulls away. "How could ye say such a thang?" and she pulls me back into her lovin' bosom and tries to comfort me.

Daddy comes into the house. I scream and run into the back room where I sleep. I jump into my bed and bawl into my piller. I catch patches of conversation from the front room.

"I caught that kid Jeff an' ar' daughter!"

"Oh Daddy..." Mama.

"...hands all over her..." Daddy.

"Ye treated me that way onct..." Mama softly.

"Dawdson's boy..." Daddy. I can't hear what he's sayin'..

"Visitin' Dawdson on the way back from..." Daddy again, almost whisperin'. "Tolt me ta git off his land...stood up fer his'n..."

"...ye kilt 'm...Tess said that..." Mama again.

"Ma...dang it Ma...Tesses out'n 'er haid...tetched the boy... boy's all right..." Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! Oh Daddy! I thought!

I grab my piller and weep happiness.

Daddy raises his voice. "She's gonna marry that missionary fellar! I gave ma word on it!"

CHAPTER TWO

When Saturday nights are warm, and all durin' the Summer, there is a dance at the Corners in the barn. Heaven and Hell stand side by side...the barn on one corner, and the church on the other. Zach

Davies attends each dance to keep the devil at bay, he says. He may mean Daniel MacDougle and his music. There is no other in these mountains.

Jeffery is here at the dance. I haven't seen him in a couple of months. I've been too scared. Also, my daddy has been makin' sure I get to know Rowan Davies, that missionary.

I found that Rowan and Zach are cousins. Rowan is up here from Nashville trainin' to be a minister like his cousin. Zach is teachin' him.

Jeffery has started comin' to church as well as to the dances just so he can see me. He grins at me in church and at the dances. I either stick my tongue at him or grin back with my nose in the air, whichever mood fits. He's grinnin' at me now, sittin' over there in the corner on a bale of hay.

Rowan doesn't miss all this. He grabs me up, and we start a reel. I see Jeffery grab up one of the McDaniel girls...the bucktoothed one...and he starts dancin' with her. The music gets wild and I get nervous, lookin' at Jeffery starin' at me over Rowan's shoulder. I stumble and miss my turn, and here is Jeffery dancin' with me, and Rowan is dancin' with that McDaniel girl. How he did that, I don't know, but I start laughin' so hard that the tears come, and Jeffery is laughin', and we reel right out of that barn and run away, laughin' our heads off.

"How'd ye do that?" I ask as we land ourselves behind the church.

He offers me a wooden crate to sit on and says, "It was only a little trick I picked up at school. You had to be fast and tough there or you didn't stand a chance."

"Didn't stand a chance at what?" I ask, wantin' to know about him and the other girls.

"Oh, gettin' friends...gettin' respect...security...bein' popular...gettin' girls...and all that," he says, lookin' away out at the stars.

I knew it! Girls! and I ask him, "What's all that?" wantin' to know if he'd been with a girl before.

"You know...if you're not tough, you get wiped out...and then you have no friends, no girls, no safety. You become a square, and you get run out of the neighborhood...you even have to give them your lunch money to save your nose. Either take lunch money or give lunch money. That's the law of the jungle."

"Would ye take money from others?"

"Well, you have to sometimes..."

"Ta save yer nose?"

"Well, yeah!... You have to or get clobbered. It's clobber or be clobbered...You gotta smoke on you?"

Jeffery's gettin' hot, so I don't push him.

"I don't smoke...didn't know ye did neither."

"Back at school, we all smoked. Dad wouldn't let me around the house...doesn't let me here either. But since I haven't been around you," He gives my hips a little squeeze. "Around your divine influence, I took it up again with the boys."

"Them Badger Creek fellers?"

"Yes, the Tom, Dick, and Harrys."

I put my hand onto his chest and rub, puttin' my head on top of his, and I say, "Ye know, the last time I saw ye, I heard the mountains call yer name."

"How's that?"

"The way ye felt so rever'nt out thar in Spooky Holler."

"Oh, that..." and he turns red in the bright moon light and clears his throat. He's been hidin' his precious feelings in front of the boys. "Well, I got to admit these mountains have carried me away some. Somethin's gotten under my skin. It's all spooky like. I guess seein' Spooky Holler...I mean...now you've gotten me sayin' it...It's Spooky Hollow, isn't it? Anyway, It's got the right name...Spooky."

"O'course, Church is a different matter, ain't it?" I say.

"Yes...I guess so. You certainly feel different vibes there."

"Vibes?" I ask.

"Vibrations...er...spirit. The woods have a different feeling altogether. It seems that I don't feel reverent at any church I've been to, except perhaps in a great big cathedral once on a school field trip. That was spooky just like in the woods...or a great big library...the old fashioned marble kind. I'd just as soon whoop and holler in church as at that square dance over there," he says, pointin' his thumb across the street to the barn.

Yellow lights dance out of the barn just as we had and throw shadows against the surroundin' trees. I notice that the music has stopped, but not the laughter and gaiety that twirls around in the yellow lights almost like spooks.

I notice someone big and round and tall like a giant walkin' over here to the back of the church. Moonlight sparkles in his grayin' beard.

