

I WONDER WILL YE KNOW ME

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## ABSTRACT

I WONDER WILL YE KNOW ME

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My thesis is a novella that tells the story of a woman who has faced displacement and abandonment throughout her life. It explores the profound effects of these experiences and the radical choices she makes after finally finding a place to raise her family and grow old. At 95 years old, just as she believes this will be the place she will live until the end of her life, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) arrives to take her land for the construction of Fontana Dam, claiming it's for the greater good of the region. Through this story, I aim to reveal the deep impact such events have on individuals, families, and communities, raising questions about whether the sacrifice for the so-called greater good is truly worth the lasting pain and devastation that generations endure. The novella also challenges the notion that building the dam brought any real benefit to the region or its people.

## INTRODUCTION

The theme of displacement and abandonment runs like a strong current through much of Appalachian literature and lore, reflecting not only personal losses, but also broader struggles between progress and preservation. Displacement and abandonment are the main themes that I explore in my novella, *I Wonder Will Ye Know Me*. I found a wealth of resonant works, each contributing to an understanding of how communities endure, resist, and sometimes fracture under the weight of forced displacement. The stories of characters affected by such upheaval are rarely straightforward tales of loss alone; they also capture resilience, identity, and survival within a new and sometimes alien landscape. Through novels, newspaper articles, recorded oral histories and conversations, I was able to capture the essence of Appalachian life—from the way people spoke, cooked, and other daily routines as well as their religious and healing practices, and understanding their deep ties to the land.

In *I Wonder Will Ye Know Me*, I attempt to capture these complex interactions between progress and loss, using characters who respond differently to the trauma of displacement. For some, like Granny, the land holds a sense of identity that cannot be easily severed; for others, like Mr. and Mrs. Calhoun, it is a painful reminder of what has been taken from them; and for the younger generation, not as connected to place, a different perspective and a new world to anticipate. By drawing from the rich literature on displacement in Appalachia and beyond, I tried to convey the emotional and cultural impacts of forced relocation, as well as the resilience that allows individuals and communities to adapt and find new ways to connect with their heritage.

Gary Carden's play *Birdell* centers around a woman displaced by the construction of Fontana Dam, a TVA project that forced her family from their home on Hazel Creek. *Birdell* brings to life the trauma of forced removal for residents who not only lost their land but also a

piece of their history and culture. By personifying the human cost of governmental projects in the name of progress, Carden's work illuminates an experience common to many Appalachian families uprooted from their ancestral lands. This storytelling emphasizes the concept of generational memory, connecting the past to the present, as echoes of displacement still ripple across communities who feel the loss of place.

A similar sense of cultural preservation is found in the writings of Jim Casada, a local historian and writer in Bryson City, North Carolina. He has recorded the memories and traditions of Appalachian life in his weekly column called, "Mountain Musings and Memories with Jim Casada," in the *Smoky Mountain Times* for many years. He wrote a series on the resourcefulness of Appalachian women titled, "Granny Women: The measure of mountain women," which describes all the specific skills and lore associated with all the things Appalachian women did in their daily lives and the quiet, tenacious strength of mountain women whose lives were interwoven with the land they cared for which are highlighted in Granny's character. These articles have information that would be hard to find unless you were to find someone from that era. Another subject Jim Casada has written about in his column throughout the years, is the history of displacement of people who lived on the North Shore of Fontana Lake and how they had to leave their buried loved ones behind and details about their annual arduous pilgrimage to decorate their graves every year. Another subject that Jim Casada often explores is the sense of loss and dislocation felt by those displaced by Fontana Dam.

Don Casada, a retired engineer, is Jim Casada's brother. He is the caretaker of the Bryson City Cemetery and has gathered research on the whole area for years. He shares his research on a website called *My Mountain Folks*. He adds to this legacy by doing research and documenting the cemeteries submerged or isolated by the dam, an endeavor that powerfully symbolizes the

resilience of memory amid displacement. Both Jim Casada and Don Casada's work underscores the way physical spaces hold memories and histories that are not easily erased.

In a broader literary context, works by authors like Ron Rash and Jayne Moore Waldrop also grapple with the theme of forced displacement. Rash's *One Foot in Eden* is a related story of the creation of a reservoir that transforms the land, and along with it, the community's way of life, presenting a powerful example of progress that comes at a steep price. For characters like Billy and Amy Holcombe, their land is not merely property but an extension of their lives and family heritage. The forced relocation severs them from their ancestral home, a painful uprooting that symbolizes the erasure of their history and connection to place. Rash describes the land with reverence, underscoring the beauty and integrity of the untouched Appalachian valley, which is turned into a reservoir. And the desire to remain on their land leads the characters to make morally complex and sometimes destructive decisions.

Waldrop's novel, *Drowned Town*, explores similar multigenerational impacts, portraying families grappling with the pain of displacement as they navigate the lingering connections to a submerged past. It tells stories that explore the complexity of loss and the longing for what remains unreachable, questioning how people re-root themselves when severed from their cultural landscapes. This is a similar story told in my novella, but this story is between two friends, and it is set in Western Kentucky. It's about the possession of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers and the acquiring of land through eminent domain to create a national recreation area on a narrow strip of land between two lakes. Waldrop uses a technique of going back and forth in time to tell their story of how they cannot separate themselves from place.

Beyond Appalachia, literature on displacement in other countries reveals similar undercurrents. A historical fiction novel, *Haweswater: A Novel* by Sarah Hall tells a similar story

of displacement due to a dam construction that is set in the United Kingdom in 1936. It is a story about the construction of a dam called Haweswater in the Lake District of northern England that resulted in the flooding of a valley by the reservoir, and the loss of the community and its traditions. Also, David Howarth's *The Shadow of the Dam* details the eviction of the Tonga people in southern Africa. Although set in different lands, these narratives share a universal thread: the erosion of culture, history, and identity in the face of overpowering economic or political agendas. The displacement endured by these characters transcends borders, revealing a shared struggle against the forces that prioritize profit or national interest over personal and cultural preservation.

In another perspective, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* serves as an American epic of displacement, where economic forces and environmental catastrophe force a mass migration of people. Though the causes differ, the sense of abandonment and social displacement resonate with the forced evacuations in Appalachia and other rural areas. Through the Joads' journey, Steinbeck illustrates the role of capitalism as a force of dislocation, highlighting its ability to dehumanize people under the guise of economic progress. Steinbeck masterfully defines his characters through their dialect, physical descriptions, settings, and actions. He also effortlessly weaves dialogue into the story to show interiority in each character.

Katrina M. Powell's *The Anguish of Displacement the Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park* provides a scholarly exploration of these themes, particularly within Appalachian history. Her analysis of families displaced to create the Shenandoah National Park brings valuable insights into the political and social forces that enable large-scale displacement. Powell raises questions about the ethical considerations of displacing communities for tourism or other governmental initiatives, touching on the same conflict of

greater good versus individual rights that permeates Appalachian displacement narratives. She asks important questions such as what conditions must have been present for this tragedy to occur and how can we change it?

Progress can bring positive effects, but along with it brings negative effects. This balance of good and bad is shown in Ron Rash's book, *Above the Waterfall* which tells the story of the conflict between two people who think two different ways. One is a local and wants the land to stay the way it is, untouched. The other is a businessman who wants to use the land for economic gain.

Dan Pierce's nonfiction book, *Hazel Creek: The Life and Death of an Iconic Mountain Community* gives a historical account of Hazel Creek and how the town and community was inconveniently within the boundaries of a place needed to set a project in motion to help win World War II (WWII) and the indirect collateral damage war can cause. Pierce tells the story of Hazel Creek in chronological order, starting with the time when Native Americans lived in the area and it ends with the financial settlement that was the result of a lawsuit between the North Shore Cemetery Association, the North Shore Historical Association and the federal government in 2016.

There are many other books, fiction and non-fiction, about drowned towns and the plight of the people who were displaced due to flooding for the greater good of the community. Examples of what is called Reservoir Noir genre of literature are found in Scott Carson's National Best Seller, *The Chill* (2020), which is a story about a dam that once drowned a Cherokee village in the name of progress and the vengeful angry spirits that emerge from beneath the waters. Another fiction novel that has gained critical acclaim is Julia Spencer-Fleming's 2004 fiction novel that is part of a collection of mystery novels called *Out of the Deep*

*I Cry: A Clare Fergusson / Russ Van Alstyne Mystery*. It is a crime novel that involves the building of a dam, flooding of a valley, and forming of a lake and storylines that intertwine from the 1930s, 1970s, and present day.

One story often shared through oral tradition and community storytelling involves conspiracy theories about suspicious activities by the TVA and other government entities at the time. A novel that incorporates this kind of suspicion is Marc Barr's novel *Watershed*. It is a fiction novel that is set in Hardin County in 1937 and is a story about how the community is impacted by the construction of a hydroelectric dam, the early controversy surrounding the government initiative of the TVA projects and the fear and suspicion that comes along with progress.

Finally, recognizing both the positive and negative effects in the aftermath of such events is essential for understanding the full scope of the outcome. Studying where people relocated and how well they adjusted to new environments provides valuable insights into the long-term psychological impacts of displacement. We learn about these stories through oral recordings taken and saved on Western Carolina University's (WCU) website called *Southern Appalachian Digital Collections*. Wanda Pressman was a child living in Fontana Village when her father worked to build Fontana Dam. She tells stories, in one of these recordings, of what the kids used to do for fun and where some of the other kids ended doing with their lives. The people who lived there during those years still come back together every year for a reunion at Fontana Village.

Also, Lucille Boyden's non-fiction book, *The Village of Five Lives*, gives anecdotal evidence of the way of life at Fontana Village during the building of Fontana Dam and gives details of some people after they left the area. Woods, Leeunah Vance. *Growing Up on Hazel Creek and in the Fontana Basin Area*.

At the heart of my thesis, *I Wonder Will Ye Know Me*, is the sorrow Granny and so many others experienced as they were forced to leave what they knew and loved. Yet, another important aspect of the story is understanding the perspectives of those who evacuated, moved away, and went on to lead productive lives after enduring the heartbreak of displacement.

## PROLOGUE

My babes lay cradled in cool green moss;

My boy and man in clover.

Each day that passes, I mourn my loss

Wishin' my long life was over!

I see each one of you so clear

And my old heart breaks in two!

My tremblin' arms ache to draw you near;

I just couldn't ever leave you!

I'll join you, Dear ones, though your trail be cold

Angel guides will show me.

But, all these long years, I've got so old!

I wonder will ye know me?

## CHAPTER ONE

The bright light of the cold November morning accentuated a silhouette of the craggy lining of the mountain ridge as the sun rose from behind the mountain. A chorus of cardinals, black birds and robins alerted the dawn of a new day.

Daniel Holmes, a young man in his mid-20's, lived in a small shack on Hazel Creek in the Appalachian Mountains. Just above him on the same side of the mountain, lived his Granny in a cabin and just on the other side of the ridge, his mother, Nannie Sue and little sister, Lizzie, lived in a bigger cabin, the home where he grew up.

Daniel was getting ready to go outside and do his morning chores. He looked out the window and saw that the sun was shining on the mountain beyond and above the holler on the ridge. It made the mixture of burnt umber, yellow and red leaves on the trees look like a brilliant fire. As he looked around, he knew it was cold because the roofs and grass where the sun had not reached yet had a thin white layer of frost.

He dressed in layers to protect himself from the cold mountain morning. He used the small amount of kindling he had left to build a fire in his wood stove to warm the cabin. He knew Granny and his mother and sister would need wood to start their fires, and if he was going to get to all the visits he had planned for the day, he knew he had to hurry. He only had a week to get to everyone on his list. So, he didn't waste any time getting to his morning chores.

He cut and stacked wood for his granny, his mother as well as himself. He went to the barn in the field on the lower part of the holler to milk the cow and left the covered pails of warm milk on his mother's back porch since she was the one who did most of the cooking and preserving of the food for the three households, plus she was the only one with an ice box.

Once done with his morning chores, he went back to his cabin, filled the basin with water and used a washcloth to wipe the sweat from the morning work from his body, ran some Vitalis through his hair, shaved with Burma shave, brushless shaving cream, and slapped on some Aqua Velva after shave. He learned this grooming routine from the men he worked with at the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

His stocky, muscular frame was not made for the suit he was required to wear, but he liked wearing the suit anyway. He was proud of wearing the plain black business pants and matching business jacket, standard issue black necktie, a white button up dress shirt and standard issue dress shoes.

