Company Town Girl: An Ethnological Examination and Creative Exploration of Coal Town Culture in Southern West Virginia, 1937-1952

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ABSTRACT

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Creative Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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This dissertation comprises a dual exploration: it serves as an ethnological analysis of the company town cultures within the New River Coalfield towns in Fayette and Raleigh County, West Virginia, from 1937 to 1952. The focus is particularly directed toward the experiences shaped by poverty, race, and gender in insular and self-sustaining coal company towns.

The first part, a scholarly exploration, establishes a factual framework that forms the foundation for the second segment of the dissertation, a historical fiction narrative. This creative piece engages in a creative dialogue between siblings, each providing a distinct lens: one through the female perspective and the other through the male perspective. These narratives are derived from research and stories conveyed through oral history interviews, culminating in a work of historical fiction.

Company town life in Southern Appalachia during this time is a complex tapestry. Shared poverty is a common thread, yet the cohesion and connections within each town exhibit significant variation. The isolated nature of these unincorporated world profoundly shapes the dynamics at play. While the experiences portrayed are shared in many aspects, they are recalled with bias influenced by personality and gender.

This dissertation considers my own family's history. Consequently, while the creative piece aspires to historical accuracy, it is imbued with my own personal perceptions and attempts to empathize with the diverse truths of the subjects.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Verlene Roberta Edens Venezia (Muffy) and to all women who have survived and thrived despite comparable challenges.

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Acknowledgements

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all my professors at Drew University, with special acknowledgment to Professor Robert Carnevale, who encouraged me to think about the concept of history, to Dr. Liana Piehler, for encouraging the creative part within me that I never believed I had. I am indebted to Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge for sharing her family history and steering my research in new and thought-provoking directions. Additionally, I express my most profound appreciation to Dr. Laura Winters, whose encouragement prompted me to dig in and connect on a deeper level to get to my truth.

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PRELUDE

In Fall 2018, Drew University offered a course named "Imagining History," which is described as a creative writing workshop focused on historical pieces. As I am a certified high school Social Studies and Language Arts teacher, the course appealed to me. Throughout the class, we engaged in reading and discussions, with one essay, "'Indians": Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History' by Jane Tompkins, causing me to pause. In the essay, Tompkins delved into post-structuralism, a theory challenging the notion of a fixed "truth," emphasizing how different biases shape varied perspectives of the same story. Tompkins forces the reader to consider what judgments are inherent in historical narratives.

Our first writing assignment prompted us to narrate a segment of our personal history. I wrote about the 1973 gas crisis, acknowledging that my judgments, descriptions, and fears played into my perceptions and, therefore, my retelling of events. The following writing assignment required research akin to Natalie Zemon Davis's creative approach in her reinterpretation of the Martin Guerre story. Davis encouraged readers to conduct thorough research while considering multiple possibilities.

The synthesis of these assignments and genuine self-reflection inspired "Company Town Girl." Tompkins prompted me to explore various facets of the same story, while Davis inspired me to delve into history and infuse creativity. I recognized the need to scrutinize and reframe my preconceived notions and biases, but this was difficult because I knew my storied antagonists, and I didn't always like them. Over the years, I

watched how the antagonists treated my protagonists, and I judged them. In life, I had no empathy. When my antagonists both died, I put them out of my mind, only to revisit them again when crafting this version of their story. So, instead of judging the narrative's antagonists, I immersed myself in their realities, acknowledging that emotions like despair and heartbreak might be luxuries the desperate and impoverished cannot afford. I learned to appreciate that not all facts are knowable, and many are far beyond my perspective.

The culmination of these considerations is reflected in my work. Initially crafting a historical fiction narrative, I kept in mind the overarching themes and thesis that guided my vision. Research for the narrative led me to explore questions of race, class, gender, and material culture. I learned that in the towns where Eden's family were born and grew, necessity dictated gender bias as more prevalent than racism, strategically excluding Jim Crow to maintain the influence of the Justice Collins-led company town machine. Poverty remained a constant force, anchoring the characters in their historical context and, at the same time, motivating some to want more.

INTRODUCTION

PART 1:

"Company Town Girl" examines a segment of the coal company town cultures of Fayette and Raleigh Counties, West Virginia, from 1937 to 1952. The research and writing focus on the experiences and memories of the company town residents, particularly those of the William Robert Edens family who lived in the Justus Collins-operated coal towns from the Depression to post-World War II progress and coal mining mechanization.

Part One provides a fact-based foundation, the scaffold for the historical fiction piece. The chapters explore the history, culture, and social dynamics of company towns in Southern West Virginia. Sources that pertain to place, race, gender, and material culture are examined in these isolated and self-sustaining coal communities, as well as the economic challenges and opportunities faced by residents.

Part Two is a creative conversation between siblings, Muffy, a young girl, and her younger brother, Hoppy. The story is based on the childhood memories of coal miners' children and the partially fictional accounts of the experiences of growing up in a company town through both a female and male lens. The stories reveal the different roles and expectations placed on boys and girls and how they interacted with the natural world and within their community. This work of historical fiction brings to life a unique and nuanced perspective of this chapter of American history.

Southern Appalachian company towns' life histories are neither linear nor singular. Each town and family have a shared poverty, but cohesion and connections

within the towns vary greatly. The smallness of their world heavily influenced the dynamics in the various towns where William Robert Edens and his family lived. At the same time, the Edens family shared experiences in many ways; personality and gender shaped individual memories. Though they shared a history, personality and gender nuances led each Edens family member to focus on different aspects of their collective experiences. The smallness of their world heavily influenced the dynamic. The Edens family experiences, while shared in many ways, are remembered differently based on personality and gender. The author's lens is admittedly biased, and familial relationships influence the telling of these family stories. Consequently, while aspiring for historical accuracy, the creative piece is peppered with personal perceptions but remains committed to accuracy.

The southern West Virginia coalfields were often small, isolated camps born along the coal seams where monied investors saw opportunities to grow their wealth. Initially drawn to the land for timber, the discovery of the more lucrative commodity, coal, fueled the endeavor to grow wealth. Accessing coal as demand grew became problematic due to the geologic nature of the coal seam. Initially inaccessible via road or rail, small encampments emerged at the mouths of these seams to house coal miners. The late 1800s saw a surge in worker demand driven by the combined forces of railroad expansion and the need to move mountains of coal. So, in addition to the native white Appalachians living in the mountains, Italian and Polish immigrants and formerly enslaved men looking for waged work migrated to these isolated encampments. Eventually, to ensure miners would stay and work the seams, towns emerged that supported family life: the Pioneer days (the 1880s to 1915), which encompassed building

the company towns, the paternalistic period when wartime and the Depression fueled the coal operators to exert maximum control over aspects of company town life and coal productivity (1915 to 1929), and the years of decline when coal miners were usurped by mechanization and alternate forms of fuel (the 1930s to 1960s) (Shifflett xiii). Robert Edens and his wife Pearl were born and raised in the coal culture of the pioneering days, married and raised a family during the paternalistic period, and employed various survival methods during the declining years.

Each company town was a microcosm of the West Virginia coal culture, collective customs, and institutions specific to the period and place. In some instances, and with the progression of time, coal barons, their foremen, and managers attempted to exert greater control over the economy of the town dynamics to sustain the culture. The exploration of the "Hollers," the valleys between the mountains, reveals a situational history of company towns and the life of Robert Edens's family before 1952, drawing insights from a wealth of research and references.

During the pioneering days at the Imperial Smokeless Coal Company in Quinwood, West Virginia, the Edens patriarch, “Dock,” and Pearl Edens's father, Allen Tipton, met, worked together, and eventually forged a relationship as their children met and married. The coal town ethnology research will focus on the New River and Winding Gap coalfields in Raleigh and Fayette County, West Virginia, specifically on three company towns: the end of the paternalistic years in the company town of Beckley (1937 -1940), the Sun Coal Camp at Mount Hope/Cadle Ridge/Hotcoal (1940 -1945), and finally, the declining years in the company towns of Big Stick and Sophia (1945 - 1952). These periods represent a time of significant change in American history beyond the

factors of war. The 1930s represented a time when Americans had the least mobility and were subject to the exploitation and limitations of an economic wage system that was the mechanism for shared poverty, especially in coal company towns (Fishback).

The West Virginia mountains gave the men and women who lived there a unique identity. The mountaineers, both men and women, respected the land, developed an intimate relationship with the mountains, and valued what the mountains could provide. Cadle Ridge provided the Edens family with all these things, income, and sustenance. Indeed, coal mining provided a steady income, but the mountains provided in other ways as well. Cadle Ridge, the mountain most remembered by the Edens family members, played a pivotal role in providing food, hiding illegal activities, and releasing treasures, such as ginseng. In this regard, the mountain was magical. Located in various hollows at the base of the mountains, communities of coal camps segregated yet united communities with shared poverty and a hard-knock desire for survival. The harsh realities of life in these coal camps forced residents to forge bonds, making either simple neighborly connections or complex ones heavily dependent on the other for support. The hazardous nature of the job required a mutual dependence that frequently forced issues of race aside. How did this manifest outside the mines when the men would return to their respective company-segregated parts of town? Did mutual reliance on mines and company towns foster cross-cultural and racial bonds within the towns? The answers are varied and complex.

Several coal camp communities dotted the base of Cadle Ridge, forming a segregated yet united community bound by shared poverty and a desire for survival. The men who worked in the mines had to rely on each other for their safety. The hazardous

nature of the job required a mutual dependence that often forced them to set aside their differences of race. It is unclear how this dynamic played out in the towns after hours, but we do know the mutual reliance inside the mines reached across cultural and racial divisions in the town during times of need.