"Band is takin' a break or we're late gettin' home," I say to Jeffery. Because if they are breakin' up and goin' home, I'm in trouble. "Come on, I want ye ta meet Dan'l MacDougle."

I run and jump up onto Daniel and give him a big hug, and he squeezes back.

"How's ma lit'le darlin' tonight?" he says.

"Jus' full of moonlight an' love whiskey."

"Full of moonshine ar' ye?" he asks.

"No...only moonshine we got is comin' from up thar in that heaven, an' we got plenty of it," I say, pointin' to the brightest full moon I've ever seen.

We walk over to Jeffery, and I introduce him.

"Jeffery," I say, "this hear's Dan'l MacDougle."

Jeffery jumps to his feet, dusts his hands off and offers a handshake.

"Dan'l, this hear's Jeffery Dawdson," I say to Daniel.

They shake hands and Daniel says, "Jeff Deadson, I believe."

"What?" he responds.

"Oh, nothin', nothin'," Daniel says quickly.

Jeffery blushes and I see the hairs on the back of his neck bristle up, but he backs down and treats the words as a joke, for my sake, I guess.

"...er...Jeff Dawdson," he stammers, trying to control his anger.

Daniel pats him on the back, still holdin' his hand. "We've met afore, I b'leive. It could'a been 'Dead Son' then." He turns to me and explains. "He an' that Badger Creek bunch a come traipsin' through my land as though they own it. I reach over an' grabs ol' Sure Fire Red Eye an' fill'er full of rock salt, an' I fire in thar di-rection. Har! Har! Ye shoulda seen 'em scatter! Har! Har!" he laughs.

My face goes white thinkin' of the time I led Jeffery through to see his house and property. I have to tell. "it were ma fault, Dan'l, I..."

"No it wasn't Tess," Jeffery butts in, and he turns to Daniel and explains, "I just admire your music so much Mr. MacDougle, I can't seem to stay away. I often hide in the bushes by your place so I can listen. I live over the ridge to the west of you. Your music sometimes floats over the trees, and I hear it just enough to be curious anyway."

"Har! Har!" laughs Daniel, and he sits down on the wooden box. "Ma music, ye say! Well, I'll be skinned an' fried!"

"The other guys just follow me," Jeffery explains.

"Not many a people likes ol' Dan'l's fiddlin'," he says with an air of satisfaction. "Well boy, if ye like it *that* much, ye might ought ta sit a spell on my porch next time ye come around." He looks in my direction and says, "and ye can bring *my* sweet-heart with ye."

"Who's..." Jeffery says, but I interrupt him and say, "Who d'ya think, silly? It's me! I'm his

sweet-heart, an' I can come anytime I please...'cause he's sweet on me."

"Why Tess," Daniel winks at Jeffery, sayin', "She's just like my own. Been that way ever since she could walk an' stray from her kin...Now, what's so special 'bout my fiddlin'?"

Well, that starts questions and answers from both sides...

Daniel learnin' what it's like to live in the city, and Jeffery learnin' what it's like to live in these here mountains. He learns all about Daniel and Zachary growin' up together, how Daniel learned Indian ways and Zachary learned Latin and Greek, havin' to think things out rationally, bringin' in the European learnin', while Daniel stuck to the spirit of his ancestors. Zach ended up goin' to Seminary, and Daniel took to fiddlin'. No two people were more learned in the whole of these mountains. Zachary took his learnin' from books...Daniel, from Nature and from his heart. Each of them was very observant, but Daniel observed real life...men, women, children, plants, animals, the seasons, the stars...Nature.

"One thang I learnt fer sure, son," Daniel tells Jeffery, "is that Nature is a hankerin' ta change. An' that change keeps everthang the same.

"People 're always a findin' ways ta keep things the way they ere, but remember this: an apricot will see April when ye an' thee ere old an' gone. Ever spring time is the same glorious moment. The world, it don't grow old with ye. Thar ain't flowers when ye're barn an' then fall leaves of ever color when ye die. If that were true, everbody would be barn at that same time an' die at the same time, an' that cain't be.

"Everone that lives beyond int-fancy gets ta be-hold the ever changin' moods of Mother Nature, gettin' ta witness the changin' of things that always remains the same.

"Everthang comes back ta whar it was. Ye bend a bowstring back, let it go, an' it comes right back ta whar it started, after it twangs a bit."

My heart is "atwangin'" and the tears come, because I know what I saw in my vision-dream. Jeffery bent that bowstring back, not knowin' the two hands of the mountain folk, or he didn't care, bein' friendly with both sides, tryin' to pull two different peoples together within himself, and somethin' popped. Somethin' happened to let go that bowsrting and send Jeffery right back to God...and I ache so much wantin' to be with him! I can't help myself now, for if Daddy knew I was out here with him, he would tan my hide and hang it on the wall. But I can't help it. I have to be with him in his last hours.

Well, the band comes and gets Daniel, askin' what the hell happened to him. They've been waitin' like an old mule for the plow that never comes. Before he leaves, though, he invites us to walk back to his house after the dance.

Jeffery is sittin' on the ground now, askin' me, "You're crying. You know that?"

"Yes, I know that," I say rather loud, because I'm so disturbed. I don't want him to ask and wipe my tears on my sleeve and sniff.

"Did something Mr. MacDougle say..."