This attire was stark opposite of the way he grew up, wearing clothes for physical labor around the house, hiking through thick bushes of laurel to get to the right fishing hole, and traversing steep terrain to sit for hours in a tree stand waiting for an unsuspecting buck to come along.

This job had been the first time he ever wore a fancy hat, and he was still trying to get used to it. The style of hat for the TVA agents, at the time, was a fedora just like the FBI agents he had read about in the Courtney Riley Cooper articles in *American Magazine*. He had a shock of brown hair that made it difficult to keep the hat on his head, so he had to keep his hair cut short and tight for it to fit.

He liked these suits because they made for easy dressing every day since he had been working for the TVA. He had three suits to give him time to wash and clean the others and five white long-sleeved buttoned-up shirts and five ties.

Normally he would wear dress shoes with his suit, but the job he had to do recently required work boots. He had to trek into places that even horses couldn't go. Places with no paths or trails.

And because he might run into trouble deep in the woods or have to defend himself against what was thought to be potential attacks on the dam by Axis spies and saboteurs to disable the dam or the aluminum factory, he was issued a shiny tin badge, and a .38 caliber snub nosed handgun with a holster.

He understood the significance of these items, but never planned to use either the badge or the gun because he had a special tool in his arsenal. Something a little more persuasive. He was a local and just about everyone in his community knew him and liked him. This fact was the reason Daniel was so important to the TVA and their mission. Another unique asset Daniel possessed was his personal knowledge and experience of this area of the mountains. He had been hiking, fishing, hunting, ginseng digging, all over those mountains for as long as he could remember, and he had intimate wisdom of the ridges, mountains, swells, hollers and streams all within a 50 miles radius.

Daniel was excited and proud to be a TVA agent. He had wanted to work for the government for as long as he could remember. But there was a downside to the job. He was now charged with trying to get people he had known and lived with all his life to leave their homes. His people. People who were the same as he was. People who didn't know life outside of the mountains. People who had to pick up and move things and memories, their whole lives, to start somewhere new. All for the sake of the war effort and for the sake of the country. There were many who did not want to go, and he was the one who had to convince them.

He worked for the same government agency that built Fontana dam, the same government agency that would run everyone out of their homes, off their land and flood their community. And all for the greater good. This was one aspect of the job he did not think about, and it did not sit well with him, but he knew he had to push forward and do his job.

Nannie Sue was carrying the two pails of warm milk into the kitchen from the back porch when Daniel walked in. The cabin had three bedrooms, a living room with a fireplace and a sink on the back porch with a hand pump to draw water up from an underground spring for washing dishes and laundry.

Her home was clutter free except for several crates and bags that were stacked in the corner of the living room. The home had a feminine touch of lace doilies and crocheted blankets, a small dish cabinet with glass doors that stored and displayed the dishware, a wedding gift when she and Lloyd got married, and family pictures on the fireplace mantle that was a five foot, six inches thick, block of hand-hewn wood. The kitchen table was made of unfinished pine and a large cooking stove took up most of the room in the kitchen.

Nannie Sue wore a long sleeve cotton dress, tailored to fit the lines of her body. The apron strings tied around her waist accentuated her figure that was no longer a young woman's body, but one that had expanded with the experience of motherhood. She still had indications of youth with her long chestnut hair in a messy bun, a few freckles scattered across her nose and her milky skin that accentuated her blue eyes.

As Daniel walked in, he took in the mixture of smells that reminded him of when he grew up. Fresh cornbread, simmering beans cooked in fatback and salt, baked apple swimming in sugar, butter and cinnamon, baked sweet potatoes, and roasted squirrel. The feelings of home always hit him when he walked through the door. He never failed to find food ready to eat in the

pantry, on the stove or in the ice box. His mother's home, his childhood home was the one place that was constant, that remained the same and would be a place where he would always be welcome, no matter what. When he smelled these wonderful smells of food, he knew he was loved.

However, this day was different. A darkness hovered over the mood of that day. The world that he knew--that they all knew--would soon be a faded memory of the past.

Daniel put a copy of the *Bryson City Times* that he picked up the day before, on the kitchen table. He pulled a glass jar from the cabinet and a spoon from the drawer, poured some buttermilk from the ice box into the glass. He grabbed a piece of cornbread from the cast iron skillet then plopped down at the kitchen table and crumbled the cornbread in the buttermilk.

Nannie Sue cut the rest of the corn bread into squares and put them in a basket wrapped in a large cotton napkin. She turned to look at Daniel as she put the basket on the table.

"Well, well, that outfit sure does look good on ya. Real official-like." She turned back around and kept working. "And ya smell so nice. I can't get used to it. Your daddy, God rest his soul, would be so proud of ya, son."

Her words caught him off guard as he felt a tear trying to escape his eyes and a lump formed in his throat. "I know." He took a big swig of buttermilk. "I wish he was here."

He quickly pressed on his tear ducts before Nannie Sue could turn around. "I got a lotta runnin' around to do today. I was down at Jenkin's General Store yesterday and picked up this newspaper. I was puttin' up flyers, and that dang troublemaker I went to school with was down there with his buddies."

Nannie Sue asked, "Who is that?"

Daniel said, “Oh, you know. That dang Pee Wee Sanders and his bunch. They was givin' me a hard time, pokin' fun at my hat and suit. He won't never amount to nothin' no how, so I ignored 'em.”

Nannie Sue said, “Good for you, honey, for taking the higher road.”

“I put some flyers up on the community board so anybody comin' through can see 'em. And I took some by the post office, schoolhouse, and Doc Whitaker's office too.”

Nannie Sue put butter on the table beside the cornbread. She poured herself a cup of coffee, sat down with Daniel at the table, picked up the newspaper and read a headline.

“LETS ALL KEEP BACKING THE ATTACK!” Nannie Sue shook her head.

“Bless those men fight'n in that war and their mamas and daddys who are waiting for them to come home.” She took a sip of coffee. “Daniel, I'm glad you're here work'n for the government instead of over there work'n for the government.”

Her statement had put things into perspective for Daniel. He didn't think about the fact that he could be fighting in the war overseas.

“When Lizzie gets up, we're go'n to Granny's and try to get her started on packing.”

Daniel took his spoon and dipped the last big bite of buttermilk-soaked cornbread out of the jar and carefully maneuvered it into his mouth.

Nannie Sue continued, “I don't know how you can get people to leave their homes, if we can't even get Granny to budge. Older folks are anchored to this land like tree roots to the ground.”

Daniel put the spoon in the empty jar and sat it on the table and stood up. “I know it, Mama. Sometimes, I don't know if I'm doing the right thing or not,” Daniel lamented.

Nannie Sue took a sip of coffee. “Whenever you run by Jenkin’s again, if you could see if he has any more empty crates we could have. That would be a big help.”

Daniel said, “Sure, Mama.” Nannie Sue pointed at a pail stuffed full of food that she sat by the door so Daniel would see it when he went out. “There is pork belly, corn bread, honey and a chunk of cheese in that there pail.”

Daniel was happy to see it. “Umm! That’s good stuff, Mama.” He put on his fedora and grabbed the pail as he walked out.

Nannie Sue watched him and smiled. She was proud to see her son trying to make a living from something other than the traditional mountain way. Logging had killed one of his classmates a few years back and it shocked him. It really changed his outlook on life.

Daniel walked down a path to the bottom of the holler from his house to where he parked the 1935 Ford truck the TVA gave to him to get around the mountain. The sun hit the peak of the ridge and lit up the whole side of mountain by the time he got to the truck. Daniel opened the truck door, stood on the running board and with a glimmer in his eyes, gazed at the beauty of the mountains. He thought to himself, “Morning glory. I’m gonna miss this.”

## CHAPTER TWO

Daniel looked in the truck's rearview mirror and adjusted his tie for the third time. It was important to Daniel to look official as a TVA agent. He stepped out of the truck and started up a steep path that was covered in laurel bushes. The path was familiar since he had been up to this house many times in his youth. The wind was kicking up and exposed the backs of the leaves on the trees that were already starting to turn. The colors were bright this year and Daniel stopped to catch his breath. He turned slowly so he could take in the whole beauty of the woods around him.

*Come on. Get this over with.*

Daniel started walking up the path again, pulling the leafy branches back as he walked up the rocky, dirt trail. If you didn't know where you were going, you wouldn't know where you were. The sleeves on his new jacket were getting wet from the frosty dew on the leaves. He could smell the strong bitterness of the coffee and the mix of tobacco smoke as he walked up on Mr. Calhoun sitting on the porch, lighting his pipe. Mrs. Calhoun was inside cooking breakfast.

Daniel spoke up so Mr. Calhoun wouldn't be startled.

"Morn'n, Mr. Calhoun. It's Daniel Holmes."

Mr. Calhoun looked up and didn't change his expression and spoke with the pipe in his mouth.

"Well, morn'n, Daniel. To what do I owe for this early morning visit? Nobody's hurt, are they? Is your granny, okay?"

Daniel said, "Yes, sir. She's just fine. Nobody's hurt." Daniel looked down, then around, then at Mr. Calhoun. Daniel swung his leg and tapped his toe on the edge of the porch as he built up the courage to speak.

“Well, this ain’t easy for me. I don’t know if you’ve heard, but I’m here to...well...I work for the TVA now and my boss said he was up here a week ago trying to give you some compensation for your land. This new dam we’ve built will be supply’n power to the aluminum plant for the planes they need for the war.”

Mr. Calhoun stood up slowly and spoke with a deep, low tone, quivering from anger.

“I fought for my country thirty year ago in World War I, and Bobby sacrificed his life for our country in this here war. And now they want us to give up our land for the war effort?”

When Daniel looked up, Mr. Calhoun was red-faced, standing with his feet hip width apart, as if ready to fight. Mr. Calhoun walked toward Daniel with a hard stare and his pointer finger in Daniel’s face. “I told him we ain’t leav’n.”

Daniel backed up, his eyes wide open and his hands lifted, palms out and stepped down off the porch. He had never seen Mr. Calhoun mad before. He had always known him to be a calm, quiet man.

“Listen here, son. War ain’t no good. It makes an empty shell out of a man and leaves loved ones behind to fend for themselves.”

Daniel tripped and caught himself on the laurel bushes beside the porch. Mr. Calhoun stopped at the edge of the porch and shook his head. His emotional rant caused spit to shoot from his mouth. He wiped it off with his sleeve. “And I ain’t leav’n my son behind.”

At the risk of his wrath, Daniel continued, “But Mr. Calhoun, if you don’t leave, you’re gonna get trapped on this here mountain. And then the officials will come looking for you.”

Daniel knew he had pushed Mr. Calhoun to the point of possible violence. He didn’t think he could change his mind, but he felt he had to try.

“Mr. Calhoun, I knowed you an' Mrs. Calhoun's been through a heap o' heartache an' sacrifice. I went t' school with Bobby, an' I know he was a good boy, and an even better soldier. God rest his soul.”

These words made Mr. Calhoun's face turn red. “Bobby gave his life.”

Mr. Calhoun eyes were burning as he tried to hold back tears.

“I don't want what y'all gave up to be fer nothin.' Buildin' this here dam could be the difference 'tween winnin' and losin' this war we's in.”

“Y'ain't got no idee 'bout half the sacrifice, boy! When ya done had a son die fer his country, then ya kin talk big 'bout sacrifice.”

“Mr. Calhoun, this war's bigger'n us. There's too many things already set in motion, an' ain't no stoppin' it,” Daniel said. “You know these woods like the back o' yer hand, an' you could live out the rest o' yer days on this mountain just fine but think 'bout Mrs. Calhoun. What 'bout the young'un Bobby left behind? She needs a steady place t' grow up. She needs her grandparents, seein' as she ain't got her daddy.”

Mrs. Calhoun, a small thin framed women with sharp features came out on the porch as she wiped her hands on her apron. She had what Daniel always called “smiling eyes.” He thought he had never seen her when she was not smiling. She had a small, proportioned nose, defined cheeks and a thin upper lip and a full bottom lip. Her salt and pepper hair was neatly pulled back into a tamed bun. “Jeb? Breakfast is almost ready.”