Issues of place, race, and gender will propel the creative piece of the project. While the account will be fictional, the stories will reflect a historical experience that is rich, informative, and entertaining. The coal camp communities examined were isolated from much of the world. Consequently, the life experiences of these communities' multiracial and multicultural inhabitants bound the mining families by shared poverty and mutual reliance for survival; this was true within the belly of the mine and on the dirt road microcosm of the coal community. These truths will become evident in the research and the retelling of family stories depicted in the historical fiction novella. The reality of these families may not reflect the pulse of racism in the South in the 1940s; however, it will reflect a gray area where white and black men worked side by side, and black and white children shared toys and playtime. Simultaneously, the gender divide widened as a woman's place was no longer at her husband's side as it once had been in the farm fields. Now, men alone went into the coal mines. Women worked hard in the home, raising children, growing vegetables, sewing clothing, and stretching as far as they could, what income the miners earned. Once out of the mines, men sought whatever pleasure they could find as women scrambled to find their way amid endless expectations and sometimes unfaithful husbands. The stories and research support the assertion that gender bias was more profound than racial discrimination within isolated company towns during the periods examined.

Coal camp communities are nuanced. Consequently, understanding the factors at play requires an interdisciplinary approach. Primary source interviews and oral histories provided evidence-based stories, dialect, and economic insights into the company store culture that contributed to poverty. Sociological understandings are also helpful, as they reveal a greater understanding of creative family budgeting strategies that emerged.

Many cited authors, such as Radford University sociologist Mary B. Lalone, have utilized or participated in oral history projects. Lalone is prolific in coal camp culture. She writes extensively regarding coal camp culture in the *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association,* concluding that not all aspects of company-town living were negative experiences. In her ethnographical view of the coal mining way of life, as put forth in her 1997 *Appalachian Coal Mining Memories*, Lalone interviews men and women documenting their experiences in coal mining camps during the 1930s through the 1950s. Much of what Lalone examines culminates in generalizations about most experiences. Lalone also addresses another critical factor of the microcosms: the Winding Gap and New River Coalfields company towns had limited transportation into and out of these towns; thus, restricted exposure to the outside. The railroad was the predominant means of ingress and egress; the railroad's primary function was to move coal. In a separate study, Lalone explains how mining families subsidized their incomes via gardens, raising animals, gathering in the mountains, and swapping resources. Lalone's research parallels the Edens family's survival practices and expounds on the efficacy of such practices.

Price V. Fishback's 1992 foray into the economic considerations of the company town provides a vital lens, revealing that the costs and quality of services provided were

less dire than some earlier historians reported them to be. Despite Fishback's assertion that some company towns were a mechanism for exploitation, he also provides statistics and qualitative labor reports that disprove the unfairness of coal barons and their employees; they faced frequent accusations of being overbearing. According to Fishback, companies running these early 20th-century towns tried to ensure their residents enjoyed comparable sanitation to local cities, relatively fair market prices, and low expenses thanks to their controlled systems. Fishback rationalizes that a miner, regardless of race or ethnicity, could move from mine to mine. If they felt exploited, they moved from coal town to coal town. It was in the employers' best interest to incentivize them to stay. This assertion supports the Edens family's experiences and movement patterns within the Justice Collins coal town communities.

Sociologist Shannon Elizabeth Bell speaks to "hegemonic masculinity" (Bell "Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia.") of coal regions and, in doing so, maintains that the construct ideology works to further the interest of the male-dominated world of coal production. Bell, a feminist researcher and a social justice advocate for the voice of women, contends that the coal industry itself, to preserve its cultural value and identity, creates false narratives to extend its "economic identity" (Bell).

In her 1972 essay, UCLA anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner tells the reader that gender roles are a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature and that a different social actuality can only grow from a different cultural view. In coal company town culture, a woman's place was firmly ensconced in the home, serving her spouse, children, and home. The structure of the company town was paternalistic in every way; a woman's

role was that of wife, mother and home tender; there was little opportunity to deviate from the expectations of her role.

Joe William Trotter's 1990 book *Coal, Class, and Color* informs the reader of black miners' entrance into the coal mining culture and their evolution towards more civil rights in coal towns than anywhere else in the South between 1915 and 1932. Trotter's work lays the groundwork to support the hypothesis regarding black workers entering into the work of coal mining at a time when labor was needed and in remote enough areas that new identity formations occurred. Trotter briefly addresses the diminished role of black women but the more equitable treatment of black miners in the communities. In his more recent book, *Appalachian Workers and the Appalachian Coal Industry*, Trotter contends that rather than working side-by-side in the field, black women were newly relegated to a company house where they toiled alone, raising children, making and darning clothes, ironing, caring for the home, planting and tending gardens and often "taking in work" in the town that included domestic service and laundry. Similarly, William Turner's book *Black in Appalachia* (1985) addresses how coal mine operators hired more black miners because they were less likely to unionize and worked harder and without complaint. Ultimately, black, foreign-born, and white Appalachian miners forged bonds to advocate for more services from the feudalistic paternalism that ruled the company-owned towns. This unique blending of separate entities forged a bond based on mutual need.

An additional research opportunity through the New River Gorge National Park archives permitted access to primary source documents held both in the Library of Congress and through the New River Gorge National Park archives. To this end,

Archeologist and Cultural Research Manager David Fuerst and sociology professor Sloane Drayson-Knigge assisted in navigating the digital archives of the National Park system by accessing oral histories, transcripts, and historical archives. Oral history archives from various university libraries, such as West Virginia University Library and the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Library of West Virginia Wesleyan College, provide other primary source-informed insights that support many of the details Hoppy Edens, the son of William Robert Edens, conveys in his interviews.

William Robert Edens, known by most as Robert Edens (1906 to 1959), was the son of a coal miner and followed his father's path by moving from the middle school classroom right into the coal mines in his early teens. In the late 1800s, his father discovered a coal seam on their property and worked on it privately. Eventually, however, as access to the coal in the seam waned, both men began working for a coal company. Life was hard, and when escape was possible, both men took advantage of opportunities to pursue pleasure, engaging in activities that were neither legally nor morally correct. The father taught the son, perpetuating the behavior. However, women worked hard, too; daughters watched as their mothers toiled, with no opportunity for play or escape, and soon these experiences would become their own. These realities inspired despair, desperation, and the eventual need to escape.

The first part of the dissertation is laid out in chapters arranged topically. Chapter One discusses the natural environment that surrounds the coal mining camps in West Virginia. The Appalachian Mountain landforms created hollows, some of which hosted the company towns that became home to many mining families. Largely unreachable, other than by train, these company towns were economically and socially isolated from

the outside world during this period. Beyond coal, the mountains were important in subsidizing miners' compensation. Mining families often turned to the mountains to meet various needs. They obtained timber for construction and wood for cooking stoves, foraged wild nuts, fruits, and greens to enhance their diets, hunted squirrels and rabbits for protein, and utilized the dense forest cover to conceal activities they wished to keep secret.

Chapter Two argues that community and shared poverty trumped race in isolated coal company towns where the Jim Crow mentality had less access and, therefore, less influence. The more dangerous the job, the more money a man could earn. Consequently, both black and white men sought higher-paying jobs. Additionally, black, and white men would move from camp to camp looking for higher pay and better wage-earning opportunities, particularly when miners became scarce and more needed during World War I and World War II (Fishback "Segregation"). Men working in the mines relied on each other; the men had to work as one unit in the mine to survive the dangerous conditions. Native Appalachian children forged tentative friendships with immigrant and black children in the company towns where they lived.

Chapter Three explores the female experiences in the company towns. In some cases, gender caused a more significant schism than race. While men had each other's back in the mine, they also propelled each other in social behaviors. Married women with children had little socializing opportunities other than supporting the households by swapping fabric swatches for making clothing, new recipe ideas, bartering, and trading vegetables or canned goods they had produced. Unmarried women, either grown-up daughters of miners or mine widows living in these coal towns, caused conflict; their

presence was often the catalyst for debauchery, causing rifts between couples, within the families, and in the community. Faced with limited options, women would sometimes forge unconventional paths to freedom, paths often fraught with the potential for suffering and tragedy.

Chapter Four recounts the importance of material culture both before and after the post-World War II middle class growth and expansion that was late to reach the isolated coal towns of West Virginia. Discussion in this chapter will be limited to the material culture most valued by the Edens family, from pre-war utilitarian items, such as the dinner bucket, cast iron skillet, and corn stills, to the late-to-arrive fashionable shoes, lipstick, and appliances that shifted the wants and perceived needs of the mining families in the company owned towns.

The historical fiction work tells the story of a family whose ethnology and experiences are unique to the company towns where they lived. Two siblings lend their voices to this story: Muffy, the protagonist, whose lens reflects the female experience; she is a quiet observer and the middle child in a family of five. Muffy's younger brother, Hoppy, more gregarious and egocentric, tells the story of the male experience, but his character lives it much differently. Their observations of race, poverty, and favoritism will reveal vastly different treatment based on gender. By sharing narrative duties, the author hopes to reveal, through an authentic lens, how their different experiences shaped their identities.

The Edens children, 1950

Back row left to right: Roland, Muffy, Hoppy
Front row left to right: Glenna and Mickey

CHAPTER 1: THE MOUNTAIN PROVIDES

During the 1880s, a confluence of factors, including prevailing market conditions, the escalating demand for labor, and the pursuit of wealth by capitalists, collectively catalyzed the emergence of a paternalistic coal camp dynamic. This phenomenon was fostered by the geographical isolation of the southern Appalachian coal fields, which, detached from the industrialization characterizing the remainder of the South, played a pivotal role in shaping this distinctive socio-economic structure.

As a steady influx of able-bodied men sought employment in the growing mining sector, necessitating a suitable residential infrastructure for both laborers and their families, the need for housing in these remote regions became evident. Consequently, the initiation of constructing company towns within these isolated landscapes took root.