"Call'im Dan'l," I say.

"Did something Daniel say make you cry?"

I plop right down into Jeffery's lap, and I grab him tight, and I cry, "Just hold me Jeffery, and don't ask me any dumb questions!" With that, he gently puts his arms around me as though I were goin' to break. I will break if anythin' happens to my Jeffery.

After the dance, we walk back with Daniel and enter his dark fairyland forest. The moon and stars peek through the darkened trees between the leaves and branches above us, lookin' like the fairy queen and her followin' of forest fairies. We call the fire flies fairies from the stories Daniel tells us...all the fairies come down and dance around us, givin' us their gift of laughter. We can hear the roarin' of the waterfall to our right and come to a little clearin' where we cross the stream on a little wooden bridge. We feel the power in this place and go silent. The giants on each side of Daniel's cabin look like

a castle in the dark with the moon paintin' it silver. It's the castle of the fairy queen.

We sit down on Daniel's porch with our feet on the steps. He hasn't any chairs to offer us except the one he sits in. He pulls out his fiddle from its case and makes it sing. ye'd think he would be tired of fiddlin' all night for the dance and come home and havin' to fiddle again just to entertain us, but what he played now isn't dancin' music. It's power music. It's the waterfall. It's the top of the mountain. It's the sunrise and sunset all wrapped into one. It's the life of these big giant trees. It's the life force of the green forest, and its power flows into us, takin' away all our fatigue. We're wide awake in the middle of the night.

After a while, the moon settles down to nap below the mountain's edge. No need for it to be up there when Daniel's on guard to watch the forest.

Daniel stops playin' for a spell, and Jeffery asks, "What is this *power* I feel?"

Daniel answers with a question. "Is it the music, or is it the forest?"

He takes a swig of moonshine whiskey from his jug and offers it to Jeffery. Jeffery takes some and chokes and coughs. Daniel says, "it don't like ye," and he laughs. We all laugh. "Ye don't have the equal power *it* has. So it over-powers ye. Now take these ol' trees hear. They have *power*. They've been soakin' up the power of the arth fer so long, they shine."

I can see that Jeffery sees it. Even though the moon has gone down, the giant oaks give off a silvery sheen. The forest is alive with a light all its own.

Daniel continues. "It's a power place. The arth has old places full of beauty and power. This hear's one of them. That power ye feel is whar my music comes from. It don't come from me. It's got a life of its own. It's hear in the trees. It's hear in the arth. No need to suck it out of a parson...no babe, no garl, no man, if ye gets it di-rect." He pauses and then says, "Most folk gets it from others by gettin' them upset and arguin' or tryin' to sooth them or by squeezin' the life out of babes. ye know, huggin' babies and little chillens."

"How do you get this power di-rectly, as you say?" asks Jeffery.

"Ye *breathe* it in, boy," and he takes a deep breath. "Ye *breathe* it in."

Daniel continues his fiddlin'. Jeffery says that it's classical music like he heard in school. Daniel lays his fiddle aside and looks deep into Jeffery and says, "It's no composition, dang it!" And he says reverently, "it comes from the arth mother," and he continues playin'.

About dawn, now, and we feel it's time to go. We stand up. Daniel looks like he is about ready to drop off to sleep. We start to go, but Jeffery turns and asks Daniel, "Why do you shoot at the guys?"

"They're trespassers. They do nothin' with the power God give 'em but ta lay waste an' destroy. They come heer ta git the power, all right, but they use it ta destroy. The path that lays behind 'em is waste an' destruction...waste and destruction."

"But isn't that what you do to them?" he asked.

Daniel starts dozin' in his rockin' chair. I say to Jeffery, "Let's go. He's done and gone now."

"But why does he try to take a life when he sits heer and talks about the power of God?"

Daniel opens his eyes all of a sudden and says, "They 're the sons of the Ammonites an' the Philistines. They're in the hands of God when they come inta this hear land. Boy! Ye have seen the power of God tonight!" and then he starts snorin' as though he had been asleep all along. We leave quietly.

Goin' up to the ridge, up to Jeffery's place, we look back into the dark woods and see the silvery fairie castle made of ancient trees knarled together to make a cabin full of power.

Takin' a deep breath, Jeffery says, not quite convinced, "I still don't see how such an uneducated man can come up with such classical music."

"It comes from 'is heart, Jeffery. It come from 'is heart," I say.

We cross the corn field growin' green in the fadin' starlight and hear the cocks start to crow. Walkin' up to Jeffery's porch, I leave him there with such a passionate embrace and a kiss that he has to

peel me off of him. I don't want to leave, but I do, but I don't touch ground until I get back home, and then the sky falls upon me.

I crawl into the back window, not thinkin' of my daddy, not until I lay down on my bed and feel the crushin' blow of his fist in my face, and he starts yellin' at me. The power is still in me and I'm out of that bed in a lightenin' flash, but he's quick and catches me and gives me another blow to the face. Mama comes between me and him.

"Not fit'n ta be a preacher's wife!" he yells at me across Mama's shoulder. "Become a little whore, sneakin' out at night ta be wif that lowlander whose not any good but ta be fodder fer ma gun!"