She stopped short when she saw Daniel.

“Well, morn'n Daniel. I didn't know you were out here.” She looked at both men and saw Daniel was standing off the porch. She realized there was a strange silence.

She tried to lighten the mood. “Daniel. How’s your granny doin’?” Daniel said, “She doin’ just fine.” She looked down at the envelope Daniel was holding. Her smile turned to worry.

“What’s that?” She turned to get an answer from her husband, but he was ridged and stoic as he stared off into the woods.

Mr. Calhoun took a deep breath. His voice was deep and low, “It’s a check to buy us out. The damned TVA’s got Daniel run’n around do’n their dirty work for ‘em.”

Daniel’s face flushed. Daniel had not thought of his job in that way.

“Daniel? Is that true?” Mrs. Calhoun asked. Daniel continued to avoid eye contact with her. He stayed down off the porch. Daniel could not bring his eyes up to meet hers. She would be able to see in his eyes the traitor that he thought he was.

“Please, at least take this check. If you don’t want it, give it to Bobby’s daughter.” Mr. Calhoun stood steadfast. Mrs. Calhoun could see that her husband was not going to budge.

“Flooding starts in one week.” Mr. Calhoun looked at Daniel holding the check out in front of him. “They’s a coming up to burn the houses so people can’t come back.” Daniel looked at Mrs. Calhoun. She was looking at Mr. Calhoun to see what his reaction would be. There was a long silence.

Mr. Calhoun said to Daniel, “Well, that gov’ment friend o’ yorn said we’ll either have t’ walk out or swim out. I reckon we’ll wait an’ see an’ do what we gotta do, but we ain’t leavin’ this mountain. We might just hafta gather up our things an’ head t’ higher ground. They’ll have t’ come take us out.”

“Mr. Calhoun turned and pulled on his suspenders. He said, “Now, if you got nothing else, you’ll kindly get off my property. I got chores to get to.” Mr. Calhoun rolled his shirt sleeves up as he stepped into the house.

Mrs. Calhoun watched her husband walk into the house, then she stepped over to the edge of the porch where Daniel was standing.

“Sometimes folks are just drownin’ in sorrow, barely keepin’ their head above water. He just wants t’ stay close to Bobby.” She took the check out of his hand and tucked it in her apron pocket. “But don’t you worry none. We’ll be out. I’ll make sure of it.”

Mr. Calhoun stepped back into the cabin and closed the door, leaving Daniel outside.

Daniel rushed down the path, jumped in his truck and slammed the door. He grabbed the steering wheel with both hands and put his forehead on his hands. He lifted his head and wiped tears from his face. He looked at the list of neighbors he still had to visit and shook his head.

“What have I gotten myself into?” He jammed the stick shift in gear and took off.

## CHAPTER THREE

The next day Daniel drove to Fontana Village for a meeting with TVA officials. He had to give an update on how many of the hold outs he was able to convince to leave their homes, but he was nervous that he may not be able to control his emotions when giving the update.

As he drove into the community, he couldn't help but think back of when he knew it as Welch Cove, a picturesque landscape, framed by layers of mountains. He remembered and missed the untouched lay of the land where you could stand and see the line of trees on the ridge that accentuated the amazing view. Now it was a paved road that led into the nicely manicured community that the TVA built to house the thousands of officials and workers who had migrated into the area to build the dam. Since the dam needed to be built within two years, there were three shifts of construction crews, going twenty-four hours a day. That meant that Fontana Village had to run like a town. It had all the modern conveniences to service this many people, and it was always buzzing with activity.

As he weaved through the maze of cookie cutter cabins, he saw kids walking to school, people working at the medical service center, a community church, a post office. He thought to himself, "Everyone looks busy and happy. This must be what progress looks like." He couldn't stop thinking that he was responsible for the irreversible change that was happening right before his eyes.

He parked in front of the lodge where the meeting was being held. Other TVA agents had parked and were walking in. He looked at his list, checked his tie, grabbed his hat and went inside.

As he walked in, Daniel admired the large lobby area, with hand-hewn beams, a large roaring fireplace masoned with smooth river rock, a sunken seating area by the fireplace, a small counter on the left where guests checked in and a long dark hallway that led to the conference room. A couple of agents were walking by and one of the men, Agent Sommers, saw that Daniel looked lost.

“The meeting is just down here,” Agent Sommers said. He pointed down the long hallway to a set of double doors that were open to a big room. “There’s coffee and pastries too.” Daniel nodded in appreciation and followed them down the hall to the meeting.

Daniel walked into the conference room which had high ceilings and a stage on the left. There were 10 rows of 20 chairs neatly lined up in each row all the way to the back of the room. The large number of men walking around in black suits, white shirts and fedoras reminded him of an army of ants that were outside their nest. Every time they were together like this, seeing how everyone was dressed alike, how they all used similar words and phrasing and the drive to achieve the same goals, Daniel couldn’t shake the feeling that the agency felt more like a fraternity than a job. He had wanted this kind of job for so long. What if something came up that was immoral or went against his beliefs. “Would I speak up?” he thought. Daniel was someone who didn’t mind speaking up outside of the majority. But he was questioning his own integrity. “Am I doing the right thing? Should I be helping my community fight against this change or am I part of the problem?”

Daniel went to the back of the room where a table was set up with an electric peculator with hot coffee, a pitcher of cream, sugar in a dish, as well as a platter of homemade banana bread, fresh biscuits with butter, jam and honey and a pitcher of cold orange juice and apple juice.

He poured a cup of coffee and sat on a chair at the end of a row, on the back row of seats so he could take in the whole room. Everyone was slowly moving into the room, getting coffee and finding their seats. Before the meeting started, two men stood behind him and spoke in low tones.

“I heard ‘little boy’ in Oak Ridge is moving right along. All the brilliant minds from all over the world are working on him,” one man said.

Daniel could not help but overhear them talking. He felt self-conscious, like he was in a room where he didn’t belong. He stared straight ahead and acted like he wasn’t listening. He had not heard about another project other than the Fontana Dam being built to power Alcoa’s Aluminum plant for the war effort.

“They say this dam will generate enough electricity to make the ‘little boy’ strong enough to throw the world off kilter,” the other man said.

Daniel looked at some of the other agents, chatting and laughing. He thought, “I’m part of this agency. I’m going to join them.” He stood up to go speak to them, but was interrupted when the captain entered the room. Everyone moved to take a seat.

The captain, a tall, thin man with a deep voice and commanding presence, stood at a podium and brought the meeting to order. “Ok. Ladies. Let’s get this meeting started.”

Some men laughed at this comment. The captain put his briefcase on the table behind the podium at the front of the room, snapped open the front locks and opened the top. He pulled out a few papers and turned back and stood at the podium.

“Good morning, men. I want to thank you for being here this morning. As you know, flooding will start at the end of this week. Friday. Everything is going as planned. This has been a big project, and I appreciate everyone’s time and effort to keep it on schedule. Any stragglers

who have not vacated yet, need to be persuaded to evacuate immediately. The goal is to get everyone out before Friday because once the flooding starts, the road out of the community will be submerged and impassable within hours. Does anyone have any updates?" Daniel stood up. His mouth was dry, he was fidgety, and he stumbled a bit at the start.

"I was able to visit all the homes of people who were waiting until the last minute or dragging their feet. They all, in one way or another, assured me that they would be out of their homes by the time flooding starts."

The captain said, "Good job, Daniel. I knew you were the right man for the job. Anybody else?" Daniel sat down and was relieved his time to speak was over. Agent Sommers came over and sat down beside him. "Hi, I'm Agent Sommers." He put out his right hand to offer a handshake. "Ben." Daniel recognized him as the man he saw in the lobby who told him where the meeting was. Daniel shook his hand. "Daniel Holmes."

Agent Sommers said, "I and a couple of other agents were the ones who did the first round of visits. Mountain people are stubborn as mules."

Daniel said, "I know that's right. If you make mountain folk mad, they can be a force to be reckoned with."

The captain interrupted their conversation, "Agent Sommers? Do you have an update?"

Agent Sommers stood up and said, "We've been looking into various areas that are causing potentially hazards such as the maelstrom over at Brendle Hole in the Alarka community. Apparently, there is a whirlpool that was created by the deep lake water and a hole under the rock formation of the swimming hole. It is sucking things down into the hole. The hole is going down into the ground, but we don't know where it's going. So, we are warning everyone

to stay clear of that area until we can do more investigating. We need to get a scientist or geologist over there to take a look.”

“Ok. Thank you, Agent Sommers. Any questions? Who’s next?” The captain continued the rest of the meeting.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The day arrived to close the dam gates and flood the land. It was overcast and cold as the TVA held a private ceremony at the dam to commemorate the rapid progress of the construction and to slap the backs and shake the hands of those in charge and those who worked so hard to get it done. The fog floated in the treetops of the thick green mountain range behind a majestic, larger-than-life concrete wall of the dam.

There was an unfolding of a profound truth that all forms of resistance, even the most steadfast, yielded to time and change. As the water rose, the lowlands were the first to succumb, as though to remind us that in nature's order, the humble fail to resist pressure, before the mighty. Valleys which once cradled the flow of the creeks and rivers, now would hold only silence, as the waters spread, consuming all in its path. What once was vibrant was quickly becoming submerged, a forgotten history of life and labor. The reservoir, growing each day, represented the inevitability of expansion, growth and progress. Forests and fields, even the high places of human habitation, surrendered to the slow, relentless force of the rising water.

Yet beneath the calm surface of the rising water, a hidden force was brewing. The dam, engineered to withstand the weight of nature's power through controlled release, attempted to manage what can never be fully regulated. It is the reminder that nature, though seemingly tamed, always retains its unpredictable strength. The flooding of valleys, forests, and fields was about to erase cultures, traditions, and memories.

Just as the land resists the rising water, people too resist being uprooted from their homes, their communities, and their ways of life. Just as the lowlands eventually yield to the flood, so

too must people submit to forces beyond their control. There is a universal truth in that no matter how deeply we root ourselves, change can displace even the strongest foundations.

And just as ecosystems beneath the water adapt or disappear, displaced people must reorganize their lives in unfamiliar environments. The loss is profound, but there is also adaptation. While what was vibrant becomes submerged, life is not necessarily destroyed but transformed. People must, like the land, find ways to survive and grow in the new realities they face, though the echoes of their past lives persist in memory.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Shafts of light from the windows cut through the shadows of the small country church and illuminated the dust particles floating in the air that kicked up from the activity of the congregation. The church had never had so many people in it at one time. There were families wall-to-wall, people milling about waiting for the meeting to begin. One last Sunday church meeting before they had to abandon the community they knew and loved.

They had already shut the spill ways which created a collection of water from the rivers and creeks to start the flooding and the water would be reaching their homes soon.

The crisp morning air carried the sound of the clanging church bell echoing to the holler below, signaling the urgency of the meeting about to start. As groups of men stood by the walls, there were women gathered in bunches in the pews, children clung to their mothers or squirmed in their seats, restless from waiting. The men were pensive and serious. The women frantically whispering to each other under their breath.

The pews were built from rough sawn wood that was smoothed down and stained with a golden oak finish from the hard working, devoted hands of the deacons of the church. Shelves on the backs of the pews held song books that were paid for by the tithing basket and Preacher Lindsay even agreed to give up his portion for a month of Sundays to make sure they had enough for the song books.

An elderly toothless woman with a wrinkled and weathered face sat alone on the back row of the church near the door. Her hair was in a long braid, that hung down over one shoulder and rested on her chest with three smaller braids wrapped around it that kept it in place. She looked disheveled and dirty and at first glance it looked like she had bruises on her arms and

hands, but on closer inspection the deep blue and purple stains looked more like she had been painting.

She was known as a granny woman in the community, because she was always crushing and mixing wild violet with roots and herbs to create potions, concoctions, and poultices for medical remedies. If anyone got sick or had an ailment they could go to her for help.

A falcon feather was hidden deep in the middle of her braid along with some smaller feathers, and a single cardinal feather was weaved into the rest of her hair that was twisted in a bun at the back of her head. It took on the essence of a bird's nest. Then there was a single dandelion flower that was a bright, pretty contrast to the camouflage of blue and grey.