Between 1925 and 1930, nearly 80% of southern West Virginia coal miners lived in these company towns ("Company Towns: 1880s to 1935"). In fact, by the end of 1925, there were more than 55 camps and more than 76 mining operations in the Winding Gulf coal field; towns were everywhere, sometimes more than 50 to 100 people in each of these camps ("The Winding Gulf"). By the 1930s, there were established economic practices and behavior patterns in many of the seasoned West Virginian company towns. At this juncture in West Virginia's coal mining history, many parents with young families living in the company towns were also born in company towns, many of which were first built before the turn of the century.

In company towns, miners lived in rental houses, owned by the mining company. The cost of rent was automatically deducted from their monthly salaries. Access to this

housing, however, was not guaranteed. The primary condition for living in company towns was a miner’s commitment to prioritize their work in the mines over any other work they many opt to do to supplement their income. This demand often conflicted with the miners' needs as wages seldom proved sufficient to meet their essential needs. Consequently, various strategies were employed to curtail expenditure. Considering the limited income, mining families found themselves compelled to explore alternative avenues to supplement their financial resources; this is known as a subsistence economy. Life in the coal company camps of the 1930s to the 1960s was rife with economic uncertainty, and relying on mining wages alone would have been foolish (Lalone "Economic Survival Strategies"). The Depression caused fear of and reduced demand for work, and with the advent of mechanization, there was reduced demand for miners.

Dependence on the company store was necessary in company towns, but not without risks. Because of the paternalistic practices of the coal operators, much of the employees' lives were not within their control. The coal operators' primary interest was to get the most work out of the coal miners with the fewest obstacles. Access to supplies, a post office, and the only telephone in town, helped to make the company store the center of town. This is true of most of the company towns in southern Appalachia during this period.

In the mines run by coal operator Justus Collins, which is where the Robert Edens family lived during the time they lived in company towns, the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency was utilized as a private police force to keep mines running as smoothly as possible (Gorby 16). One of the jobs the Baldwin-Felts men were tasked with, was to check private mail in the company store post offices for union-generated publications.

Another way Collins exerted control was by discouraging the cashing in of scrip for Federal money. Additionally, Collins reinforced his authority by reminding miners that his ownership of company housing came with the ability to oust uncooperative or lazy miners. Collins, using the Baldwin-Felts men, also controlled who can come into the privately-owned camps and who to keep out (Athey). Collins remained wholly focused on ensuring a seamlessly-run, high-functioning, coal producing town.

In other ways, Justus Collins endeavored to keep the miners and their families motivated to stay in his towns. Some company stores were notorious for marking up prices and exploiting miners. Collins, however, took a different approach. To keep his miners happy and productive, he kept prices in his company stores moderate and sometimes even paid higher wages than other operators. Collins also prohibited saloons and bars in his mining towns, thus preventing miners from coming together to discuss any shared discontent. However, it was also a way to prevent drunk behavior, such as bar brawls, and lessened productivity in the mines (Fishback "Economics").

The company store was the only source of goods for the coal town, and railroads delivered the necessary goods to the store. The store typically stocked dry goods such as sugar, flour, beans, grains, salt, tea, and coffee, as well as other items such as hats, clothing, boots, shoes, groceries, tobacco, hardware, tinware, drugs, glassware, crockery, work tools, and paper twine. Train tickets could also be purchased with cash, or company scrip at the company store. Management would investigate why employees did not spend at least 40% of their wages on scrip, but only as a way for Collins to stay abreast of residences financial interests and practices (Athey). Company-controlled housing,

restricted shopping options due to company stores, and the paternalistic philosophy served to bind miners to a life reliant on mining and company resources.

Scrip, a company-manufactured substitute for money, was often the currency paid if miners needed an advance on future earnings. Scrip remained redeemable for cash by Federal law, but it was costly; this discouraged many miners from the practice. Justus Collins, at his peak the coal operator/owner of the New River, Pocahontas, and Winding Gulf coalfields, thus in charge of all the company towns the Edens family lived in, tried to discourage the cash-in option for scrip, going as far as printing on the coinage, "Payable in merchandise only" (Atley). Collins would not part with cash unless necessary. The lack of liquidity is a hallmark of Justus Collins's coal operations. Collins was an observer and a manager with an aptitude for calculating risk, profit, and loss. He secured loans, negotiated land deals, and leveraged capital to start and grow his coal operations. Collins had an aptitude for creative problem-solving, consolidating when necessary, and securing funds by outmaneuvering capitalists with schemes and promises when necessary (Gorby).

Miners spent their scrip on mining equipment and household necessities before earning it; thus, income alone often could not be stretched to meet all family needs. Consequently, families sought additional ways to acquire food and employ other livelihoods to assist in economic survival. Coal towns, especially from the pioneering days and into the 1930s, allowed miners to keep livestock and to have gardens. Feeding and tending livestock and growing and harvesting gardens was time and labor-intensive, and the chore often fell to the wives and children (Shifflet 83). Many towns were built adjacent to mountains, often ill-suited for gardening, but miners and their families

worked the available landscape. Families scraped out gardens regardless of the pitch of the land or proliferation of trees, and families used what space they had to raise chickens, hogs, and sometimes a cow if the company town allowed. Many of the 1920s and 30s West Virginia coal miners were born of former farmers turned coal miners and brought with them knowledge of how to remediate the rocky and unyielding hillsides of the Mountain State (Salstrom). These small gardens were the most utilized to supplement mining income (LaLone "Economic Survival Strategies" 56). Garden staples most frequently included corn, beans, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, onions, peppers, cabbage, beets, and pumpkins. Attending the garden started in early spring and lasted well into the fall. The gardens were tended with great diligence; not one scrap of garden vegetation went to waste as the miners' wives worked daily to 'put up' or can vegetables for the winter months and adding peelings, stems, and harvest debris to the feed for the chickens and hogs. Children were assigned chores, such as watering gardens, weeding, and feeding the animals. Eula Shepard Fisher, both the daughter and the wife of a coal miner, speaks to the importance of raising a garden, chickens, and hogs. Fisher recalls that everybody shared the work because preparations for the winter, which included canning and raising hogs, were essential to the survival strategy (Lalone *Appalachian* 110). Coal-town families came to rely on these farming activities as the first way to supplement their household needs.

Women and children performed most of the household's subsistence activities. Older children hiked into the mountains to gather wild strawberries, pears, and pokeweed during springtime, blackberries and grapes in the summer, and acorns, walnuts, apples, and chestnuts in the fall. These foraged items were eaten fresh and processed into jams,

jellies, and nut butter to sustain the mining families throughout the winter (Lalone "Economic Survival Strategies" 57). William Boyd Edens, known as 'Hoppy,' grew up in the coal camps until his family moved to Pennsylvania in his teens. He remembers picking berries, nuts, and apples with his siblings and explained that his mother worked hard putting up fruit and nuts from the mountains and vegetables from the garden (Edens). Women in the towns would also participate in quilting bees and fabric trading to repurpose clothing that had been outgrown or was no longer helpful. Fabric swatches that were too small or worn could no longer be used for quilts and were sometimes used to pad the knees of miners' pants so they would last longer (Giesen 166).

All family members worked in ways that contributed to the family household. On fall weekends, miners and their families would return to the mountains to unearth more of the treasures they held, planning weekends to kill and process hogs, capture beehives to extricate honey, and forage for valuable ginseng. Hunting squirrels, groundhogs, and rabbits were year-round activities, as was collecting coal from the slag heaps. The hog slaughter usually occurred around Thanksgiving; this undertaking involved neighborhood planning and the participation of all family members. The process required skilled hands and ample experience (Cook). One or several fatted hogs in the coal camp communities were earmarked for slaughter. The men, women, and children each had assigned roles in the endeavor; the process would often take an entire weekend from beginning to end. All usable hog parts were used (Stanley). The slaughtered hog yielded hams, hocks, pork belly, spareribs, shoulders, loins, bacon, pork chops, cracklings, lard, and scrapped parts used for making Pon Hoss, better known colloquially as Scrapple. Women coveted the lard used to make soap and would promise their sons the hog bladders. Edens recalls that

his mother would dry out hog bladders, and then inflate the bladders to give to the boys to use as a ball for them to play with after their work was done (Edens). Edens tells the story of his mother fashioning peas shooters from hollowed-out animal bones. Toys were rarely purchased as miners were striving in every way to minimize the debt owed to the company store. The exception was Christmas, when children sometimes received store-bought products like marbles in their stockings (LaLone "Economic").

Having grown up in coal mining towns since the earliest part of the twentieth century, Robert Edens, the patriarch of the Edens family, gleaned knowledge of how to supplement his income with some extra "cash money." Edens flourished in a dual economy; he was part of two economic sectors: the paternalistic economy of a coal miner living in a company-owned town and that of an independent capitalist. Moonshiners are entrepreneurs who take risks to start their businesses. They use their labor and privately owned resources to produce their products and sell them directly to consumers. Moonshiners created the prices for their products and, at times, might compete with other moonshiners on a neighboring mountain. To this end, Edens could be considered a capitalist. Despite Justus Collins prohibition of alcohol consumption in his company towns, Edens made sure that his immediate mining foreman, as well as the company store supervisors, benefited from his capitalistic ingenuity.

Salvage capitalism is the practice of gathering and selling raw materials that have dollars or trade value but are not manufactured nor in a controlled environment (Tsang). In the case of Appalachia, ginseng is a prime example of a salvage capitalist resource. Miners found ginseng plants at the base of large trees in cool, shaded areas with rich, loamy soil. Ginseng is gathered in the fall when the roots are mature and have the highest

value. The free market determines the price of ginseng, and the demand for it has never waned. The relationship between Appalachia and wild ginseng collecting is long and storied. For centuries, ginseng collecting has been a lucrative practice for mountain people. Cherokee Indians once inhabited the mountains and used ginseng as a trading tool. In the 1880s, wild ginseng exports peaked at over six million pounds. Ginseng collecting became a common way for mountain people to supplement their income during an economic depression, and it was one of the first Appalachian herbs traded on the global market (Manget *Ginseng Diggers* 4). Many company town mining families became dependent on ginseng to supplement their income.