I curl up into the corner of the room. I lick blood off my lips and savor the salty flavor. What a change of scene I came into! But the black eye and swollen lips can't shake the feelin' that's between me and my love. I can still feel the enchantment of the night.

A black eye doesn't bother me. I've given them and I can take them. But when Daddy start's yellin' that he's goin' to get his gun and go over there and kill that Jeff guy, slammin' the door as he goes, my enchantment flickers. I thought I should run to my Jeffery and warn him. I hear my daddy's footsteps trampin' outside. I rise to go, but my mama stops me.

"He's only agoin huntin' and drinkin'," Mama says.

She follows me to the front door and puts her arms around me. We stand there together and let the first rays of the mornin' sun touch our faces.

"We love ye, an' we stayed up all night worryin' where ye were," said Mama gently.

"We only stayed up with Dan'l after the dance...at his place," I say.

"Ye an' that Jeff guy?"

"Yes'm"

"I wish ye wouldn't go over thar. He won't teach ye nothin' but heathen ways."

"Yes'm. But, don't ye thank that a guy what don't hit nobody is more saved than one who does?" I say, tryin' to defend Daniel.

My mama stiffens up and says, "Now don't ye get on that agin', all about yer daddy bein' a rough man. He may be a bit wild, but that's what ye an' me likes about ar' men, now ain't it?" and she smiles. I blush and whisper a "yes."

"Ye rile yer daddy 'til he's sick with worry...an' ye expect him ta be nice? Besides...he aint lazy like some men 'round hear. He's a good provider. He al'ays puts meat on the table."

"Yes'm," I say.

"Better wash up. I'll git ye some ointment."

CHAPTER THREE

I go to church early every Sunday. A group of us get together and sing. They call it a choir. Jeffery says that it could become one if we had someone trained to lead us. I asked him if he were trained. He said no. "Then," said I, "how do ye know we're not a choir? It's the best one ye'll find in these mountains, and it feels good to sing today."

I can see Jeffery comin' in the front door. I know he'll fume when he sees my black eye. Everyone in the choir made such a big fuss about it this mornin'. I told them it was nothin', and bein' a good Christian, told them it was because I stayed out all night. Some of them agreed it was a fittin' punishment. I don't feel it though. I feel my swollen mouth more than I do my black eye just tryin' to sing. I sure hope Jeffery doesn't make a fuss with my daddy over such trifles.

He sees me, starts to smile, cocks his head and comes runnin' up to the choir seats.

"What happened?" he asks.

"I just had a run in with my daddy," I say, leanin' on the railin' in front of me with my elbows, "but everthang's alright."

Right then my daddy walks through the front doors, and I see Jeffery stiffen. He whips around and looks my daddy in the eye, but I grab him by the back of his shirt and say, "Ye leave my daddy alone ar' ye'll never see *me* agin." He looks back at me almost pleadin', but I say, "Ye jus' go on an' sit down, Jeffery Dawdson! I can take car' of myself."

He goes and sits down three seats back. My daddy sits on the last row so he can keep an eye on thangs. I look at him eye to eye and reflect his overly serious expression. I then look at Jeffery and try to give him a reassurin' smile. No black eye has ever taken *my* spirits away. But I must look ridiculous singin' up here in the choir with a black eye. People are lookin' and talkin' and gigglin' if not out right laughin', but I sing the louder. My swollen lip doesn't stop me either.

We sing "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder" and then "Gatherin' in the Sheaves." The congregation joins in on "Rock of Ages Cleft for Me," and now, that they're all here, Preacher Davies gets up to pray.

I peek over at Jeffery, and he peeks at me. We smile, thinkin' of last night. I see Daddy starin' straight up at me, and I quickly close my eyes. I'm so mad at him tryin' to marry me off to that Rowen Davies, I could spit hell fire.

Daddy's stance tells me that he is goin' to beat me every time he finds me with my beloved Jeffery. He thinks to beat the devil out of me. I'm supposed to be Rowan's girl...supposed to be married to him, but I have other plans.

Jenny McGafferty has sat down next to Jeffery. She's my dearest girl friend. She lives just over the next hollow. I haven't seen her much since I've been with Jeffery, but she understands, bein' married already...and she loves her man just like I love Jeffery, but her man's a highlander. Anyway, she and I are in cahoots with each other on this plan of mine. I see she is shakin' hands with Jeffery. I smile at him as he looks so surprised. She is slippin' him my note. After church, we'll go our separate ways. Rowan will have dinner with me and my folks, and then I'll make some excuse to leave. I'll meet Jeffery on that knoll above his house and we'll run away together. Otherwise, I'm stuck with that no good lowlander Rowan Davies. I don't want any *missionary*.

Preacher Davies is preachin' up a storm. He has Mrs. Pritchitt rollin' in the isle again...hands clappin'...praisin' and hallelujahs everywhere...and there goes Widow Banes shakin' all over with her hands reachin' up and down in the air.