Some people in the community thought Granny might have magical powers or that she was a witch because she understood the ways of wildlife and it had been rumored that she could communicate with animals in the woods, with the trees, even with the mountains. She was able to cure people who seemed incurable and knew when things were going to happen when others didn't. It was usually people who thought they were more educated than Granny. But in truth some people just didn't have the knowledge that Granny had. So, they were scared of her and would call her strange.

She had dried snuff in the corners of her mouth, and she wore a long skirt that was layered by a long-stained apron tied around her waist and a leather bag with a long strap secured across her chest. And she leaned on a hand-made cane that looked like a short walking stick with peculiar-looking totems carved into it. They took on abstract shapes of sad and happy profiles and they represented her loved ones she had lost and the babies she had brought into the world in her younger years as a midwife.

Preacher Lindsay, a stocky man, with thinning gray hair, paced on a raised stage behind the pulpit as Daniel, patiently, stood by him. The large picture window behind them allowed for a long-range mountain view with layers of monochromatic blues and gray clouds that looked like a painting. The forced perspective from the angle of the congregation, when giving his sermons, made Preacher Lindsay look bigger than life, like he was floating on the clouds.

Everyone was restless, so Preacher Lindsay started to preach.

“Dear friends, today, we’re gathered up to think on resilience and adaptin’—two things we sure do need with all the trials and troubles we’re goin’ through, but also on our walk with Christ. Life’ll often throw us trials that shake us right down to our roots. We might face hard times, losses, or changes that feel mighty heavy. But as believers, we’re called to stand strong.”

These words made Daniel look at Granny and realize that Preacher Lindsay was talking about someone like her. She had always been the strong one. She was the one who carried the burden of heart break, but carried on so others could live and thrive. She endured suffering that he had never experienced before, and she persevered.

Preacher Lindsay continued, “Today, we’re here to remember a powerful truth: sometimes we’ll face things we got no control over. Whether it’s sickness that hits all of a sudden, losin’ work, or somethin’ that blindsides us, we can feel overrun and helpless. But in those moments, we have faith that gives us hope and strength. We must trust that God’s got a plan.” Preacher Lindsay looked across the crowd of his congregation as they hung on his every word. He knew he had to be strong now. He knew they depended on him to help them understand all this pain and suffering.

“Let us pray.” Everyone in the congregation bowed their heads except for a few restless children and Granny.

“Dear Lord. I know you work in mysterious ways and good comes to those who trust in you. Your flock in this community is hurt’n, Lord. What we’re goin’ through might be painful, but we know you are using it for our growin’ and for your glory. In your name we pray. Amen.”

The congregation started to move around as if they had been bound by something during the prayer. They were wanting and a few “amens” came from the crowd. Some wiped tears away from their faces, some shook their heads, some looked to their neighbor and hugged each other.

Preacher Lindsay stepped back from the pulpit and wiped sweat off his neck and forehead with his hanky. He nicked a boil with his fingernail that had formed from stress, on the side of his neck.

“Owwwww! Lord-a-mercy!”

He stuffed the handkerchief in his back pocket and straightened his overalls. He feigned a smile when some families walked by to find a seat. Daniel stood with his hands clasped behind his back like a soldier standing at ease.

Preacher Lindsay asked, “Where could he be, Daniel?”

Daniel replied, “I don’t rightly know. But I expect he’ll be here directly.”

“These here people are my flock, and I don’t want them to wait any longer than they have to. Do you know what the announcement was?”

Daniel was hesitant. He said, “Well it’s all right here,” Daniel put his hand on a stack of papers, “but Agent Sommers was the one who was authorized to make the announcement.” They looked around the church hoping to see Agent Sommers in the crowd or walk through the doors any minute.

As Daniel patiently stood waiting, he looked out at the parish, reciting his speech over and over in his head in case Sommers didn’t show up.

A frazzled woman, who rushed in late with her children in tow caught Daniel's eye. She was dressed in her Sunday best, and she was pulling her children, behind her, by their hands. She scanned the pews and saw an empty seat by Granny. She started to walk that way, saw Granny, then thought better of it. She stopped short, made a hard right, and pulled her children over to lean on the wall, by some men, at the back of the church.

This made Daniel mad at first, but when he looked back at Granny, he saw her in a new light. He saw her the way the woman saw her: dirty and disheveled; strange and scary. She looked old and tired. He had always thought of her as someone with so much strength and wisdom, but the way she was sitting, the way she was looking at everyone, he could see the whole situation of having to move away and leave her husband and children was taking a toll on her. He could feel a slight edge of fear of what the future might hold for this community. He was starting to realize that he may not see these people, in this church, gathered together anymore, after today. The finality of it all was starting to sink in.

Then Daniel's eight-year-old sister, Lizzie, came busting through the front doors of the church and stopped where Granny was sitting. She cupped her hands around her mouth and whispered into Granny's ear. When Lizzie finished, she joined her friends, in a pew, on the other side of the aisle. Granny was visibly disturbed. She put both hands on the top of her cane, put her head down on her hands as if she was praying, and leaned on the cane. Daniel was afraid Granny might be sick. He started to go check on her when a man with the same suit that Daniel had on, walked in through the church doors with a hat in his hand. Daniel and Preacher Lindsay felt relieved to see another TVA agent. He walked up the aisle to Preacher Lindsay and Daniel and told them something in a low tone. Preacher Lindsay and Daniel, both nodded. Preacher Lindsay stepped up to the pulpit and everyone got quiet.

“Good morning! I know yuns have been wait’n here a long time and want to know what is happen’n. We were waiting on Mr. Sommers, one of them agents from the Tennessee Valley Authority to arrive so he could deliver an announcement, but he must ‘a been delayed.”

“Now, most of yuns know Daniel, here.” He stepped over to Daniel and slapped him on the back. Daniel wasn’t expecting it and almost fell forward.

“He’s Granny Holmes great-grandson.” Daniel felt lightheaded and looked down at his feet. He had just watched the reaction of a women who was repulsed by Granny. What would they think of him knowing he was related to her?

“Most of yuns know him from running around in this here churchyard, playing and getting his church clothes dirty along with your own children.”

Several people in the congregation nodded their heads, kept quiet and kept their eyes on Preacher Lindsay. Granny looked up and over the walking stick at Daniel with loving eyes. She was so proud.

“And as yuns know, he’s been working for the TVA for a little while, now.”

Granny looked around the congregation to check their reactions. She was worried about some of the attitudes toward Daniel in the community. She felt safe and confident that they would not cause a scene in the Lord’s house.

Preacher Lindsay looked at Daniel with a nervous glance. Daniel stepped up, tapped the stack of papers on the pulpit, and cleared his throat. He looked around the room and realized all the faces were staring at him. His ears started to burn. He slowly began.

“Morn'n everybody.” He read from a stack of papers. “The officials at the Tennessee Valley Authority instructed me to remind you that flooding of this valley, to form Fontana Lake,

began days ago. It will take a few months for the lake to form, but the only road out of here, Hwy 288, will be flooded within days and you will not be able to pass if you wait too late.”

There was a rustling sound and mumbling coming from the crowd.

“The TVA has promised to tend our graveyards and is talking about building a new road to let the families visit the graves that remain above the waterline. Now, you should be able to build new homes with the money the government give.”

A man jumped up from his seat. “The hell you say!” His face was red, and it looked like his head was going to pop off his body. “What if we don’t want to leave. What then?”

Daniel didn’t know what to say. The crowd looked to him for an answer, and he stood there dumbfounded. The man turned and gestured to his wife to grab their kids to leave. He stomped out of the church ahead of them. Embarrassed by his outburst, his wife scurried out with her head down. Their children followed. The youngest son waved at his friend in the last pew before exiting out the church doors.

This prompted another man in the crowd to get up to leave. He gestured to his wife to go in front of him. As he put on his hat, he said under his breath, “This is a crying shame!”

A few other people gathered their things and stormed out. Everyone else stood still and looked at Daniel. He swallowed hard and continued.

“Most of you have successfully re-established elsewhere. For you remaining few, time has nearly run out. If any of you need assistance...”

A farmer shouted, surprising Daniel, stopping his speech.

“We’ve had enough help from you, Daniel Holmes. I reckon we can handle it!”

Then a logger piped up, “We have, all of us, took care of our own.” He whirled his hat around as if he was a bank robber waving a gun around and stopped at Daniel.

“You should know that, Daniel. You used to be one of us.”

Preacher Lindsay interrupted. “Now, Thomas Cutshaw! You know he *is* one of us. You know he is.”

A man stepped in front of the logger. Preacher Lindsay tried to calm the growing fury. “Now, just sit down and listen. He is just the messenger!”

Two other men stood up and stepped into the aisle as if to hold the logger back. Daniel grabbed the pulpit to make sure there was something between him and the angered man. Daniel then remembered his gun and put his hand on it to make sure it was secure in the holster. He continued with a shaky and robotic voice.

“Government records show that all monies due to you have been paid. The Tennessee Valley Authority is satisfied...”

Sam Cabe, an old, stout farmer with a red face and white hair stepped up, raised his arm and pointed at Daniel.

“Well! I would just reckon that’s so! Dad-gum government! Treat’n us like we’s them Cherokee!”

Daniel raised his voice and continued as if he had not heard anyone’s response. He said, “A fair deal was struck!”

Someone yelled from the crowd. “Condemning our lands and us having NO SAY, ain’t a fair deal! What about the land above the water line? What about that land?”

Daniel didn’t have an answer. He panicked and held onto the pulpit to brace himself. He widened his stance and kept reading from the scripted announcement. The louder the crowd got the louder Daniel read. A ripple of movement came from the crowd as some of the men got up to

leave and their families and friends followed them. Daniel stopped speaking and stared out at the crowd. He realized he had lost his audience.

Preacher Lindsay's face turned pale as he worked to keep a strained smile on his face for everyone as they were leaving. "Well, son," Preacher Lindsay said, "You did your best. You're in an awkward position seeing how you know everybody." He pulled his hanky out to wipe the sweat again, but the pain of the boil on his neck was almost unbearable.

The logger's wife nagged her husband, "Law! Come on! I still got a hundred things to do and you still ain't fixed that truck tire." The logger barked back at her, "I just got to hunt me up some tools. Can't get nothing done with you a quarreling all the time, no how!"

Miss McGaha, the community schoolteacher, looked up at old Sam Cabe, who was standing to leave. "Mr. Cabe, I hate to impose, but I still have a number of books and supplies...do you have any room in..."

Half turning to her, Sam said in a gentler tone. "We'll make room, missy, we'll make room." She picked up one of the song books and held it tight against her chest. She moved toward the door as she looked up at the beams in the cathedral ceiling, then down to the door jamb that had the measured heights of all her students throughout the years.

"I can't believe it. All our memories, all our time here will soon be under water."

"Mr. Cabe? Do you think you could cut this part of the door jamb out. I marked all my students' heights as they grew over the years. I can't leave it behind." He looked at the door jam, then back to her. "Whatever you need." She said, "Thank you." She covered her mouth, started to weep and exited the church.

Preacher Lindsay witnessed this and put his hand on his shoulder. "Mr. Cabe, that is mighty kind of you."

Mr. Cabe answered, "Well, Preacher, she taught my kids. Besides, we have to help our neighbors out."

Preacher Lindsay said, "Do you think you could get our church bell in your truck?"

Sam answered, "Preacher, if I can't get it, we'll make sure someone gets it so we can have it in our new church. It would be a sin to let it go under."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Cabe. You're a good man. I'll say a special prayer for you tonight." They shook hands.

A young man in a WWII Paratrooper's uniform spoke to the person in front of him as they filed out, "I spent the last four years fighting to get back here. Don't make for much of a home coming!"

Picking up the last few papers, Daniel, realized everyone was leaving and stood to say one last thing, "If there's any way that I can help....uh....the agency can help..." Frustrated at his blunder, he shook his head and plopped down in a seat.

Sam turned and shouted back. "Don't you worry none. We'll be out!" He stomped passed people who were going slower.

"It ain't right! Ain't right!" Sam mumbled under his breath.