In addition to ginseng, other salvage capitalist resources in Appalachia include picking coal topically off the mountain and frequently visiting the slag heaps for pieces of coal dumped with mining sludge. The most lucrative supplemental economic activity for the Edens family, however, was moonshine. Moonshining was a popular way for miners to make extra money during the Great Depression. Miners would often give their supervisors moonshine to ensure they would disregard the illegal activities. Hoppy Edens explained that his father would make moonshine in the mountains and sell it for fifty cents for a quart size Mason jar (Edens). Moonshine production was a livelihood strategy that figured heavily for economic survival (Peine & Schafft). Moonshiners used what they had, in terms of grain, as the base for distillation; for Robert Edens, the base was corn. It was rarely suspect if a coal miner to grow corn in his garden plot, and the extreme isolation of the camp made moonshining that much easier. Isolation, growing corn as the base grain, lack of other economic opportunities, a history of family practice, and

knowledge of distilling process, made moonshining an attractive option (Peine & Schafft).

The coal mining industry in West Virginia has a complex history. In the early 20th century, the industry was booming, and West Virginia was the leading producer of bituminous coal in the United States ("Mining in West Virginia"). The demand for coal increased during World War I, and miners worked long hours in dangerous conditions to meet the demand. During the Great Depression, the coal mining industry in West Virginia suffered a significant setback, and miners often had to look to the mountains, employ subsistence activities, and look for supplemental income to survive. The industry began to recover in the 1940s, but by the 1950s, technological advancements and mechanization enabled companies to mine coal more efficiently, reducing the workforce needed. Consequently, Miners often made and sold what they could for surplus money, and their hard work helped their families survive, even as the company-owned coal mining camps did not.

CHAPTER 2: RACE IS A FACTOR

The United States of America is a country built on the backs of its laborers. Industrialization propelled America into the twentieth century and, in doing so, employed the labor necessary to build it. After the Civil War, change was inevitable. With the freeing of slaves and the consequential failure of the plantation system in the South, many black agricultural laborers moved North in search of better opportunities and more lucrative work. Simultaneously, foreign men landed on the shores of America in search of economic opportunities. These two groups of labor-seekers would converge as a growing need emerged for labor in the West Virginia mountains of southern Appalachia.

For native Appalachian land dwellers, the discovery and mining of coal was, at first, an unanticipated benefit, as at this time, most mountain families in Appalachia made their living as subsistence farmers. The coal the farmers dug was burned for fuel and sold at local markets for additional income. The money earned from coal became more and more profitable and drew attention in the marketplace. With increasing demand for iron and steel, wealthy industrialists seized the opportunity to grow their wealth. Initially, local "petty operators" moved in with money from outside investors who would eventually buy up the land to create consolidated companies (Gorby 2). The expansion of the Chesapeake and Ohio railroads and the Norfolk and Western railroads fueled growth in developing eastern states (Montrie 4). The railroads enabled access to the most remote locations, such as at the base of mountains, where coal and timber were plentiful and had remained untouched until this juncture. It was easy to move the in-demand raw materials

because of the railroad's expansion into the refineries and industrialized cities where demand was great.

Initially, black laborers learned of mining opportunities in southern West Virginia when they worked as day laborers, laying track for the growing railroads; many saw the opportunities provided in the emerging coal industry and chose to remain in West Virginia as coal miners rather than return to the deeper South where their opportunities were limited (Turner and Cabbell 117). Eventually, in not returning to their southern homes, the black miners would write home and recruit friends and families to join them and escape the limitations of life and earning potential on the sharecropped plantations. Friends and family of the black coal miners encouraged their peers to take advantage of the opportunities afforded in the emerging coal encampments, as this was the rare chance for black miners to have their own homes (Fishback *Soft Coal* 34). There were additional incentives to look towards West Virginia; social, cultural, and political factors reinforced the state's attractiveness: racial lynchings were fewer than in other southern states; educational opportunities were greater as the coal camps provided colored schools, and unrestricted-by-race voting as compared to other places in the South. The Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, a West Virginia state agency, emphasized the political and social attractions of West Virginia as a way to motivate black men and their families to move there (Trotter *Dynamics* 157). Incentivized by these opportunities, black tenants and sharecroppers were anxious to flee the poverty and peonage that was their lot in southern agriculture (Shifflet xii).

An added benefit unknown to the newly arriving black miners was that they had little supervision in the underground mines and thus developed a sense of ownership and

pride in the underground 'rooms' they worked in (Montrie 6). These were freedoms previously unknown to the black workers migrating North. In the early 20th century, hundreds of thousands of blacks migrated away from racial violence, lynchings, and the Ku Klux Klan-heavy South. Still, few expected so much opportunity in the neighboring state of West Virginia ("Racial Violence and the Red Summer").

With coal in greater demand, large and small mines grew. Job recruiters working for the emerging coal collieries traveled north to the East Coast ports to recruit immigrants searching for work. Agents waited at the ports of Ellis Island to recruit from incoming ships. Additionally, coal operators advertised in many cities with the promise of wages and homes to incentivize immigrants working in the overpopulated cities to move South. Another recruitment method entailed coal operators hiring skillfully trained black agents as recruiters, sending them to black churches, bars, and other known meeting areas to corner potential laborers and persuade them with promises and free train tickets. Often escorted by private law enforcement, the most famous of which was the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, black recruiters were convinced to recruit their brothers (Gorby 125).

Additional benefits incentivized black laborers to migrate to West Virginia; Coal loading, a backbreaking, physically arduous, and dangerous job, was a critical part of the mining process. Black miners often preferred the physically rigorous job despite its risks because the pay was more significant than that of other mining jobs, and there were fewer direct supervision overseers in this part of the mine. A miner filled the rail cart and was paid based on the coal-loaded weight. For other labor-intensive jobs in the mines, black and white workers received the same pay for the same work. In addition, West Virginia is

one of the few states that can boast the emergence of branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, as well as a McDowell County Colored Republican Organization, all before the Great Depression took hold of the country (Trotter *Dynamics* 159-164).

In the unincorporated coal towns governed by Justice Collins, black miners experienced more significant economic opportunity and equality than in any other coalfield—perhaps anywhere else in America (Lewis 121). Justice Collins is particularly renowned in southern West Virginia because West Virginia University houses his papers, a vast collection of "correspondence, agreements, contracts, deeds, financial statements, ledger books, magazines, maps, minute books, pamphlets, photographs, production and shipping records, reports, and stock books" ("Collection: Justus Collins"). These records have been scrutinized and referenced in many southern West Virginia coal camps and colliery histories. This distinction is essential in understanding why the camps operated by Collins were not exposed to direct United Mine Worker intervention. Collins was adamant about keeping the Union out of his small coal encampments, so he took several steps to ensure the intervention would not occur. First, he paid higher wages than many of the larger encampments infiltrated by the Union; second, he kept the Baldwin Felts Detective Agency on retainer to keep the peace in his towns; and third, by employing a strategy known as the "judicious mixture." A judicious mixture is an effort to balance the interests of all coal miners living in his coal camps, regardless of race or nationality. The policy of a judicious mixture is that an ideal labor force comprised a mixture of native whites, Appalachians, blacks, and immigrant workers. Each operator created his

majority-minority balance to control the workers (Lewis 134). Collins' variation worked well. He understood that integration within the mine was essential. Collins understood that the hazards of coal mining forced a bond between workers in the mine, despite their living conditions (Withers "Winding Gulf"). Collins also acknowledges that segregation had to exist in the company towns he built to house and feed his miners. In Whipple, one of the company towns run by Justus Collins, Collins segregated the blacks, native Appalachian whites, and immigrants in such a way as to prevent communication between groups outside of the mines. Collins also designed a massive company store with segregation practices in mind. Blacks were allowed in the company store at certain times of the day and sometimes would have to put their order for goods in at the side of the building. Immigrant families walked and spoke in groups, often only speaking their native languages and keeping to their part of town. Collins believed that facilitating this schism in the mining living sectors would deter families from meeting to organize or discuss striking based on shared grievances. The Baldwin Felts men were often tasked with monitoring the situation, reporting to Collins if any worrisome activity emerged (Kline 17).

The Collins camps were also where Robert Edens worked and lived with his family throughout his tenure as a coal miner. Edens's son, Hoppy, recalls that everyone mostly kept to their part of town unless they were trading comic books or selling firewood (Edens). There were also times when a neighboring family might fall on hard times and need help; hardship happened when a family member became ill, a miner became injured, or worse, was killed in a mining catastrophe (Lalone "Economic Survival Strategies" 62). In these cases, the blurred lines of segregation existed as cultural

groups tended to help their own. Coal town communities varied from town to town; no two were the same. It is not that coal mining work mitigated racism, but a town's treatment of race varies from town to and from one time to another (Shifflett 75). The near absence of Jim Crow laws in the state's mining towns was a significant factor in the large-scale migration of black Americans to these areas. Southern West Virginia miners were generally offered comparable housing, rental rates, and tenancy terms, reflecting the region's adherence to the separate but equal doctrine (Lewis 146 - 152). Discrimination existed, but the isolation of the towns and the day-to-day interaction dissipated the fear and uncertainty that occurred before the townspeople had the opportunity to get to know each other. There were lines of segregation, but there was also flexibility, particularly in the smaller towns (Lewis 151).