Now that old Zach has them rollin' in the aisles, he's givin' it over to Rowan to get them down the aisles all the way to the altar. He says to them, poundin' on the pulpit, "You come to a fork in the road of life and you can go only one of two ways. On the left, you can go to Hell and live with the devil

and his angels who are experts in the tortures of Hell where there is everlastin' burnin's of fire and brimstone." There are a lot of Amens and Hallelujahs. "Or you can turn to the right and be on that straight and narrow road so often spoken of by the Lord and Master. Are you going to do what is right? Be on the Lord's side! As for me and my house, says Joshua who made the heathen walls of Jericho fall down with the blast of the Lord's trumpet, we will serve the Lord! This is the road, my brothers and sisters, which will lead you to Heaven and to peace and rest. Yes, brothers and sisters. Do you see the way to choose? The one way of sin and damnation will lead you to Hell. The other road will lead you to God and his rest. Do you want to rest, my brothers and sisters? Do you have enough trouble in the world? Then come and let the Lord take away your sins. Come down to the altar. Come to his love."

Then to emphasize his meanin', he slams the Bible on the pulpit and says, makin' one boom follow another boom with his boomin' voice, "The way is clear! Clearly mapped out in the Bible. Je-sus said, his sheep will he have on his *right* hand, and the old goats like Daniel MacDoogle and all you worshipers of the devil will he have on his *left* hand..." more Amens and Hallelujahs. "He will open the Pearly Gates of Heaven and let the bless-ed and the saved enter in to his rest," and he sings, with the choir joinin' in, "There will be pe-e-eace in the va-alley for ye-ee-ee, Amen!" Then everybody joins in the singin' while he does some more preachin'.

Everyone starts singin' "Savin' Grace...what a wretch like me."

"Do we have someone here today," Rowan continues, and then Zachary starts singin' "I come dear Lard, I come." Everyone follows. And Rowan asks, "Is there not one soul here today that feels the hand of the good Lord on their shoulder? Isn't there one here today that feels the need to unburden their load of guilt and sorrow at the altar and say 'Lord, I'm sorry. I have sinned, and I don't want this burden anymore?'"

There is one woman that gets up and runs down to the altar and falls down on her knees, cryin', "Ah Lard! I need ye! Ah, Lard! I've sinned!" Some of the sisters get out of their seats and go and pray with her. Zachary prays, "Thank ye Lard, thank ye." Then he asks, "Now is there any other?"

I get all emotional and sorry for myself...sorry for all the bad thangs I've done or thought of doin'. I start to get up and go cry at the altar when I see Zachary approach Jeffery. He lays his hand on his shoulder and grips it hard.

"Har's one," he cries. "Har's one what runs 'round with sinners, gettin' drunk and dancin' with the devil. Son, where's yar friends? Why did ye choose this day to be in the house of the Lard? Is it because ye feel the power of Salvation in this place? Do ye feel the power? Do ye feel the time is right ta become a Christian?"

I can see Jeffery blush and hold onto his hat really tight. He turns to Jenny and says somethin' to her. He seems so nervous. He has a few words with the preacher whose face turns red and wrinkled. There is a lot of commotion and talkin' and people gettin' out of their seats. Jeffery goes down the middle aisle towards the door. There, I can see my daddy grab Jeffery by the front of his shirt. He's surely givin' him a warnin' not to mess around with me. Everythang's breakin' up. The Sunday meetin' isn't supposed to end like this.

Zachary yells out, "Does this mean that ye cannot accept the Lard, and ye are taken the hand of the devil?"

Jeffery turns around and tells everybody, "I don't mean to offend anyone, but I have to find my own path to God. I heard God come out of a fiddle in the middle of the woods. I'm sorry, I really tried, but I can't feel the Spirit of God in this church." He turns around and walks away.

My daddy nearly flips onto his back. He sways as though he is about to pass out, and then he sticks his head out the door and calls out, "Goddammed devil worshipper!" But Jeffery keeps goin' right on I hope to our secret meetin' place above his house, and I hope I can get away.

Rowan goes up to Daddy and calms him down. He says, "Now Brother McClair, let's not have any name calling. There's other ways of taking care of the devil..." and with a twinkle in his eye, he

adds, "so as we can save the poor boy's soul."

Brother McCalley comes behind the young preacher, whisperin' in his ear just like the devil himself, sayin', "That kid's pa thinks hisself right down smart, he does. Thinks we is all come from monkeys, an' he teaches that ta ar' younguns."

"Well, Brother McCalley," Rowan says, "we'll talk to him about it."

Rowan looks out the door of the church with his hand on his mouth with a really bad worry look on his face. He stands there holdin' up the congregation which wants to get out. He turns around and appologizes, smilin', shakin' hands as the people leave. Everyone takes their turn as they shake Rowan's hand at sayin' somethin' bad about the Dawdson family.

"Upstart city-slickers!"

"If any one's come from monkeys it's the Dawdsons. Look at that littlun of thars...looks like one."

"Takin' my chilluns out'n that school if'n that's what thar teachin'!"

"That Jeff boy's a witch...taught by ol' McDougale hisself."

"Saw Miz Dawdson t'other day knitten hexes onto her clothes. I said she ought not ta do that."

"Dawdson's carn's so high, must be withcraft."

All of a sudden all the mountain's talkin' bad about Jeffery's family, and I've never heard anyone talk bad about them before. Everyone has always been so nice and polite to them, even behind their backs. I've only heard compliments. Everyone was so respectful of Mr. Dawdson's knowledge and experience. That's why they put their children in his school. Now, that little spark, started by the devil himself, just a small blaze in dry grass, is spreadin' like wild fire. Their souls have all dried up, forgettin' anythin' the preacher said today, and they're burnin' up with the fever. I even heard someone say that Jeff gave me my black eye at the dance last night. Why all these lies?