Preacher Lindsay said to Daniel, "You better watch your back when you leave here, son." Daniel watched everyone clear out of the church. Granny still sat in the back with her head down. Preacher Lindsay followed the last person down the aisle. He spoke to various people as they left. When he reached Granny at the back of the church, he stopped to speak.

"Mary Eliza?" Preacher Lindsay asked, "Where was that little Lizzie this morning? She came into church late."

Granny said, “Oh, now, you know, Lizzie. I can’t keep her from climbing trees with the boys.” He chuckled as he rubbed his neck. She rummaged through her leather bag and pulled out a piece of cheese cloth stuffed with something that smelled like garlic, eucalyptus and honey. It was in the shape of a ball secured with a thin piece of leather wrapped around the handle.

Preacher Lindsay continued, “You saw Ed Hicks come in. He said Mr. Sommers might have gone missing. They found his government badge, on the bank, near some maelstrom that’s been forming over by Brendle Hole since the flooding started.”

Granny said, “Well, there are some places in these mountains that ain’t safe. Sometimes strangers shouldn’t be meandering where they don’t belong.”

Preacher Lindsay made a deep sigh, looked around and nodded.

Granny handed him the tiny bundle of poultice. “Make sure to put this on your boil three times a day. It will heal in no time.”

Preacher Lindsay took it. “Thank you, kindly, young lady!” He patted her on the shoulder. “I appreciate you!”

Daniel came up behind Preacher Lindsay and stopped at Granny's side. “That is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do. Daniel had a painful look on his face. “Granny, we got to get home and finish packing.” He slid his arm under Granny’s arm and helped her out of the pew.

“Daniel, yer a strong man fer standin' up to that bunch. It takes a brave soul to do the things that aren’t easy.” Granny limped and leaned on her walking stick as they made their way out the door and to Daniel’s work truck. He helped her get in and went around to the driver’s side.

Granny gazed at the church and the people in the community she had known for 70 years, she thought, “Lord, the waters will rise, swallowing all traces until even memory drowns.”

Daniel yelled to Lizzie, “Come on, girl.” She ran toward the truck waving goodbye to her friends. “We got to get home and pack the truck.”

## CHAPTER SIX

Driving down the road, Lizzie sat between Daniel and Granny in the front seat. Lizzie was little for her age, but she was feisty. Her dress was dirty and her only good shoes that she wore to church were scuffed. She didn't have much patience for boys, and she was always trying to prove she was better than them. She always had skinned knees and messy hair. It was a common occurrence to have Miss McGaha send notes home to Nannie Sue telling her how smart Lizzie was, and how if they could channel her energy into something besides scuffling with the boys over how far she could spit, she might be able to change the world. Lizzie talked incessantly.

“Granny, you know, I'm sure gonna miss Betty Lou. You know she's my best friend and she went to the school at Fontana Village. Her daddy helped build the dam. She said she's moving to Bryson City, and they have a movie house there.”

Granny stared out the window as her body moved from the rhythm of the truck on the rough road.

“Oh! How I would like to see a picture show! And there is a big school there with a playground and lots of kids. Oh, I wish I could go there.”

Lizzie's chatter made Daniel realize something. Lizzie was part of the generation that would never experience life the same way he had or most of the people who he was trying to convince to leave. Kids her age were the ones who welcomed a new world, a new way of living. It made him feel sad, but also hopeful that even though the people who had grown into adulthood here in the mountains would miss the life they had here, but she would experience a world with electricity. It made him want to be her age again.

“You sure do wish for a lot. There are people who want to keep their feet right here on this here mountain,” Daniel said. She rolled her eyes, crossed her arms over her chest and sulked. He realized at the tender age of eight she had her whole life in front of her and didn’t understand what others were going through. His mood lightened.

“Well, we will be moving to Almond for the time being and then we’ll see what happens from there.” Daniel said.

“Lizzie said, “Yippee! I can’t wait!” Lizzie was ready to go to a new place.

Lizzie was so excited about the possibilities of what electricity might bring she could barely contain herself. Miss McGaha had taught a lesson on electricity and painted a picture of a world where burdens were lifted by machines. When Lizzie watched her Mama work so hard doing the same thing every day, all day, just to run the household, she liked the idea of electricity taking that burden away. Miss. McGaha told them about “electric kitchens” with fancy stoves that lit with a click, with no need to chop wood or to clean out the coals. How strange that sounded. She could hardly imagine it. It was like magic. And yet...she could see it. A warm, humming kitchen, bright as anything, like the Hotpoint Appliance Electric Kitchen plan she saw in the newspaper Daniel brought to her mother.

Some of her classmates whispered about television sets too. Big, glowing screens that showed pictures from faraway places. She could imagine every detail. Her curiosity extended into imagining herself in new roles, inspired by Daniel and the heroic exploits of her favorite female detective, Nancy Drew. In her love of Nancy Drew stories, Lizzie’s excitement captured the familiar world of her small town and the allure of the unknown. If she could read the pages of her books under electric lamplight, it could open pathways to ideas beyond life in the Appalachian Mountains. Reading Nancy Drew made Lizzie want to be like Daniel and work for

the government. She looked up at Daniel as they drove along. She imagined working alongside him someday. Daniel looked down at her, and smiled, surprised she had stopped talking for a moment. "Lizzie? You okay?" Daniel asked.

Lizzie continued with her story. "Betty Lou's mama was talking to Sarah's mama, and she said you were pert' near a hundred."

"Granny? Are you really a hundred years old?" Lizzie asked.

With a serious expression Granny said, "They laawww, no, honey!" Granny kept a straight face. "Do I look that old? I'm just a young chicken."

Granny looked at Daniel. That made Lizzie look at Daniel. He tried to hide his grin, knowing Granny was joshing Lizzie. Then she looked back at Granny, confused.

"A lady never tells her age." Granny let out a big laugh and Lizzie could only see snuff and gums where Granny's teeth used to be. Lizzie smiled realizing Granny was joking and said, "Granny, you look beautiful to me!" Granny gave her a big squeeze and said, "Thank you, sweetie."

Lizzie continued, "Betty Lou's mama said that you've been living in these here woods so long that she don't know how you're gonna leave. She said, it's a keen misery, the grief a soul like yours suffers, to have to leave when your roots go as deep as the trees."

Granny said, "I reckon Betty Lou's mama sure does talk a lot." She looked over at Daniel and they smiled at each other. Lizzie took Granny's hand and traced the veins on the back.

"Are you sad, Granny?" Granny didn't answer. "Are you gonna miss Papaw?" Granny gazed out the passenger side window, thinking of Will.

"I have had a heartache since he was put under the cool green moss, baby."

Lizzie caressed Granny's hand and turned it over and ran her fingers along the lines of her palm. Granny said, "See these lines?" She pointed to the line that was an arc that extended around the thumb.

"See how long it is?" Lizzie nodded and listened. "This one tells you how healthy you are. If it's long and unbroken, you'll live a long life. Hmmm, it looks like I might be 100-year-old after all." Granny laughed and tickled Lizzie to make her laugh.

"The long one that runs under your fingers is your heart line." She ran her finger across the base of her fingers on her own palm. "That tells you how loving of a person you are."

Granny took Lizzie's hand and turned it over and touched her heart line. "Looks like you have a big heart, Lizzie Holmes." Lizzie smiled.

Lizzie thought for a moment, "Did you save a boy once, Granny?"

"Betty Lou's mama said a boy was out of his head with fever and his mama brought him to you. You made up a poultice or something and put it on his chest and his feet and he got better."

Lizzie gently touched the necklace Granny was wearing that was made of a tiny, repurposed glass bulb. It had spices and dried flower petals inside and it was secured with a tiny cork. Then Lizzie ran her fingers over the soft, bumpy binding of Granny's braid, then over the wispy feathers in her hair.

"Granny, what is this?" Granny put her arms around Lizzie and braided a small strand of Lizzie's long, tousled chestnut hair. Granny pulled the feathers from her hair and one by one, showed them to Lizzie and told a story for each.

"This is a cardinal feather. It is believed that seeing a cardinal is a sign that those who have passed to the other side are with us in spirit. So that means that the redbird is carrying a

message from the spirit world to us on earth. I saw the cardinal that this feather came from the morning after Papaw died. It is a reminder that Papaw is with me.” She put the cardinal feather back in her hair.

She reached back and pulled the falcon feather out of her hair.

“Falcon feathers are a symbol of knowledge. Falcons sometimes show us the answer to questions we might be seeking.” She put the shaft of the feather into her braid, securely against her head. Granny pulled Lizzie’s toward her and hugged her. She took a deep breath in to smell Lizzie’s hair.

Granny took the dandelion out of her hair and twirled it in front of Lizzie’s eyes then rubbed it under her chin so she could feel how soft it was. “The dandelion is a symbol of resilience. It is strong and can survive in the worst of conditions.” She secured it behind Lizzie’s ear. “But I was wearing it because I think it’s pretty.” Lizzie laughed at this.

Lizzie felt the feather and flower in her hair and said, “Now, I’m like you!”

Granny whispered, “More than you know, child.” She looked out the window. “More than you know.” Granny knew that Lizzie would be strong like her and whatever obstacles came her way in life, she would be resilient. It was in her blood.

They arrived at Granny’s cabin. It was a simple structure made of hand-hewn lumber and a tin roof. The wood had turned gray from age and the roof was rusty. There were several strands of leather britches--heirloom green beans threaded on long rawhide cord--that were brown and shriveled hanging like a curtain on one side of her porch. The porch looked like the home of an organized hoarder. Several mortars and pestles were lined up on a wooden worktable that was against the outside wall.

There were several different sized glass jars with collections of various things in them such as cork pieces, thin leather pieces, buttons, metal washers, nails, cheese cloth, twine and various tools. They were stacked in separate wooden crates and ready to be loaded. On the porch that still needed to be packed were sealed glass jars with various powders and liquids in them on a tall shelf. Rough gemstones were strategically placed in different areas of the porch and lined the shelves near the ingredients. And a small tin can of black paint and cloudy water in a cleaned-out baby food jar, with three paintbrushes in it were on newspapers on the table. There were herbs and plants of all shapes and sizes in various stages of growth, that sat on the banister and in a tiered plant holder made of wood. And there was a rusty hook, pail, and pulley system at a well just off the side of the porch.

Daniel backed up the truck close to Granny's front porch that had some boxes, crates and bags ready to be loaded. Daniel jumped out and went around to the passenger's side to help Granny get out. Lizzie jumped out on the driver's side, "I'm gonna go show Mama my hair."

Daniel helped Granny to her old rocking chair on the porch. It was calming for her to sit quietly on the porch and listen to the wind in the trees and the gentle, rhythmic sound of the stream just below the cabin.

Granny noticed that Daniel was stoic and doubting himself. She reached for Daniel's arm and stopped him. "Don't you worry none 'bout Mr. Cabe or any of 'em down at the church this mornin'. They ain't in this alone. They got their folks, their kin to lean on. They'll find their feet in a new place soon enough, and life'll go on." She patted his face with her stained hands. "It's not you they's mad at. You're just doing your job. You're a good man for doing your job."

She motioned for him to sit beside her. "Know this—same as these mountain waters floodin' over and changin' the land and disruptin' all livin' things in their way, they're doin' the

same to this here community, but just like the world under the water don't get destroyed, it just gets shifted around, we ain't destroyed neither. We just have to reorganize, 'cause folks gotta adjust to the powers we cain't control. Wherever we end up, we'll make a home again. Same as the earth settles its silt in layers, leavin' a quiet mark of time passin' and the way the world changes beneath, we'll build ourselves new homes too." Daniel listened intently. "In the end, we might lose the valley, but a lake is born in its place. And with every change—be it slow or fast—we're shown that redoin's just the way of the world. What once was solid melts into somethin' new, and outta all that, new ways of livin' and meanin' come to be."

Daniel leaned on the arm of the rocking chair and looked into her eyes. "Thank you for reminding me of what a good Granny I got. What would I do without you?" He leaned in and gave her a hug.

Daniel said, "I'm gonna run over to Mama's to see if she needs any help packing." Granny nodded as she tried to catch her breath. "Then we can come down and pack up some more of your boxes. Okay, Granny?"