Justice Collins wanted to ensure his efforts towards seamless productivity would continue without obstacles. He clarified that if anyone objected to conditions, whether with payment for work done in the mines or with conditions in the mines or with the cost of products in the company store, they would be tossed to the streets with their families and replaced; this was true for all miners, black or white. Although black miners in southern West Virginia enjoyed a degree of parity with their white counterparts, they remained beholden to the coal companies' feudal authority (Lewis 156). It is clear the Baldwin-Felts men knew their job: ensure the miners did not come together to unite against the machine. However, their shared identity of economic circumstance did unite the miners in other ways; together, most found alternate economic opportunities to ensure survival.

"Gender is also a profoundly economic relationship; it involves women's and men's differential access to and control over material resources, and it is deeply implicated in class relations."

Barbara Ellen Smith

CHAPTER 3: GENDERED INEQUITIES

Robust research-based evidence supports the assertion that black and white male miners were subjugated to the feudal power of the patriarchal society in company-run coal towns of southern West Virginia from the 1920s to the 1940s, especially in isolated towns where union access was limited. However, there is a need for more scholarly documentation regarding the circumstances of women's lives in these towns. Existing studies on the experiences and limited agency of coal town wives heavily rely on oral histories to present a comprehensive picture.

There are "gendered constructions" that sometimes belie the truth of the Appalachian women's experiences: While there is much evidence to support the notion that many daughters of miners, without access or exposure to outside social opportunities, chose to marry young to relieve their parents household of one more mouth to feed, but also to be married off before they could become pregnant, the truth is many had no other options nor opportunities (Miller).

Before the emergence of coal towns, women in the mountain regions of southern West Virginia, around the turn of the twentieth century, were the daughters or wives of subsistence farmers. Women expected to work alongside their husbands to support the

homestead. But when coal operators acquired land and built company towns in the mountain hollows, mountain men gravitated toward the opportunity. One of the many consequences of moving to the company towns was that the expectations of the mountain wife shifted. Gender differences intensified in the coal towns (Shifflett xv). The physical demands of mining and the necessity for women to raise children and labor in the home confined women primarily to domestic tasks in coal towns; therefore, working outside the home was not possible. Women were expected to tend to the family garden and livestock, maintain house and laundry, mend and make clothing, make and preserve food, tend to the children, and train their children to assist in these necessary tasks. As miners' sons reached a certain age, typically twelve, thirteen, or fourteen, they would begin working in the mines as helpers, trappers, or apprentices under their father's supervision (Shifflett 95). Motivated by the desire to become full-time miners and move out of their family homes, young men in company-run coal towns in southern West Virginia expected to marry girls while in their mid to late teens. This new reality, driven by the need for young miners to secure company housing, resulted in boys and girls leaving school at a young age (Giesen 22-23).

The shift from farm life, where coal miners in southern West Virginia had limited daily companionship with their wives and children, to company towns transformed men’s social habits as well. In these towns, miners spent long periods deep in the mines' underbelly with other men. The Justus Collins mines were inhabited exclusively by men, and the mere presence of a woman in the mines was considered bad luck. Consequently, the subsistence activities employed by coal miners and their families largely fell to the coal miners' wives and children. The planting, tending, harvesting, and weeding of home

gardens was a whole family endeavor, however, the canning and preserving of the harvests were women's work; this work was both time-consuming and labor-intensive. To prevent spoilage, one had to cook the harvested material, carefully can it, and store it for use through the winter months. The same process applied to preserving fruit, nuts, and greens gathered in the mountains. These tasks were time-intensive but invaluable for the family's economic viability. Another labor-intensive endeavor was meat preservation, especially the annual hog slaughter, which involved salting, smoking, and canning the pork. Furthermore, cooking fatback into lard for culinary purposes and utilizing pig skins to make lye soaps were essential practices (Lalone et al. 25).

If food was not grown, foraged, or processed, the family obtained it by purchasing materials from the company store. Hoppy Edens recalls that his mother minimized purchases from the company store, opting to only buy bolts of fabric for making clothes and staples like flour, coffee, and sugar for baking and cooking. This approach proved worthwhile; even old clothes found new life by repurposing them for quilt-making (Edens).

Both men and women rose before dawn; women to make breakfast, pack the miner's dinner pail, and start morning fires and stoves to prepare for the day's work. After the miners left for the mines, chores commenced and often remained unfinished by day's end. Another arduous and time-consuming task was washing clothes; the family performed laundry tasks using a wash tub, lye soap, and a scrub board. Water had to be retrieved via several trips from a pump near the company store and lugged back to the house for warming, washing, and rinsing. Clothes were hung and tended to prevent coal dust pollution and theft from a clothesline. Coal dust control was an endless battle.

Persistently, miners' wives and children worked hard to prevent dust from entering their homes, and cling to clothes, as well as ensure the black dust did not contaminate their food.

Once reaching an appropriate age, children attended school but were expected to return home and assist with chores and child-rearing their younger siblings after completing their school day. As the children matured, the division of chore responsibilities between males and females became more apparent: boys typically took on tasks such as hunting rabbits and squirrels, gathering firewood, and replenishing stoves with coal and firewood as required. Meanwhile, girls took on household chores and child-rearing duties, including scrubbing dirty diapers, cleaning floors, and washing dishes (Edens). Everyone helped with the garden and caring for livestock. Most coal mining camp children remember their childhood as filled with hard work (LaLone 34).

The physically demanding and hazardous nature of coal mining and the knowledge of the constant risk of maiming or death manifested in various off-duty behaviors of the male miners; binge drinking and womanizing on off days became the practice of some married and unmarried miners. These behaviors played out often in the mountains near moonshine stills and, on occasion, within or behind the company store in an effort to hide illicit behaviors from anyone who might report back to Justus Collins or his managers. Coal miners' wives, utterly dependent on their husbands financially and emotionally, had little recourse if they, consequently, became unhappy with their lot.

Occasionally, a wife may seek divorce, but this was a rare occurrence. Mary Smith Ward, a coal miner's daughter, married four different coal miner(s), divorcing her first three husbands because they were all "women chasers." After her first husband left

her, she received romantic interest from one of his close friends, "I know my husband had been gone two weeks and someone called here…and I was not interested" ("Matewan 15). Eventually, due to the need to survive and support her children, she did marry another miner.

A coal miner's wife's biggest fear was the death or maiming of her spouse. Either of these possibilities left a wife bereft of her anchor; she faced the daunting task of supporting herself and her children alone. With the loss or maiming of a spouse, friends, and neighbors might offer initial support but would soon return to their own lives. If a miner died, their widows, with little education and few job opportunities, would sometimes marry, often to another miner in a nearby town. However, widows occasionally received visits from their husband's friends, but these friends' wives disapproved, fearing that the desperate or needy widows might tempt their husbands into infidelity (Giesen 86).

The wives of injured or sick miners grappled with other challenges as well, fraught with hardship and uncertainty. The company store, the touchstone of all mining business, was the center of activity for merchandise and exploitation. Besides being the only place miners could buy goods, the coal operators had complete control over the prices of goods and frequently charged exorbitant prices. The company store trapped miners and their families in a cycle of debt, as they were compelled to purchase goods even when they could not afford them. This often led to miners falling into debt, which the company could then use to control them. The company could also threaten to fire miners who did not pay their debts or evict them from company-owned housing.

The wives of injured or sick miners were particularly vulnerable to exploitation at the company store. Depending on the coal operators' policies, women often had to accept whatever terms the company offered. These practices were particularly true of the company stores owned by Justice Collins, who forbade women from entering mines.

Since its heyday, various investors have bought and sold the Whipple Colliery Company Store, the sole remaining Collins-built company store. It has since become a museum dedicated to preserving the history of the company town's coal culture. Former miners and their families have come into the museum to share stories and experiences to add to the Whipple company's vast memorabilia collections.

One set of stories revolved around the treatment of women in need. When a woman's miner husbands were injured or unable to work, women requiring food for their children would occasionally receive something called "Esau," a sort of super credit that had to be repaid within 30 days of disbursement. Based on first-person narratives, the debt was often satisfied with sexual favors if a miner could not return to work in a reasonable time frame, usually the 30 days allotted. Other stories often repeated surround women in need of shoes. "Over the past several years, we've had eight or ten women refer to a rape room" (Kline 79). Women in need of shoes paid for the shoes by consenting to go into the third-floor room with one of the company town guards or officials as a way to earn a pair of shoes.

Michael and Carrie Kline, distinguished West Virginia documentarists, folklorists, and musicians, are dedicated to researching and writing about social issues and individuals within the state. With a Ph.D. in Public Folklore from Boston University, Michael Kline has thoroughly investigated the theme of Esau in the Coalfields.

According to Kline, women, when feeling bereft of options, would resort to any means necessary to provide sustenance, clothing for their families, and maintain shelter (Kline 81). Numerous independent scholars have undertaken efforts to document Esau practices in the coalfields and company towns, with countless in-person interviews corroborating these accounts. The insights of Joyandfaith Lynn, a former owner of the Whipple Company Store Museum, align with Michael Kline's findings. However, a notable reluctance among historians and scholars persists in acknowledging this practice in their published works (Harris *Truth* 32).

More stories have emerged about smaller-outfit coal companies outside of more established towns funding what are referred to as "comfort girls" sent to even more isolated company towns for four to six-month stints as a way to keep miners focused by day and satisfied at night, thus willing to stay in more isolated coal mining locations (Harris, *Truth* 41). Poverty-stricken, many of the comfort girls signed lease agreements with company agents. Mining families in nearby company towns sometimes bought babies resulting from these arrangements when childless couples sought to adopt (Harris *Truth* 48-49).