They're gatherin' a little crowd outside, talkin' about runnin' those Dawdsons out of these mountains. Rowan is tryin' to calm them down with his sweet words as they leave, and I like that in him, for it's a kindness, but the people standin' outside are formin' a mob. At least, it could become a mob if the sun were to heat up a little more.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mama knows right how to fry up a chicken. When we all three (Rowan, Daddy, and myself) get home...I smell it...and the mashed potatoes and the gravy, the candied yams and sour greens...My! I sure am hungry.

Rowan talks really sweet to me, tryin' all the small talk as if we were in Paradise and nothin' has ever happened. I act really shy around him. I *am* shy around him. I don't understand his kind. He's always polite and talks softly, like perhaps the Lord does. I don't trust him. He's like a snake-in-the-grass. He'd probably beat me as bad as any man around here, but here he is, puttin' on airs as though he were the kindest and gentlest thang! Is he or ain't he the wolf in sheep's clothin'? I don't feel right around him. I feel at ease and calm like he's just part of the family...not all excited like I do around Jeffery. Jeffery makes me feel like a woman. He makes me feel like havin' his baby. I could have dozens of his babies and never flinch. Rowan here is more like a brother or a friend. There's no fire between us. I can't marry my *brother*!

"Howdee Rever'nd!" Mama calls out as we enter the door, wipin' the palms of her hands flat across her apron.

Now, the steps don't go straight up to the door, because of the location of the house, the way it faces away from the trail lookin' down into the hollow; they come up from the side of the house onto the porch. So, Mama has to show everybody comin' up the steps where the door is by stretchin' her left arm out the door. Then she says, "Come right on in an' make yerself at home!" The trail goes back up the road that leads up to the Dawdson place ...and my mind travels back along that trail and up the road a bit to where Jeffery is waitin' for me.

"Tess!" Mama calls to me. "Don' stand thar a dawdlin' all starry-eyed. Come on in the house an' help with the Sundee victuals. The Rever'nd can't wait all day ta fill up that hole in 'is soul."

It's our turn to feed him. Everyone at church takes a turn feedin' the preachers (school teachers too, but the mountain folk don't take to kindly to Mr. Dawdson, he bein' self sufficient). Mama takes it as a special occasion as if we alone thought of invitin' him.

Rowan takes my hand gently and wakes me up. He says, smilin', takin' his black broad-rimmed hat off with his other hand, "She's no doubt bewitched by the old forest spirits I hear comin' over the trees, and needs to be led gently away from them to God's own." There *is* strains of Daniel's soothin' music faintly heard on the breeze. Maybe he's referrin' to that.

"I'm sorry, Rowan," I say. "Been up all night at the Corners. Didn't git no sleep last night."

While Mama puts the finishin' touches on the table, my shiner comes up in conversation.

"And how did such a pretty lady like you come up with a black eye?" asks Rowan.

"Oh, ye know rough an' tumble me," I say, lyin' through my teeth, "I ain't no lady."

"Well, you are to me," he says, "and the prettiest lady around these heer parts."

Daddy is just soakin' up all Rowan's soft talk and compliments, just sittin' in his wicker chair just a beamin', not takin' any notice that I'm savin' his hide.

"Yup," he spits out. "She's the finest catch this side of the ridge."

"Dinner's ready Reverend," says Mama, and she comes in between us, tiltin' her head towards Rowan and puttin' her hands together as if she's prayin' to him. It makes me uneasy to see her bein' so polite to him. I thought only Catholics worship the priest, and here she is worshippin' Rowan! He might as well marry her as me and ditch dear old Daddy.

"Will ye sit at the head of the table heer?" she asks so politely, directin' him to sit in Daddy's place. Daddy don't mind a bit, offerin' to push the chair in for him, just beamin'. He thinks he's goin' to get rid of me. He is, quicker than he thinks, and tonight, if thangs go right.

What am I talkin' about? Will I ever escape with a soul Heaven-bound? Surely, someone is

comin' to kill Jeffery. I don't know if I can stop Mr. Death, but I have to try and get Jeffery out of these mountains and me with him.

Dinner's over and the conversation has gotten around to killin'.

"I say strike down the Philistines," says my daddy...a little louder than he should with the preacher sittin' next to him. "Don't let'm take an inch...ar' this land'l be turned ta i-dolity."

"I know," responds Rowan, "that the Lord at times commands his people to destroy the wicked. But Brother McClair, don't you think that the word of the Lord is more powerful than a two edged sword?"

"Yes, by golly. But ye saw that bullheaded lad today! He ran right out o' the church sayin' he'd rather warship them false gods of the heathen, sidin' as he does wif that goddamned fiddler now!"

"That so?" Rowan asked, raisin' his left eyebrow a bit. "Still, the Good Book says that if a man has ought against his neighbor, he should talk to the man, not blow his head off. I'm sure that Mr. Dawson is level headed. I hear he's been teaching false ideas about man evolving from monkeys. Our children may act like monkeys sometimes, yes, but," and he and my daddy laugh at this.