Granny watched Daniel run over the hill past the gravestones. As she sat in her rocking chair, she felt the pinch of cold air blowing across her face and chapping her skin. Granny pulled a tin of snuff, put some in her lip and began to rock and hum. Granny's gaze drifted across the autumn trees all around her cabin. Another gust of cool wind made a fluttering sound through the leaves. It almost sounded like they were trying to talk to her.

Granny heard the soft screech of a fox that sounded like a child's cry. She looked around and her gaze settled on a figure that resembled a small girl at the gravestones on the knoll a few hundred feet from the cabin.

"Lizzie?" Granny called out.

Staring at the gravestones in the distance, Granny's mind drifted into thought of when she was six years old standing all alone, crying, at her parents' graves. Granny felt a pang of missing her mama.

"Mama!" She stood in a tattered dress, overcoat, and bonnet, inside a well-kept picket-fenced graveyard in 1855 rural Virginia. Mary Eliza's face was swollen from crying. Her cheeks were pink from the cold winter air. Granny's breathing became shallow. She stared, blankly as she remembered lying down next to the freshly covered grave mounds. Her face laid next to an earthworm, unearthed from its burrow of hibernation from the digging. She watched it as it squirmed, trying to get back under the soil. She looked at it and blinked several times to get the tears out of her eyes and clear her vision. She touched the worm, and it squirmed as if it had been touched by a red-hot poker.

Mary Eliza felt a pain in her arm as the minister's wife pulled her up and away from the graves. Two ladies from the church, wore ornate dresses with hoop skirts, brightly colored silks and satins accessories, walked toward them. Mary Eliza tried to break free to get back to the graves, but the minister's wife had a tight hold on her shoulders.

Irritated, the minister's wife jerked Mary Eliza's arm and tugged at the baby hairs at the nap of her neck and said, "Mary Eliza, be still! You stand right here. Have you not been taught any manners?"

The minister's wife stood up straight and smiled for the ladies who were walking up to quickly. Tears washed down Mary Eliza's face as she sobbed without any sound. She stopped resisting and stood still, sniffing.

"Good morning, ladies," the minister's wife said.

The younger lady asked, “Did they burn everything? Does that kill it out? Typhus...it even sounds deadly.”

The older lady waved her arms in expansive gestures, “Oh, I know for certain. I saw it all.” Mary Eliza’s slowly lowered her head in sadness as she listened to the ladies talk and missed the things she had lost. She let out a weak cry, “Mama!”

“They backfilled that rotten well with rocks, then they burned the house, and everything in it.” The minister’s wife said in a harsh, matter of fact tone, “Yes, except for that rocking chair. They couldn’t pry the child loose from it, so they just let her keep it.”

Mary Eliza got a burst of energy and broke loose from the minister’s wife and ran back to the graves. Surprised by her movement, the minister’s wife yelled at her.

“Mary Eliza! Come back here!” Embarrassed, she angrily, wiped the dirt off her dress, “She’s going to be a handful.”

Mary Eliza ran to the grave, grabbed the earthworm and jammed it in her pocket. The younger lady said, “Well, I know their decision was charitable, but, my dear, how can you bear to touch her? What if she has it?”

She overheard the minister’s wife talking with the women.

“I know, but we don’t have much choice. As good Christians and as the Minister of the Church, my husband feels she is our responsibility. The doctor said as long as we keep her at a distance, wash our hands every time we touch her, we should be okay.”

The minister’s wife continued, “And, as good Virginia folk, we must care for her until her mother’s sister can be told. The ladies looked at each other as if they wanted to run away at that very moment.

“A message has already been sent to her in Tennessee.” As she rolled her eyes heavenward, “Pray for a swift reply.”

The husband’s stood around the carriages waiting for the ladies.

The older lady continued, “Yes, well good luck with her.”

She quickly broke eye contact with the minister’s wife and turned toward the carriages as to avoid any more conversation. “Let us know if we can help in any way.” They both quickly walked away.

Mary Eliza stood by the gravestones with her hands in her pockets and her head down. She wiped her nose on her sleeve and smeared dirt under her nose. The minister drove their carriage closer. “Don’t doddle, Mary Eliza. Come away.”

The minister’s wife saw she was not coming and went over to the gravesite, put her hands on Mary Eliza’s shoulders and guided her to the carriage.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Granny opened her eyes and Daniel's hands were on Granny's shoulders as she rocked in her chair. She opened her eyes and let out a little cry. Daniel moved in front of her so she could see his face. Daniel looked concerned and asked, "Granny? What's the matter? Are you okay?"

Granny was holding her breath. She let out a sigh when she realized it was Daniel.

"Oh, Daniel! I was thinkin' 'bout when I lost my folks. I was just a young'un, real little. I didn't have nowheres to go, so they sent me off to my mama's sister's place down in Tennessee."

Daniel studied Granny's face. He was worried. She continued, "Seems like I've been mov'n, pert near all my life. I didn't have anything to keep me grounded until we came to this place."

"I know Granny. I'm sorry. I wish we didn't have to go, but we don't have no say. Do you want to go rest while we pack some boxes?" Granny said, "No, I can do it. You don't need to help." Daniel knew she was too weak to do it by herself, so he continued. "Let's get you packed up." Daniel pulled an empty crate over to Granny. He grabbed a stack of old newspapers for wrapping. Then he brought a crate full of glass jars that had various insects in them.

"Look at this collection you have Granny." Daniel started to wrap the jars with newspaper and put them in a solid crate.

Granny looked at Daniel, then at the jars and a wave of exhaustion came over her. "Daniel don't mess with those jars. I need those." She reached for the jar. "My Aunt Sally taught me how to use those ingredients."

She leaned back in her rocking chair and focused on the wheels of Daniel's truck parked in front of her cabin. She closed her eyes and saw the wooden spokes of an old wagon wheel at

her Aunt Sally's and Uncle Mike's cabin. An old, boxed trader wagon, pulled by four mules stopped in front of a rural Virginia cabin in 1850. As a trader jumped down and walked to the rear of the wagon, a man in his 30s with bushy brown hair, wearing dirty cotton work pants, a sweaty long john shirt, suspenders, work boots and holding a pitchfork came out of the barn to greet them.

"You Miller? The trader asked. "At's right!" as he wiped his sweaty forehead with his sleeve. "Mike Miller?"

"Yeah. Whose ask'n?"

The trader unloaded a valise, a rocking chair, and Mary Eliza. A woman in the cabin coughed her way from inside the cabin to the front door. She leaned her frail body against the frame. The young man strolled over and slapped the haunch of the closest mule.

"Much obliged, friend. What do we owe ya?" The trader shook his head. "The thing had to be done, and we come down the Cumberland Gap regular anyhow, with salt and such." The trader nodded his head toward his wife who was still sitting on the wagon. "The wife took care of the girl's needs."

Mike looked down at the ground, "Then we're beholden to you. Light up and rest a spell." The trader climbed back onto the wagon seat and released the brake.

"Much obliged, but I need to make the Tennessee Trade'n Post before dark. Still got to dicker prices with that woman there and I swear, she can argue the legs off an iron pot."

He popped his whip, and the wagon pulled away. Mary Eliza stood beside her rocker. Mike went over and put his hand on her head.

“I’m your Uncle Mike, Mary Eliza.” She didn’t say anything and stared at the ground. He leaned the pitchfork against the barn. He put the valise on the seat of the rocking chair and carried them to the porch.

“Come up and see your Aunt Sally.” Mary Eliza followed him up onto the porch. Mike retrieved his pitchfork and went into the barn. Sally came out onto the porch. “Mary Eliza...poor thing!”

She squatted down facing the child. She held a hanky over her mouth and coughed.

“You sure are itty-bitty. And law, you look just like your ma did when she were a mite.” She stood up to control another coughing spell. “How come you bring this here rock’n chair all the way to Tennessee?”

Mary Eliza slowly warmed to Sally, “My papa made it for my mama.” Sally nodded. “Yes, your Pa was a fine craftsman.”

She looked at Mary Eliza and saw the sadness on her face. “Well, honey, I’m your Aunt Sally...” She paused, the hanky at her lips, muffling a cough.

“Your mama was my little sister. I guess, I’m about the only kin you got left.”

She put her arm around Mary Eliza’s shoulders. She leaned over and pointed to a box against the wall. “See that there? That is a box full of new puppies.”

Mary Eliza turned to look at the box. “That’ll be your special job....to help their mama take care of them.” Mary Eliza squatted beside the box. She picked up one of the pups and cuddled it. It squirmed until she held it snug to her chest.

“Oh, he likes you.”

Sally took the valise from the rocker. “Listen, why don’t you rock that baby in your chair? I got to lay down for a little bit.”

Sally carried the valise inside and gave in to another coughing spasm. Mary Eliza stood up holding the puppy. She climbed into her chair and rocked the puppy as she crooned. “Hush little baby, don’t you cry, la la la....”

That night as Mary Eliza got a bath in an oval tin tub, Sally gathered her dirty clothes for washing. Mary Eliza watched Sally put her hand in Mary Eliza’s jacket pocket and pull out a shriveled-up worm.

“What’s this Mary Eliza?” Sally held out the dried specimen in her palm of her hand.

“That’s mine!” Mary Eliza jumped out of the tub. “Give it here!” Mary Eliza shouted. She ran over and clutched the worm against her chest.

Sally was surprised by her frantic behavior. She grabbed a bath towel and wrapped it around her body. “Honey. Shh. Shh. It’s okay.” Sally knelt down to her eye level. “I’m not going to throw it away.”

“I found it on Mama’s grave. It was trying to burrow down to her.” Mary Eliza began to weep, “I miss Mama.” Sally held and rocked her.

“Ahhh, I know, honey. I know you miss your Mama.” Sally puts her on a chair. “I have something to show you.”

Sally left the room and came back with a small, clean mason jar.

“See this? Your worm can stay in here.” She put the worm in the jar and pushed a cork securely on top. “I have the perfect place to keep it.”

She took Mary Eliza’s hand and led her into the kitchen. She opened a door in the back corner beside a dry cabinet, that revealed a pantry closet with shelves that were full of various oddities.

Eliza slowly looked up at the shelves, amazed, staring at each jar on the shelves. The collection of ingredients included herbs, powders, strange colored liquids, a snake in a big glass jar, floating in a thick liquid, a huge hairy spider in another jar, butterflies with bright yellow and orange wings, in a shadow box, and then some things she did not recognize.

Sally said, "See this?" She pulled out a tin of black paint and a small paint brush. "Here. Put your mark on it. This is your jar and your worm."

Out of nowhere, Sally turned and bent over coughing. She tried to shake it off. Mary Eliza watched Sally cough. The coughing reminded Mary Eliza of her mother when she was sick, and it scared her. Sally stood up and saw blood in her hanky that was covering her mouth.

She gathered herself and turned back around. Sally calmly asked Mary Eliza, "Can you make an M?" Mary Eliza grabbed the paint brush and concentrated so hard while putting the best M she could on the jar.

Sally said, "Here we go. This is where we'll keep it. It will always be there if you want it." Mary Eliza stood there looking at it. Sally said, "Okay, Mary Eliza. Let's get you ready for bed."

Granny opened her eyes and looked around and realized she was on her porch in her rock'n chair with a crocheted afghans on her lap. It was nice and warm, and the cool air smelled good as she took a deep breath.

Daniel and Nannie Sue talked while packing Granny's things. Lizzie was play'n by the creek. Granny blinked her eyes to try to focus.

Nannie Sue saw she was awake and asked, "Did you have a good nap, Granny?" Granny leaned back, looked around and started rocking her chair. "Granny, I was just tell'n Daniel that you've done a lot of move'n in your life."

Granny thought for a few seconds. “I reckon I been put outta place more times than I can count.” She thought back on the times she had to move. “It tears ya up somethin' fierce, but ya jus' keep yer head down an' carry on best ya can. When Mama and Daddy passed, they sent me off to Aunt Sally an' Uncle Mike. Soon as I met Aunt Sally, I felt right loved, but she weren't around too long after.”

Granny shook her head and leaned back in her rocker. “She passed, an' I was heart broke, left all alone again. Then Uncle Joe's wife came 'round to our cabin. She was a northern gal, already had a young'un, an' weren't too keen on the outdoor work. She went plum crazy, got mixed up with a one of the soldiers from Kirk's Raiders, and had another babe, then took her own kids an' ran off to Virginia chasin' after her man, left that baby with me. That was Lucy.”