The unique life experiences and individual perspectives of the Edens women profoundly influenced their outlook on existence within the coal company towns. Pearl Edens, the matriarch of the family, spent her later years yearning for the West Virginia mountains and her former life in the coal camps. It was the simplicity and familiarity of coal camp life she yearned for. Pearl Edens found solace and comfort in the clarity and well-defined expectations that characterized it. Conversely, Pearl's eldest daughter, Glenna, spent the early years of her life harboring a desire to break free. The allure of

cosmopolitan centers such as New York and Philadelphia captivated Glenna, leading her to dream of a career as a dancer in one of these vibrant cities. As a discerning observer of her surroundings, Glenna saw the constraints of coal camp life and after high school graduation, promptly departed on a train with her closest friend, Mary Lou. She never looked back.

Unlike many of her peers, Glenna had agency. She was aware of her beauty and the opportunity it afforded her; thus, she used it to her advantage. Glenna's strong will and determination enabled her to forge opportunities that many others did not have the courage to pursue. She defied the expectations of coal camp life and charted her own path in the outside world (Edens).

Muffy Eden's position could be clearer. The middle child and second daughter of the Edens family, Muffy was less self-assured and more obedient than her brazen older sister. As a child, Muffy was very attached to her father and brothers, whom she saw as her protectors. Muffy's more cautious view of the world kept her in the company town. Perhaps Muffy's timidity stemmed, in part, from an attempted assault in the company town by an uncle when she was between ten and twelve years of age (Venezia).

In her article "Family Violence and Incest in Appalachia," sociologist Dr. Peggy J Cantrell suggests the frequent circumstance of familial sexual violence happened when the circumstances were right, circumstances such as stress, economic hardship, low parent education, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and social isolation (Cantrell 44). Thirty-eight percent of female company town respondents in the sexual history/incest survey report that they had at least one incestuous sexual experience before the age of 18 years. In half of these cases, the other person involved was a brother.

Uncles accounted for 27% of the reported incest cases. Indeed, over one-third of the women sampled told of at least one incestuous event in their childhood (Cantrell 45).

Life in the secluded coal company towns of southern West Virginia is marked by distinctive challenges. The introduction of mechanization in the mid-1950s led to the elimination of numerous mining jobs, and the rise of alternative fuel sources hastened the decline of these communities. Consequently, the pervasive fear of uncertainty, coupled with the specters of poverty and gender oppression, accelerated the aging process and induced depression in the wives of coal miners. A miner's wife at the age of twenty-five might appear as though she were forty, and by the age of forty she could appear two decades older than her husband (Scott 13). While the older generation of women grappled with these hardships, the younger generations cast their gaze toward the mountaintops, nurturing hopes for a more promising life on the other side of the mountain (Scott 19).

CHAPTER 4: MATERIAL CULTURE

Objects serve as vessels for personal stories and shared experiences, offering insights into both individual and collective identities. Material culture becomes a tangible expression of meaning and memory through these objects. The value of such items, especially for a poor family with limited access to store-bought goods and minimal space for storage, is determined by necessity. Wants only to become a consideration once the essential needs have been fulfilled.

A company coal mining family minimized the purchase of store-bought items, acquiring necessities from the company store or sometimes obtaining desired items through barter or trade. Cash was at a premium, and the Edens family held on tightly, spending it rarely; mostly, they saved what little cash they earned from their various non-mining endeavors. The generational experience set the Edens family apart from new mining families; Pearl and Robert having grown up as the children of coal miners. Robert's father had been a subsistence farmer who dug coal on his land until the draw of the company town and the promise of steadier income lured him in. From his father, Robert learned there were workarounds to the limitations of coal income.

Mining supplies were necessities acquired from the company store. Most of these supplies, such as boots, pickaxes, shovels, carbide-lit helmets, and the like, were merely tools of the trade. However, to the coal miner and his family, the dinner bucket held meaning beyond its daily utility; it held a connection to home and life outside of the mines. Smells and tastes of home emerged with the opening of the bucket, an idea that nourished as much as the food. For the miner's wife, the dinner bucket was a responsibility that required significant effort, planning, and responsibility. Fresh water

was held on the lowest level of the three to four-tiered bucket, a meal, and biscuits above it, and a sweet of some sort on the top. Robert Edens generally hoped for a piece of pie as his sweet, consistently saving a bite or two for his son Hoppy, who would be the first to greet him when he returned from work in the evenings. When asked, Hoppy said he was never sure why his father saved the treat for him. However, in her book *Coal Camp Voices,* Joyanfaith Lynn recounts a story that answers the "Why save the sweet?" question. Lynn tells the story of a daughter of a miner shared. The woman told Lynn that superstition held that a miner was ensuring safety for another day in the coal mines by sharing a bit from his dinner pail when he returned home. For the child sharing the sweet, however, it was a bonding ritual (Lynn 46).

One essential element of everyday material culture for coal camp families is their cookware. The Robert Edens family was fortunate to inherit a valuable Griswold cast iron Dutch Oven from Pearl's mother, Granny, in the 1940s. Over the years, this Dutch Oven has become a cherished family heirloom. Selden-Griswold Manufacturing, established in 1865 in Erie, Pennsylvania, produced these sought-after cast iron pieces. Granny was drawn to invest in one in the early 1900s due to a combination of advertising and practical necessity.

Although Griswold cast iron pieces were not considered to be collectable at the time, the reliability and versatile usability of the Dutch Oven empowered it in the small coal camp kitchen. This became especially significant towards the end of Muffy's life when her daughter received the Dutch Oven as a gift, ensuring that the legacy of this valuable cookware would endure. Today, Griswold cast iron pieces are highly sought

after, not only because the company ceased operations in 1957 but also due to the unmatched craftsmanship of their cast iron products (McKay).

The corn still was an unusual and noteworthy piece of material culture to be found just outside the company town. Miners frequently produced or purchased homebrew from the mountain stills. Company officials were concerned that liquor consumption might reduce miners' productivity and focus, but stemming this practice proved challenging (Brown 85). For Robert Edens, the moonshine apparatus represented more than just a means to make the family surplus money (Wills). This capitalist activity was another way to earn more financial independence from the cycle of poverty that most company-town coal miners were bound to. Edens, having grown up in the mountains, was privy to mechanics of corn-still creation and moonshine production; this ability gave him a social cache, providing him with a respected local identity. This cultural reproduction had been transmitted, father to son, for generations (Peine and Schafft). Edens also inherited an understanding of the importance of greasing the palms of those willing to overlook the illegal activity. Consequently, he forged a relationship with the mine foreman and company store management (Edens). This mutually beneficial arrangement enabled the moonshining activity to continue uninterrupted for years.

More notable material culture would present itself via access to the larger incorporated towns, which were a train ride away from the isolated, unincorporated company-run coal towns. The weekly train fare was a lucrative investment for Robert Edens as his reputation as a crackerjack barber had spread beyond his coal camp community. Eden's trips into the closest incorporated town, Thurmond, West Virginia, netted a pocketful of cash and tales of the big city, which he would recount to his family

over the dinner table each night. Occasionally, Edens would bring back magazines and newspapers tossed aside by his barbering customers. Glenna, the eldest daughter of the Edens family, would eagerly flip through the pages, marveling at images of movie stars and advertisements showcasing luxuries previously unknown to those in their isolated community. These pictures presented an enticing glimpse into an outside world that the residents of the secluded community were largely unfamiliar with. By the 1950s, the outside world grew more alluring with the promise of more goods and opportunities. Any cash earned by the older children would first go towards the movies, but equally enticing for Glenna were the beautiful shoes, dresses, and make-up worn by the alluring film stars. Consequently, when Robert gifted Pearl Edens a second pair of shoes, likely acquired during one of his many trips to Thurmond, Pearl was thrilled. Pearl was incredibly proud of having that second pair of shoes for church and outings. Owning that second pair of shoes gave her an elevated social value in their small company town.

Shoes are a more nuanced piece of material culture. Sturdy boots for miners were a staple of the company store, as were the serviceable shoes the women and children would need for day-to-day wear. "We'd get a new pair of shoes for the first day of school, and they'd be extra big, so they'd last you the year" (Edens). By summer, shoes would be worn out or outgrown, in either case, unable to be passed down to a younger sibling. Most children in coal mining camps were barefoot in the summer. It’s clear to see that having an extra pair of shoes for church was considered a luxury and an indication of higher social cachet in the coal camp community. Men would have a second pair of shoes to wear outside the mines, particularly to church or more formal meetings where coal dust covered boots were inappropriate. A woman with a pair of dress shoes, particularly

heels, implied more; it would mean a woman had a place to go where she could wear the heels - such as a church or dance. Children and teens rarely had more than one pair of shoes as they were growing and would outgrow shoes before their usefulness might be exhausted.

Within the company towns, the only way to acquire shoes was from the company stores. The only surviving Justice Collins-built company store is in Whipple, West Virginia, and was the store most frequented by the Robert Edens family. Rumors suggest that the company store has a "shoe room." In Joyanfaith Lyns' book, *Coal Camp Voices*, the same room has been referred to as "the rape room" in other articles.

> "Just off the ballroom on the third floor of the store is a smaller room toward the back of the building. In early photographs, it is the only curtained room. It served as a fitting room, so it has been frequently told, where women were accompanied by one of the guards from the first floor to try on shoes, they had seen displayed in the shoe department. A woman, of course, seldom had money of her own and barely enough scrip or credit at the company store to cover the week's groceries and rent. So, when she got up to the shoe room, she found it furnished with a cot upon which the guard encouraged her to sit while trying on the shoes. When the door shut behind her, she found herself alone with the guard. Over the past several years, we've had eight or ten women refer to this as the rape room. After they got their lovely shoes, they would have to pay for them in this room. Then they would be escorted back downstairs to resume shopping,

> or pick up their children down there, or what have you. They would have to keep their mouths shut tight about what had happened to them upstairs. If the miners would get wind of this, what would a husband do? How would he react? The first thing he would do is react, most men. However, if the men were belligerent, they'd soon have 'accidents' in the mines, and we've had reports of that as well. So, the women had to do what they had to do and keep their mouths shut."
>
> Joyanfaith Lyn

Al Anderson, a West Virginia Rhythm and Blues singer, and Osage West Virginia shoe repairman, tells an oral historian for the West Virginia Folklife Collection that shoes were the thing folks judged a person by and that even when you went courting a girl, the first thing a girls' parent would do is look at was your shoes. ("Oral History"). Shoes were about more than usefulness; they spoke to a person's social value.