"Yeah, they shore do, don' they?" Daddy says, winkin' over at me. But then his face sobers up, and I know he's thinkin' of Jeffery.

Conversation has somehow come back around to the weddin' of me and Rowan. I dread talkin' about this and makin' up lies... Lord forgive me, I don't mean to deceive. I just don't know how else to get out of a beatin'.

"An' when is this big day gonna come?" Daddy asks for the hundredth time as if he just can't wait. (Once, he said, "I jes' can't wait ta have a preacher in the fam'ly.") Women's lives are sold like cattle.

Lizabeth, who is always in the background blurts out, "She's gonna be big an' fat an' git all ugly like Ma when she gits in the preacher's bed, she is."

Ma raises her voice with a vengeance, sayin' in the little girl's direction, "Shush yo' mouth, girl! Yo time is comin' up soon enough!" and at the same time grabbin' the kitchen spoon and hittin' Lizabeth on the noggin. Lizabeth yells "Ow!" and that's the end of that. All the children are silent and in the background. That's the way Mama likes it.

"It will be another month, Zach tells me, before I get my first church," says Rowan, leanin' over with his elbows on his knees and his fingers intertwined and twisted like he's in deep thought, smilin' really big. He looks over at me, and I blush I'm so angry, but he thinks I'm just shy. "Then we'll get married," he continues, "at the Corners and just head over to our first little church. Zach says they already have a cabin built for the newlyweds. We'll have a sweet little home, won't we Dear?" Is he talkin' to me?

"Yes sir," I say, lookin' down at my toes which are more important than he ever will be.

"Don't need ta be so shy, Tess," Daddy puts on. "Why, she's thinkin' of havin' all those babies...why that's only *natural*. It'll come real smooth like it does ta all the women folk. Ain't that right, Mama?"

"Ye don't know tha half of it, bein' a man as ye are," says Mama actin' as a wise old owl. "But it gits easier on the lovin' end at least."

Oh, I've got to get out of here! Now I *am* embarrassed! Them talkin' like that in front of Rowan, and him bein' a preacher, too. I rise, and Daddy asks, "Whar ye goin' daughter?"

"Ta the outhouse," I say, raisin' the singin' note of my voice so they can understand. "Excuse me all," I say as I squeeze between Rowan's and Daddy's knees, as there isn't much room in our little cabin.

"Well, why ye goin' to the bedroom?" Daddy asks so sweetly. "the toilet's outside."

I yell back in anger, "I gotta git a rag! I gotta git a rag!" All the while, I'm throwin' my thangs into Mama's suitcase. I throw it out the back window, and I follow after it.

I can almost hear Daddy laugh as he says, "she's in her womanly way."

As I go up the hill carryin' the suitcase to the road, not on the trail, but through the bushes so they can't see me, I can hear them singin' "Leee-ning, leee-ning, leanin' on the Everlastin' Arm." I start singin', and forgive me of my sacrilege, but Jeffery's the one I'm worshipin' right now, "Leee-ning, leee-ning, leanin' *in* his everlastin' arms." I can't wait to see Jeffery, my Jeffery. I just know he's up on that knoll above the hill in the rock cleff waitin' for me. Back at the church, I heard him thank Jenny. I know he got my message.

The moon has come at midday. The evergreens are greener. The autumn leaves are redder and crisper, like flamin' fires burnin' underneath my feet, liftin' me higher and higher to my Jeffery.

Now I am surrounded by the fire of his arms. We sink deep into the grass, and I want to become one with him so bad that I forget everythin' that is behind me.

I'm afraid that I have overwhelmed Jeffery. I feel the passion of his love enterin' into me...the fire of the glory of the sun, moon and stars, and I meld into his soul. We are finally one, and that makes three, for surely, I know I'm pregnant. And that makes us married.

We lie here under the rocks without speakin', caressin' each other, huggin' and kissin'...and then comes a dark shadow passin' over us. It sends chills up and down my spine and makes me shudder. I have made love to a dead man. I get up on my knees really fast.

"What's wrong?" Jeffery asks. "Did I do something wrong?" He comes up along side me and asks, "Are you having some regrets?"

"No, no," I say as I rush my fingers to his pretty lips. Then I turn and look at Mr. Death standin' there in the shadows of the trees. "No! No!" I cry! and hear the blast of a shotgun twice, and I'm all covered with blood. Jeffery's blood is all over me. "Jeffery!" I am screamin'! I am dizzy. I am numb. I reach over and give Jeffery one last kiss.

I hear my Daddy say, "Git on home or I'll blast ye wif him an' not regret it."

How, I don't know, but I find that I have run all the way through Daniel's place and am washin' myself in the creek below the waterfall. I know I am as blue as the sky above, but the cold water has washed all my feelin's away. All I know now is that I am where the music is...where the beauty is...down there in Spook Hollow. I am the water fallin' over the rocks down into the cold bubblin' pool where life has taken me. I stand in the waterfall and let it wash all the blood of my love away...out of my hair, off of my face, out of my clothes...and out of my heart. I see Daniel come, but I don't care enough to give him a mind.