Daniel was amazed by this story he had never heard her tell. “Granny, I reckon you're the strongest person I ever knowed.”

“After that, I learnt that Bob was my uncle on my mama's side. It was a blessin', findin' him again, like seein' my kin from back home. Bob took me in an' brought me your Papaw Will. That helped my heart some. Last big heartache I had afore me an' your Papaw Will finally put roots down here on Hazel Creek was when ol' Bob burnt the house down.” She looked up to the sky. “I tell ya, thank the Lord yer Papaw Will asked me to marry him, else I don't know what I'd a done.”

Daniel had never heard this story. “How'd he go an' burn yer house down?” Granny said, “Well, it was done by accident. He didn't mean no harm. It was Christmas Day, and I swear, Bob loved to take a nip of moonshine as much as he loved Christmas. I thought he had finally pickled his brain when he told me he was my uncle. I thought he was try'n to make up for all the harm he had done but turns out what he said was true.”

Nannie Sue directed Daniel to the task at hand. She said, "Okay. These crates are ready to go." Daniel picked them up and stacked them with some other boxes on the porch.

Granny's gaze drifted into the woods as her thoughts slipped back to a Christmas long-ago. She could almost feel the chill of that bright winter day, with the sun shining high in a clear blue sky, casting a crisp, frozen crust over the snow as evening approached.

Lucy played by the Christmas tree, stirring a pot with five squirrel tails, her wooden spoon clinking against the tin. Mary Eliza had laid out a grand dinner, with a plump turkey as the centerpiece of their table, its aroma filling the cabin.

Mary Eliza untied her apron strings, "Good girl! Cook up them squirrel tails for Mama!" Bob bursts in through the door whooping and hollering. He is already happily inebriated and waves a clay gallon jug up and down.

"Son! Feed me or shoot me!" Will followed him in. He carried small branches of holly, loaded with red berries. "Merry Christmas!" Mary Eliza took the holly from Will and returned his greeting. Mary Eliza said cheerfully. "Merry Christmas, Will Holmes!" She arranged the holly in a large cup. Will's eyes followed her.

"I'm thinking that this has got to be the prettiest Christmas I ever did see!" Bob set the jug on the pantry shelf with a thump.

"I brought this here jug of sweet cider. It'll tasty up that ole Tom turkey proper-like. I'm so starved, I could eat up the bones and the beak!"

Mary Eliza opened the oven to check inside. "The taters are pert' near done. Hang up them coats." Bob took off his coat and hung it on a peg. Will started to open his coat. He looked at Lucy to be sure she was watching.

"Lookee what we found outside, just a shivering in the cold!"

Lucy looked. He reached inside his coat and brought out a small kitten. With a shriek, Lucy bounded over to Will, arms outstretched. Will handed the kitten to her.

“Reckon you can think of a name for this here mouser, honey?” Lucy nodded, smiled, and cuddled the baby kitten. She carried it to Mary Eliza’s rocking chair and climbed onto the seat.

“That was just the nicest thing I ever seen a body do!” Mary Eliza said.

Will finished taking off this coat and hung it on a peg. Bob took a string from his pocket, stuffed it in his cheek, then staggered over to the Christmas tree. He removed several feathers from its branches. He sat down near Lucy and made a show of drawing the string out through his lips.

“What’s this? I think I must’ve swallowed a snake!” When he had removed it from his mouth, he held the string up to examine it.

“Laws, No! It’s just a ole string!” He tied the feathers into a bunch at the end of the string. “Kitties like to chase things, Lucy. Set her down here and watch her.”

Bob dangled the string in front of the kitten. He started backing up, slightly off balance. The feathers jiggled as he dragged the string along. The kitten chased it. Bob backed up to the tree. He tripped on the pot of squirrel tails and lost his footing.

Will called out a warning, “Bob! Watch out!” To recover, Bob took a couple of giant steps backward and knocked the tree onto the hearth of the fireplace. The kitten scurried to safety.

Bob grabbed at the mantle to keep from falling. “Well, I be damned!” He bumped an oil lamp, and it fell off the mantle, glanced off his shoulder and smashed on the hearth. The lamp splashed oil into the fire, soaked the tree, a basket of raw wool, and the wooden floor.

Will jerked Bob away just as the fire exploded outward, instantly igniting everything with a muffled pop. He slapped some flames off Bob's shirt.

"Son! Now you've done it!"

Mary Eliza grabbed Lucy, ran outside and pulled a shawl off a chair on her way. "Get some water!" Mary Eliza yelled. She set Lucy beside the well.

"You set right-cheer, now. Don't ya dare not move!"

She places a big rock on the skirt of Lucy's dress and wraps her in the shawl. Then she raced back inside the burning cabin. Bob and Will run out to get water buckets, but the water was frozen.

"Ain't no use, Bob! That ole cabin is tinder for the fire. Let's haul out what we can!"

They rushed back to rescue Mary Eliza's belongings. She pulled the rocking chair out, piled with quilts and clothes. Bouncing caused it to overturn in the yard.

By the third trip, the fire covered the living area ceiling and made them cough and choke when they went in.

Mary Eliza covered her face with her arm and went back for more. The fire had spread and covered the whole ceiling in the living room. The bright orange color of the fire stopped her in her tracks as she stared at the flames engulfing her home. Her heart began to sink knowing this was the end of the cabin where she grew up. The movement of the fire across the ceiling looked like a dance of a medieval monster coaxing its victim into surrendering like a python does to its prey. She started to choke and realized she didn't have much time. She grabbed the tin types from the mantel and passed Will as he came out with a churn, a spinning wheel and a gunny sack of small items. Bob drug out a box and a basket of pot and pans. Mary Eliza loaded her arms

with more clothes, quilts, linens, and personal items. Finally, Will grabbed their coats, Mary Eliza's shotgun and a very frightened kitten.

Will put the kitten in Lucy's lap and draped his coat around Lucy. Exhausted, Mary Eliza slumped down next to the little girl, with tears in her eyes and gave her a hug. She looked up at Will.

"Where's Bob?"

At that moment, Bob bounded out of the burning building with the turkey under one arm, and a jug of whiskey under the other. He stopped and turned to look at the cabin as the roof collapsed.

"Good God a'might!" Will shouted!

Will dropped to one knee beside Mary Eliza as Bob slide in the snow to the ground, his hands full. A light snow began to fall. They all sat there helpless and watched the cabin burn.

The next morning, Bob and Will shuffle through the charred ruins. Will gathered spikes from the burned logs. Mary Eliza came out of the barn where they had slept through the night lugging a heavy gunny sack full of things pulled from the fire.

She said, "I reckon I'll see what's in here that can be turned to good use." She opened the sack and started to sort through. "That snow we got probably helped keep the fire from spread'n to the woods."

Bob wandered out of the rubble through what had once been the doorway. He strolled to a pile that had been left in the yard from the night before. He looked it over. A mattress, churn, buckets, stool, a small upside-down table, and the over-turned rocking chair. He brushed snow off the rocking chair with his hand and jerked away as if he has touched a hot spot. He shifted

around and squatted, examining the chair. Will came over to the well with his hands full of spikes.

“These here spikes is hard to come by. We’ll need ‘em to build back yer cabin.”

In the background, Bob straightened, took a swig from his pint, and stood up. His hands shook as he returned the bottle to his coat pocket. He rubbed the back of his neck.

Will dropped the spikes into the empty can. “Yer baby still asleep?”

Mary Eliza nodded as she looked down at her. “All snugged up in the hay with her kitten. I love Lucy like my own, but she ain’t my baby really.”

Will looked confused.

“Kirk’s Raiders rode through here near three year ago. Clara...Miss Miller, took up with some of ‘em and she had Lucy. Then she went off and left her here with me.”

Will scooped a dipper of water, listening.

“This weren’t my cabin, neither. It were Uncle Mike and my Aunt Sally’s.”

Bob overheard this and started to pay attention. He loped over to them.

“Who do you say? Mike and Sally Miller? She were Sally Smith Miller! Ain’t that right?”

Surprised, Mary Eliza nodded. Bob began to pace.

“They took me in. Aunt Sally was my mama’s sister.”

Bob stopped pacing abruptly. He pushed his hair back from his forehead, scratching at his scalp in the process.

“Shoot! Ya’ll not believe this...can’t hardly believe it my own self!”

Will looked confused. “Your spirit sure is revivin’. You been at the ole knock-em-stiff already? That’s what got us into this mess in the first place.”

Bob grabbed Mary Eliza by the shoulders.

“Sally was my sister, too! Your mama was, too! Lela! Lela married up with Henry Zigler. Your’n their girl!”

Stunned, Mary Eliza looked into Bob’s blood shot eyes and nodded again.

Bob screamed with excitement.

“You ain’t no Miller at tall! Mary Eliza Zigler. That’s your real name, ain’t it?”

Will put his hand on Bob’s arm.

“Whoa, Hoss! Where’ve ya been getting all this from?”

Bob went to the rocking chair, picked it up and started toward them with it. They met him halfway.

“This here rocky chair. Your pa made this chair hisself, Mary Eliza. I seed him when he was makin’ it.”

He put the chair down and tipped it so they can look underneath the arm.

“See here? He struck his mark.” He set it up right again.

Bob’s fingers made swerve movements as he rubbed his fingers over the etchings on the arms of the chair. Mary Eliza went over to look at the mark under the rocker. She bent down to look at the carvings on the arms of the chair.

“See he always put his initials H. Z. in the carvings.” Bob startled Mary Eliza when he screamed. “And that ain’t all neither!”

He pulled a tin-type photo and his pint, from his coat. He handed her the picture, and she studied it as he took another drink. He identified the people for her, pointing to each one.

“That’s Henry...your daddy. That’s me. That’s you there, a-setting on your Ma’s lap in this same rocky chair! This were took...let’s see...most, ten...twelve year ago.”

Mary Eliza raised her eyes to study Bob's face. "That would make me three years old there." She threw her arms around his neck.

Mary Eliza said, "That makes you my uncle, don't it?" Bob pried her arms away. He backed up. "Careful, there! A body could get hurt, a wrestlin' that-a-way!"

They all stood and laughed in amazement. Will made a fire and they sat around the fire talking.

Bob said, "After the war, I come back through Virginy. They said, Lela and Henry were dead-n-gone from the typhus. So, then, I come here a lookin' for Sally. Nobody knowed her at t'all. They knowed that a Joe Miller's widow lived out this-a-way. When I met you, I figured I was off track."

Mary Eliza held Lucy in her lap with a big blanket around them both. Lucy held the kitten in her lap. They stayed close to the fire to stay warm. Mary Eliza had a sad tone in her voice.

"Aunt Sally died six year ago, now." Will brought some pots that he has picked out of the pile of salvage and a bucket of fresh snow to melt on the fire.

"Who is Joe Miller then?" Will asked. Will positioned the pot on the coals.

Mary Eliza said, "Bob?" Then she thought for a second and smiled, "Uncle Bob?"

Bob looked at her with an expression of unfamiliarity. "There should be some coffee in that littlest box in the barn. Bring that turkey, too. Since you risked your life-n-limb to save it."

Bob went to the barn to search for the items she requested. Will moved the rocking chair closer for Mary Eliza to sit in.

"Joe Miller is Uncle Mike's brother. Uncle Mike went west. Joe and Clara come here. Joe went to war and got shot down. Clara went to wherever he was at, just this past spring."

Will squatted down. He added more wood to the fire. Bob, returned with coffee, turkey, and a jug of cider.

Will saw Bob found more cider. “Bob. Don’t you think you’ve had enough of that cider?” Bob put the cider down.

“And she left you with her baby and now, your cabin is all burnt down!” Bob looked down in shame. He said to Mary Eliza, “I’m sorry for causin’ the fire. I just lost my balance, and it just happened so fast.”

Mary Eliza observed the burnt remains of the cabin. “I can’t hardly take it all in. Not all at once.”

There was a long silence. She rubbed the arm of the rocking chair. “Maybe it’s a blessing! This ole cabin seed a heap of sadness in its day. I don’t think nobody was wanting to come back, here, no how.”