Multiple visitors to the Whipple Company Store have told Joyanfaith Lyn shoe stories. The desire for shoes, in most cases, was the desire for a necessity. In other cases, particularly in the late 1940s to early 1950s, the desire for some was based more on a want for the luxuries advertised in print and in the movies. A lipstick and nail polish combination, a packaging invention of Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, was an advertising sensation (Nemy). Revson began the campaign in 1939, but the advertisements and access arrived in the company towns in the mid-to-late 1940s. Again, the acquisition of such material culture had a social cache. Beyond that, it intensified the desire for some in the company towns to join the outside world. Access to the outside

world coincided with both mechanization of the mines and the rise of alternate fuel sources and, thus, the reduced demand for coal.

Along with the growth of 1950s consumerism and the desire for goods beyond what the company store could provide, the pull of the outside world leeched into the company towns, stirring teens to want out of the company towns. Glenna, the oldest child of Eden's family, acquired lipstick, although no one knew how, and upon wearing the lipstick in town, her social value increased. The attention fueled the restless teen into action, and upon graduating high school, she left the company town with a friend, never to return. She did, however, send gifts from the outside world to her family in the company town, and Eden's family got a taste of unknown luxuries such as store-bought clothing, bicycles, and board games. Within four years, medical necessity, and the promise of more lured the family North to follow Glenna.

Hoppy, Muffy, and Mickey 1951

PART 2: COMPANY TOWN GIRL

PROLOGUE

While inspired by the actual experiences of the Edens family in the New River coalfields in Raleigh and Fayette County, West Virginia, in the 1940s and 50s**,** this historical novella is a work of fiction. The mountains of West Virginia provided for the family: coal mining provided income, but the mountains provided in other ways. Cadle Ridge, the mountain holding the most memories, played a pivotal role in providing food, keeping secrets, and releasing treasures. In this regard, the mountain was magical. Communities dwelled at their base in the hollers, segregated yet united with shared poverty and want for survival. Relationships formed out of necessity, some simple, some more complex.

FORWARD

When I was a little girl, my mother hugged me often, and every evening before we climbed the stairs to our bedrooms, my parents kissed us goodnight. Even as we grew older, and my father shifted to shaking my brothers' hands instead of kissing them, my mother continued to hug and kiss all of us. I always thought this to be normal until a friend spending the night at our house asked me if my mother always hugged and kissed us goodnight. I said yes, surprised by her questions as she, too, had experienced my mother's hugs and kisses. Wasn't this normal?

I didn't think much of it until I was much older. When my oldest brother went to college, my mother cried and cried. The same happened when I went to college. So, I asked her why she held onto us so tightly, hugged and kissed us so much, and despaired when we left. She told me that her mother had never shown her affection as a child. I realized that what my mother meant was that she did not feel loved by her mother.

Over time, I grew and my love for my mother grew and the disdain I felt for my mother's mother, grew. I held myself back from getting close to my grandmother. I thought she did not deserve my loving mother as her daughter. Age and wisdom have since taught me better. My grandmother, or Mom Mom, as we called her, had a very difficult life: deep poverty, endless work, and a cheating husband. She anchored herself in an isolated coal town, a life she grew up in, and married into, and found happiness in. Leaving the mountain was a great sacrifice for her as she disliked crowds and idle chatter; she much preferred nature and the simplicity of mountain life. I knew this to be true.

Sometimes in the summertime my parents would go away for romantic weekends at the beach, and my younger brother Joe and I would stay with Mom Mom at her house in Malvern, Pennsylvania. I remember waking up and ambling down her long staircase to find her at the front of the house on the porch in a rocking chair, smoking her Pall Mall cigarettes, listening to the birds, and waiting for her morning glories to open as she patted the head of her little dog Poco. These were some of the few times Mom Mom looked happy.

My mother painted my grandmother as detached, yet clearly, she showed favoritism to her eldest daughter, Glenna. I believe that my mother's hurt feelings were a product of never receiving affection from her mother. This is where my curiosity about gender roles is rooted. Why did my grandmother treat my mother with disdain? Why did she favor her more beautiful daughter? Was Mom Mom's seemingly detached nature a survival strategy, or was it a practice handed down to her from her own mother? Was this reservedness or disinterest merely reflective of a life filled with struggle and disappointment?

My mother's relationship with her sister Glenna was more complicated. They remained part of each other's lives until Glenna's death, but ultimately their profound differences prevented sibling closeness. Being six years apart in age was not the defining divide; rather, their values were greatly disparate. Consequently, their paths led them in very different directions, and they lived very different lives: Glenna lived for the moment and can best be described as voraciously hedonistic, as opposed to my mother who valued a life built on rewarding work and the love and closeness of a devoted spouse and children. But it must be said that Glenna's desire for a different kind of life was the

impetus for her parents’ and siblings' exodus from poverty into a world of progress and possibility.

Hoppy, a middle child like my mother, is my favorite uncle. As the Edens family aged, he became my mother’s closest sibling. He is a curious combination of his sisters: he embraces adventure and seeks self-fulfillment but is deeply rooted in family life. His memories, combined with my mother's, form the scaffold for this story.

Muffy

I know I was born atop Cadle Ridge Mountain. Mom told me an old Cherokee woman pulled me into the world. Mom didn't trust many people, but she trusted that Indian women in the mountains cause folks always said they was wise in the ways of plants for healin. Daddy dug coal along the Winding Gulf and we lived in company towns that didn't have doctors, so Mom learned some about cures and such from where she could. Granny taught her some, and Mom figured out the rest along the way.

We moved to another company town every now and again cause when a shaft was worked out, we had to set up near the new part of the seam. The houses were always the same, and sometimes the schools were too. When we moved to Big Stick, we went to the same school, but we had to walk a ways to catch the bus. Hoppy made a new friend on the very first day; he'd always find someone new to shoot marbles with. I never knew if Roland minded movin' or not; he never seemed to care as long as he could climb all over Cadle Ridge after school huntin' with Ole Pete and Buster at his side. Roland and me didn't make friends easy like Hoppy. Hoppy didn't know the meanness in people like we did; he was too young yet. But he'd learn.

After school, we'd walk back to the house knowin' we had chores to get done fore Daddy got home. Coal towns are dirty, and black dust hangs on the air and then settles on the floorin' and the furniture. We'd try hard to keep it out of the house as best we could, but every day was a battle. Keepin' the house clean fell to me most days as Mom was always workin' the garden, and fixin' food, or warshin' laundry and hangin' it up. Mom

was particular about the laundry when it was hung on the line, always checkin' to see if there was enough of a breeze to keep the coal dust off the clean clothes.

One day near the end part of summer, we came home from school to see Mom sittin' on the back porch smokin' a cigarette and thinkin'. Now Mom never set down much, so we were surprised to see her there when we walked round to the back of the house. We stood still, sensin' something was wrong.

"Mom?" I said as I neared. She looked up at us and stood.

"A pair of your Daddy's britches went missin' from the line," she said with a worried look on her face. "Now he's got only two pair."

"Who do you reckon took 'em?" Roland asked. We hadn't lived in Big Stick for more than two weeks, so it coulda been anyone.

"Don't know," Mom said as she pinched off the lit part of her cigarette and put the rest of it in her pocket. She went to take the clothes off the line, and I went to help her.

"Mom," I said, "I'll do this."

She looked at me and nodded. Mom didn't usually let me do this chore cause she feared I'd lose a pin or not shake out the clothes right, but she had a lot she was thinkin' on, so she let me finish.

Roland didn't take off with Pete and Buster that day; they stayed close to the house to keep watch til Daddy got home. I finished my chores and Hoppy helped me get the bathin' tub ready for Daddy and Mom made supper.

Daddy musta know'd somethin' was up as Roland walked on up to him when he came up the road from the mine. By the time Daddy was at the door, his bath was ready,

and Hoppy and me went outside with Roland. Daddy and Mom would talk as she helped him clean up.

A while later, Daddy came out the back porch. I went in to help Mom carry out the tub and dump the dirty water from Daddy's bath. Daddy was talkin' to Roland, who looked at me as I came down the back steps.

"Supper's ready," I told 'em.

Roland, Hoppy, and me washed up and came to the table. Daddy walked in from the front room, where was lookin at his newspaper.

"Where's Glenna?" he asked Mom.

"She's visitin' Mary Lou Hawkins," Mom said, in a way that sounded like she was defendin' Glenna again.

I helped Mom get the food to the table and sat down to eat. Mom never sat with us; she just kept busy in the kitchen while she and Daddy talked. She brought a plate of biscuits to the table; Daddy took one of 'em to sop up his gravy. We ate in quiet and when Daddy was done, he stood up.

"I'm gonna walk over to the company store to see if anyone can tell me somethin' about clothes goin' missing." Daddy headed out the front door as he called for Roland to come with him. The dogs tried to follow 'em out, but Mom called 'em back.

I helped Mom sweep and wash up. Sometimes when chores was all done, Mom'd sit and darn our clothes, and Daddy'd let me comb his head full of chestnut-colored hair. I would be so careful and quiet, happy to see his tight face loose up. But Daddy got back late that night. I was goin' up to bed when he walked in the door.

"Night Muff," he said. Daddy nicknamed me Muffy, after the story "Little Miss Muffett." I'm not real sure why cause I'm not afraid of spiders much, only when I go to the privy at night.