"I heared a gunshot," he says matter of factly. "Then I see ye scamper down that mountain thar."

That's all I hear him say. I lay myself down into the cold watery grave, thinkin' I will end it all here. My soul has gone to Heaven, and I am no more.

Then I find myself in a field of wild flowers. I see Jeffery. I run to him and my feet are lifted into the air. We try to embrace, but he's always ahead of me. There's just too much air or somethin' between us.

"Jeffery! Oh, Jeffery!" I cry. "Why can't we touch?"

I see a young handsome man all glowin' in white stand beside Jeffery. Jeffery says, "This here is my son. Our son. You have to go back so he can be born."

I turn around and see the black hole from whence I came underneath me. I turn back to Jeffery. I see others standin' there now, and they call me "Mama." I know they are my and Rown's children.

"It's all right, Tess," I hear Jeffery say. "I love you Tess, and I always will."

As I cry out "I love ye!" he gets farther and farther away, and I feel myself fallin' down into the sink hole. He becomes a star shootin' across the blackness amid myriad of stars.

"Jeffery, good bye," I say. "I love ye, good bye."

I am again aware of the cold blue water around me. It is so very cold, and I go to sleep. I wake up in front of a warm fireplace, wrapped in a bear skin and bare naked too. The pelt of my soul is just

as bare.

"If ye gonna kill yerself gal," says grumpy old Daniel, "do it on yer own land."

I look at the fire and see my clothes hangin' down from the high mantel.

"I ain't gonna kill myself Dan'l. Not no more," I say, "I gonna git married to Rowan."

I stare into the rich orange flames and fall asleep, dreamin' of Jeffery.

CONCLUSION

Rowan got his call yesterday. A full month has passed since that bloody Sunday. He's now a full fledged pastor, just like he said. He has his own church now. "We just have to get married and move over to Arkansas," he says. "It'll be a nice little country church like the one at the Corners."

It was too bad about Mr. Dawdson and his family. Rowan told me all about it. There was a committee that went up to talk to Mr. Dawdson...caught him near the road in his corn field. Rowan said that he had taken after Daddy when Daddy suddenly got up and left the house with his shotgun. He came upon the committee talkin' to Mr. Dawdson. Someone had pulled out a gun and shot the man. No one seems to know who it was or they're not tellin'.

Rowan was the one who carried the body up to Mrs. Dawdson. He said it almost broke his heart. There was nothin' he could do. Mr. Dawdson was dead by the time he got him up to the house. The doctor came, but there was nothin' to do but pronounce him dead. When Mrs. Dawdson had to bury her two men in one day, her husband and her son, she went insane. She grieved so much, and she bein' a lowlander hadn't ever been in any sufferin' before, she disappeared into the mountains, they say, lookin' for her way back home, back to *her* mama. One of the McAllister boys took up with the little girl Nancy, and the little boy has been dead a year. I have been taken up with Jeffery so much, I never took notice.

Rowan came over to Daniel's cabin the Monday after the awful thang when Daniel went and told my family where I was. They went and told Rowan to go over and fetch me. Daniel said it was no surprise to him what happened, seein' that everthang in these mountains happens to keep the status quo. "Everthang remains the same," he said.

If Daniel hadn't pulled me out of that water...and I think of this quite often...I would have surely let that creek carry me away down to the river that runs into the great Mississippi... the one that Mr. Dawdson talked about in the school...and that great river would have carried me into the wide ocean Mr. Dawdson said was out there...like all eternity where sky and ocean join together all the souls of men. Then I would have joined my Jeffery, but seein' what Jeffery showed me, someone would have rescued me as they already did. Daniel did, and I love him like a real father...that is, I wish he *were* my real father. I think I love him more than *any* man. I will surely miss him more than he will me.

Daddy has disappeared. They say he's livin' with one of Daniel's friends...one of those king men who still live up in the high mountains waitin' for some future time when Scotts will have their own king...probably waitin' for the resurrection of bonny Prince Charly.

Mama is worried now that Daddy is gone, wonderin' where her next meal is comin' from, but every time a killed turkey or possum or chicken shows up on her door step, she knows Daddy is still around. Funny thang is that one of the sisters from the Church has to come and clean it for her. Mama says it ain't hers and she won't touch it, but she winds up eatin' it anyway. She sits on the porch worrin' about her next meal and about Daddy. I think she has gone funny somehow.

Sister MacAllister is over havin' me stand here in an old weddin' dress that has been in my mama's family for a hundred years. She is sewin' it up around me to make it fit. My mama's folk use to be rich and own a plantation. Now, this is the only thang that's left of all their great riches. Everythin' got ruined in the war with the North. She's pamperin' me, sayin' such thangs as "Look at the purty bride," and, "Ye is goin' ta make the purtiest bride."

She's finished. She helps me down off the chair I had to stand on and gives me a big hug and kiss. She says, "You's so bright and cheery today...like you's all forgotten that awfull thang about that lowlander...what's-is-name? Pastor Davies is goin' ta have hisself a perfect bride."

"Yessiree," I say...and then I hear someone comin' up the path. I see Rowan out the window. I scream with excitement, not wantin' him to see me yet. It's bad luck. Then Lizbeth shouts, "Te-ess!

Someone's come ta marry ye."

THE END