Will came over and sat beside her. He put his arm around her shoulders and rubbed them to try to warm her and Lucy and console her.

“I warrant it’s a terrible thing. We can build this place back for ye. But, me and Bob, we been figuring for a time, to head down into the Carolinas and set up new, come this Spring. There’s good hunting there and there a copper mine where we could find work or there’s logging work.”

He took her hand.

“No offense, Mary, but would you wed me, and yuns could come with us?” She covered her mouth with her free hand. Her eyes filled with tears, and she laughed at the same time.

“No offense took! Yes, we will! I had about concluded you weren’t never going to ask me at all.”

In celebration, Bob grabbed Lucy and the kitten and spun them around in circles. Lucy squealed and laughed.

Will pulled Mary Eliza to her feet and put his arms around her.

“They’s plenty of room at the boardin’ house in town. We can all stay there whilst we clean all this up and can get ready to make the move.”

Bob took in the whole scene and let out a whoop. Lucy squealed. “Ah, gawd! If I had a Bible, I’d marry you up right now, my own self.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Granny was looking through some tins and saw Will's tin type. Daniel said, "Granny, you have been through a lot in your life.

Granny sat in the middle of her cabin looking at tin types of Little Willie and Lucy, Meg and Floyd. Granny caressed the tin type and said, "Yes, siree! I been through a heap of heartache."

She always had them in her heart, and when she stayed busy, going to church, helping people with their ailments, and prepping food for the winter months, she could keep her mind busy and not think of them so much, but now that she didn't need to do those things anymore, and she was packing her memories, it made the longing come back.

There were packed boxes and crates all around her. She put the tin types in the box, picked up a baby blanket and put it to her face to smell it. It was in the shape of a bundle, and she put the blanket in the crook of her arm and cradled it. She put her hands in the blanket as if she were petting something.

"Are you looking for something, Granny? You see something?" Granny snapped out of her trance as her head jerked around at the sound of Nannie Sue's voice. She stood in the doorway.

"I miss my babies. What I wouldn't do to hold Meg and Little Willie again." Tears welled up in her eyes. She wiped away the tears. "These ole eyes must be a getting rhuemy. I can't hardly see my hand in front of my face!"

Nannie Sue waited patiently as Granny packed the blanket into a box in front of her. "Is this one ready, Granny?" She squatted down to secure the top and pulled some bags and boxes together in a pile.

Later in the day, Nannie Sue arched her back with her hand on his hips to stretch strained muscles. Nannie Sue said, “Well, that’s that. This is might-near all she’ll hold this trip.” Lizzie came in and grabbed a box and lugged it outside to the truck. Lizzie was helping Daniel organize all the boxes. He took the box from his mother and secured it in the back of a flatbed truck.

“No more! Lizzie, c’mon up here and set on them sacks, so they don’t fly loose.” Daniel reached down and helped her climb over the side. He jumped to the ground.

Granny and Nannie Sue walked out on the porch.

“How many more boxes do you have to go? I think we might need one more trip.”

Nannie Sue said, “Daniel can we get Granny’s old rocker up on the rear. It outta set level on them crates.” Daniel picked up the rocking chair from the porch and set at the rear of the flatbed.

Daniel said, “Ok. All set?” He slapped his hands together as if knocking the dust off.

Daniel called Granny. “Okay, Granny, hop on up here and ride on the back with Lizzie!” She looked up at him with a big toothless smile and a shine in her eyes. “You silly boy. In my younger years, maybe. I’m not as spry as I used to be.” She laughed at the thought. Daniel and Lizzie laughed. Nannie Sue was all business and said, “No she ain’t, Daniel! Granny you’re sitting up front with me.”

Granny said, “I want to go visit Papaw one last time. I need to speak to him about somethin’.”

Everyone looked at each other in silence. Nannie Sue said, “But Granny, the water is getting higher. We need to get off the mountain afore dark.”

Granny said, “I need to talk to Pa.”

Daniel and Nannie Sue looked at each other worried she was stalling.

Nannie Sue said, “Ok, Granny. Daniel will be right back to get you after we drop this stuff off.” Me and Lizzie are gonna stay at the house in Almond and start unpacking and get’n things put away so we have room for these littler things. We’ll have a nice place ready for you to rest when you get there. Okay, Granny?”

Granny nodded and looked at Nannie Sue for a long time.

“That sounds nice. Thank you, sweet girl.” Nannie Sue smiled at Granny. She gently put a loose strand of hair behind Granny’s ear and kissed Granny on the cheek. Then Nannie Sue picked up some smaller bags and moved toward the passenger’s side of the truck.

Lizzie squealed with delight, “Mama! Can I ride on the back?” She stood at the passenger side of the truck with the door open waiting for Lizzie to jump in, “No, ma’am. You’re riding up front with us.”

“Ahh! Mama! I’ll be careful.” Lizzie promised.

“I said no! Besides, it’s too chilly. Now come on. We got a lot of work to do yet.”

Lizzie ran over to Granny and hugged her tight around the waist tight. She looked up at her. “Ain’t you coming with us, Granny?” Granny gently hugged Lizzie’s head.

Nannie Sue said, “Granny wants to talk to Old Pa again, one more time before she goes.” Lizzie jumped in the truck. Granny grabbed a basket of tools, some honeysuckle, her walking stick and started up to the family graveyard.

Nannie Sue got in the truck and put Lizzie on her lap. Daniel got in the driver’s seat and closed the door. Nannie Sue pondered, “What’s she going to do when she can’t go up there every day?” Daniel shook his head, shrugged his shoulders. He started the engine, shifted gears and the truck jumped forward. It swayed as it forded the rocky shallows of the creek just a few hundred feet from Granny’s cabin. The truck was jolted sideways by a large rock and without anyone

noticing, the rocking chair slipped off into the creek. It landed on its side just below the drop-off in a foot of water.

## CHAPTER NINE

Granny put the gardening basket on her forearm and held the walking stick with the other hand. As Granny crested the hill, she stopped to take in the long-range mountain view one last time. The wind was brisk, so she wrapped her shawl a little tighter around her neck. As she approached the graveyard, she leaned her walking stick down against a large boulder beside Will's grave. She sat on a flat spot to rest and catch her breath. She put the basket down.

“Well, now they done it, old Pa! This time ain't like that first time. The government has come in now and told us all...the whole valley...that we're condemned!”

She reached into the basket, pulled out a rag and wiped down the gravestone.

“This time they ain't askin'. They's a tellin'! Take what they decide to give and get out! Just like that!” She looked down at his grave marker.

“The kids have almost everything moved over, and I'll be gone from here soon. I don't rightly see as to how I can stand to leave you' uns here alone. My whole life is buried here!” She shook her head.

“I know you never knowed Daniel, but he is so much like you and Son Boy. He's havin' a hard time right now bein' stuck between two worlds, but he'll make it through. He has a good head on his shoulders and if he follows his heart, he'll do a lot of good in the world.”

She removed a few leaves that had fallen and brushed off some pine needles off the grave bed. A soft light green moss had grown on the top of the graves.

“I sure wish you could see how much Lizzie has growed! She's a fusser like her mama and she's wild as ever, like our little Meg.”

She took out a pair of scissors from the basket, pulled one of her small braids loose and cut it off. She twisted and banded one end with a thin piece of wire. She leaned from her sitting position, scratched out a patch of moss, dug up some dirt and buried the honeysuckle vine and her braid on his grave. “There now! Ye’ll have plenty of honeysuckle blossoms from this, come Spring. And a forget me not.”

She dropped her tools into the basket and rose to her feet with great effort. She shook her head as she moved to two tiny graves. She lowered herself to her knees between them. She placed a hand on each crude, slab headstone. She took the rag and wiped dirt from an etching of a lamb on the headstone of the smallest grave that read William Garrett Holmes Jr.

“My little Willie. My precious newborn! My old arms just ache to hold ya!” Tears welled up in her eyes. “Your daddy’s heart broke that day. I know he’s happy to be with you again.” She turned to the other small grave.

“Meg, you little sister business! You were my wild one. My free spirit! I hope you’re helping your Pa with your little brother. Your Mama is right here! Watchin’ over ya! Always!”

As she struggled to her feet, her long hair caught on a low hanging branch. She stopped momentarily to twist it back into a loose bun. Her breathing became labored. She looked back at her babies’ graves.

“Law, I’ve got so old...I wonder will ye know me?”

She brushed dead leaves from the next two headstones. One had Robert Hiram Smith scratched on it. The other, Lucille Miller Whitehead.

“Reckon my heart broke start’n with the first of these graves! Angels all...”

She ran her fingers over the etching in the headstone. “Uncle Bob. You always seemed to show up when I needed you. I wish you would now. I know you couldn’t help your drinking ways, and

I know you meant well. I'll never forget the day you discovered we were kin. I never felt alone again after that day. I knowed I had family with me when you were there."

She wiped a tear off her cheek. "I'm sorry to have to leave you."

She moved to the next grave that had a small, tattered piece of American flag attached to a wire and placed in the middle of a small cement planter at the head of the gravestone.

Granny talked to her son, Lloyd. "Son boy! You died for your country and now you will be rest'n on government land. I hope they appreciate your sacrifice and take care of you." A tired look came over her face. "There's another war a brewin. That's why we are leavin."

She turned to sit on the gravestone. "I just hope to God the boys who go serve, come back to their families. They shouldn't have to suffer like me and Pa did, not ever seeing you again."

She stood up and walked back to Lucy's grave. "And Lucy. My first love. The one who taught me how to be a mother. I guess you and I went through a lot, growing up together. And you were such a good mother yourself. You fought long and hard to bring your young un's into this world. I'm sorry you could not go find your real mother like you wanted and get all your questions answered. I hope you have all the answers you ever wanted now."

She turned around, repositioned her shawl across her shoulders and retraced her steps. When she passed by Will's grave again, she saw a black wooly-worm with one small brown stripe on it crawling on his headstone. She watched it for a few minutes.

"Well, looks like it's going to be a harsh winter, Pa." She stood up and swayed back and forth. "It's a heap to lean burdens on ya, but now, I'm a needin' to get on down to the cabin. They'll be back t' get me soon." She left the basket sitting on the rock and picked up her cane. Half-way down the path, she stopped to rest. She leaned against a tree for support. She looked around and took some breaths of the fresh cool mountain air.

“Near about everything’s gone, even the trees in the valley. The floodin’ won’t leave sign of no valley at all.”

Her shawl caught and clung to the tree bark, sliding off of her shoulders. Granny kept walking unphased.

“In years to come, won’t nobody recollect that all this were ever here.” She stopped and turned around slowly in a full circle as if she were looking for something. She grabbed at her hair and looked her hand, seeing nothing, she did it again. She continued down the path.

“Where is that old man? We got some decidin’ to do.” She took a few more steps toward the cabin and stopped again.

“Aunt Sally, no... she died. Miss. Miller...no...,” She nodded. She gained the clearing at the end of the path and spotted her rocking chair lying on its side in the creek.

“Will! My rocker!” She hobbled over close to the chair, dropped her walking stick and leaned into the creek bank to steady herself. She waded into the cold creek water. She shouted as loud as she could and looked back behind her. “Old Pa! Make haste! Make haste!”

She waded to her rocker and managed to pull it upright, but the current made it slip sideways again. She gripped the arms of her chair and pulled it toward her. It slipped backward, pulling her with it. She tried to hold it against the current, but it was too much for her. It slipped on the slick underwater rocks and slid toward the middle of the creek into deeper water. The cold water made her lose her breath. As she weakened, she lost more ground, until the arms of her chair were almost completely under water. Hip-deep in cold water and exhausted, she reached for the arms of the chair, she shuddered and gasped as her skirt floated up as if resisting, trying to stay afloat. She eased her body into the seat, sinking chest deep into the water that covered it. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. Her bun broke loose, and her hair unraveled and

floated on the surface of the water as if a den of tiny garter snakes had been released. Her body relaxed. She floated with the current and slowly, the chair tipped over sideways. Her clothes became soaked, and the creek seemed to swallow her. She submerged and faded into the deep natural tannins of the creek. The lone red feather from her hair floated to the top and washed away with the current of the water.

The sound of the old truck returning was heard in the distance, creaking and grinding.

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