"Night, Daddy," I smiled down the steps at him.

The next morning, Mom was in a good mood. When I came down to breakfast, she almost smiled at me. Maybe Daddy had got his britches back.

"Mornin," I said as me and Roland sat to eat before school.

"Mornin," she chirped as she put a plate of milk gravy, biscuits, and fatback on the table for us to eat. "Hurry n eat fore you miss the bus," she warned us.

We ate quick, grabbed our book sacks, and rushed out the door. Hoppy tried to follow us out, but Mom called him back.

"I wanna go with 'em," he wailed.

"Your too little yet," Mom said, "Soon enough."

After me and Roland had walked a little ways, I asked, "what happened last night? Did you get them britches back?"

"Nope," was all he said.

"Why's Mom so happy then?" I asked, hopin' he'd tell me more.

"Dad gave her a letter that he took outta our box at the company store. It was from Uncle Ernest. He's comin' to stay for a while," Roland explained.

Uncle Ernest, one of Mom's younger brothers, just finished servin' our country. He used to work in the coal mines in Quinwood with their Daddy fore the war. I didn't like Uncle Ernest too much, and I don't think Daddy did neither, but Mom sure liked him.

"What about the britches?" I asked, draggin' words out of Roland was like pullin' a hundred-pound pail of water outta a well.

"Hoboes," Roland said, usin' only one word.

"What are hoboes?" I asked.

Roland looked at me like I was stupid. He picked up his pace to walk faster so we wouldn't miss the bus. "Hoboes are tramps who hop on freight trains. The miners at the store last night told Daddy they sometimes they're lookin' for work, and sometimes they's just lookin' to steal. I reckon yesterday they was just lookin' to steal."

"What's Daddy gonna do?" I asked, runnin' to keep up with him.

"He's gonna get Mom a gun," Roland said with a grin.

I never did see that gun. When Uncle Ernest came to stay, Mom said she felt safer cause there was always a man round when Daddy was at work. I think she's just happy to have her brother visitin' for a spell.

One night, after supper, Uncle Ernest came out to the front porch to set down on the stoop near Hoppy and me while Daddy set in his rocker smokin' a cigarette.

"Robert," Uncle Ernest looked at Daddy, "can I give these young'uns a little pocketknife each and teach them how to whittle?"

Daddy slowly rocked back and forth, thinkin' on it.

"Do you want to learn how to whittle?" Daddy looked back and forth 'tween Hoppy and me as he flicked his spent cigarette out to the dirt in front of the porch.

"Yessir, Daddy!" Hoppy piped up.

"Yessir, I guess so," I said quietly. I didn't want my Hoppy to learn fore I did.

"I guess it's alright," Daddy said slowly, giving Uncle Ernest a long look.

"Okey-doke!" Uncle Ernest reached into his pocket and pulled out two little knives; he gave us each a big smile and handed me a little pearl-handled knife and a Hoppy one with a handle that looked to be made outta wood.

Daddy stood up; pain worked on his face as he straightened his back. "Let's get us a dry piece of wood from the woodpile out back," he said as he came down the porch steps.

We all walked around back, and Hoppy and me watched as Daddy and Uncle Ernest picked out some wood for us to learn on.

"This'll do," Daddy smiled as he took the hatchet off the back porch wood pile and skinned the bark from the thick old walnut branch. He cut it down some so it wouldn't be too heavy. He took a piece for his self, handed a piece to Uncle Ernest, then me and Hoppy got little pieces that would fit right into our littler hands.

"What are y'all doin'?" Mom asked as she pushed out the back porch door, wipin' her hands on her apron.

"Uncle Ernest's gonna to teach Muffy and me how to whittle!" Hoppy bragged as he held up his little folded knife to show Mom.

"Be careful," Mom warned as she looked back and forth between Daddy and Uncle Ernest.

"We will!" Hoppy sang, his bright blue eyes dancing as he smiled big at Mom.

That made Daddy laugh. I looked at Daddy smilin', and it made me smile. I looked at Uncle Ernest, he was smilin' too.

We walked back ‘round to the front porch, and Daddy and Uncle Ernest took turns givin’ us tips as we all sat on the porch and worked the wood.

“Push the blade away from yerself,” Uncle Ernest told us.

“And make little cuts,” Daddy warned, “better to take off a little at a time as too much at onest.”

We worked the wood for a while and made a big bunch of nothin’, but me and Hoppy were havin’ fun. Daddy and Uncle Ernest turned their wood into things. Daddy made his look like a duck, and Uncle Ernest made a little arrow.

When it started to get dark, Mom put her head outside the door and said, “you two get on up to bed.”

I turned to look at Mom; she sure looked tired.

“Yessum,” Hoppy and I said at the same time.

“And thank your uncle,” Mom ordered.

“Thanks, Uncle Ernest!” Hoppy said as he closed his knife in his little hand and put it in his pocket.

“Thank you,” I said quietly as I looked down at the closed knife, admiring the pretty pearl handle.

“You're welcome,” Uncle Ernest smiled as we said goodnight.

Later that night, when I was asleep, I woke up sudden. Someone was getting’ in my bed I feared maybe it was a hobo. My eyes popped open wide, and I began screamin’ as a hand slapped across my mouth. It was Uncle Ernest. Daddy, a light sleeper, musta heard me scream, cause he was in my room in a flash. He whipped his belt off and swung it at Uncle Ernest.

"Get out!" He yelled at Uncle Ernest, "and don't never set foot in this house again!"

Uncle Ernest fell out of my bed, pullin' up his pants, trippin' as he jump-hopped down the steps, duckin' from Daddy's swings. Daddy picked up Uncle Ernest's boots and run after him throwin' them boots at his back.

I just sat in my bed crying.

Then, Mom came into my room with a mean look on her face. Her icy blue eyes cut into my muddy green ones. "Now you've done it," she said quietly, knowing Daddy couldn't hear her. She was mad at me cause Daddy sent Uncle Ernest away.

Muffy: Spring to Summer

Cadle Ridge gives us so much, ‘specially in the spring and summer. Come March, Roland, and the dogs would strike out, lookin’ up the mountain for the old paths we wore in before and begin to wear ‘em in again. The boys played up in the mountain quite bit once chores was done. I never did go up the mountain by myself in the springtime, but by May, the paths would be dried dirt with roots and rocks pokin’ through, just in time for Mom to send us up the mountain to collect strawberries, huckleberries, and boysenberries. I like blackberries best, but they don’t come til summer. We had our spots picked out, so we always knew where to go.

One warm Saturday mornin, Mom woke us early to fetch some berries; I guess she had time to make jams and such, so we had to get us some berries. Roland is always the leader, with Hoppy tween us and me climbing after him up the mountain path. Each of us luggin’ a big pail in one hand and a walkin’ stick in the other. The sticks were for whackin’ at the snakes we always expected. I always looked down at the path, worrin’ about those snakes, but Roland always looked up.

I love pickin’ berries; my skinny arms are small enough to reach round the brambles. I’m careful not to squeeze the berries I pick cause Mom's particular about em. We’d fill our buckets until they’s almost too heavy to carry, dreaming of the jams and jellies Mom would make. Hoppy was happy just bein’ with us. He ate everything he picked, or he’d tossed them to Pete and Buster, but alright at least we got him outta Mom’s hair for a bit.

“Look there!” Hoppy was pointin’ to some big juicy berries ‘cross a big mountain break.

"Stay put," Roland ordered Hoppy. He looked at me, askin' me with his eyes if we should jump across. The biggest berries would fill the buckets quick, but they's always on the other side of the mountain breaks. The mountain breaks happen cause there's minin' goin' on underneath. Some of those cracks were two feet across, but that didn't scare us much. We'd just jump over them cracks to get to those big berries. Mom and Daddy liked to tell us scary stories of kids and dogs falling into the cracks and bein' lost forever, so we never did tell Mom about the crack jumpin'. She woulda been mad.

I nodded my head to Roland, and I held Hoppy back with me while Roland got ready to jump across. He turned and dumped his berry bucket into mine, fillin' mine up. Then he jumped across the crack. Before long, he filled his bucket with big juicy berries. He jumped back across and showed us his full bucket.

"Hoppy, you can't tell no one I jumped the crack, you hear?" Hoppy looked at Roland with big eyes. He knew from Roland's voice that he meant business.

"We'll alright," Hoppy agreed, "you'll see, I can keep a secret."

We turned and headed down the mountain; we were happy we made quick work of this chore. When we neared the house, I heard Mom's voice real loud and mad. I slowed down.

"Moms worked up about somethin," I warned, stoppin' Roland and Hoppy in their path.

"She'll be happy when she sees these here berries," Roland promised, pushin' past me as he moved all the way down the hill. Me and Hoppy followed him.

As we rounded the big trees near the privy, the dogs ran ahead to the house. Mom and Glenna were in the backyard, Mom was workin' on turnin' the garden soil up, and

Glenna's face was a brighter color red than her hair. We could tell they'd been havin' words, but they stopped talkin' as we neared the garden.

"Look, Mom!" Hoppy said, pointing to the full buckets of berries.

Mom smiled on her mouth but not in her eyes. "That's good," she said, "go on in and put them buckets in the sink. I'll see to them directly."

We took the buckets into the house and put them in the sink like Mom said, then we walked through to the front of the house out to the porch.

"Let's set out here for a while," I said to Hoppy.

Roland bent down to pick up the dogs' water bowl and took it to the pump to get 'em fresh water. They were mighty thirsty, and I was too.

"Get me some water too!" Hoppy shouted after Roland.

"I'll get us some cups," I said as I went back into the house. I heard Mom and Glenna talkin', but I couldn't make out what they were sayin'. I grabbed two cups and went back out front to hand them to Roland, who went back to the pump for some water. We sat and drank our water in the shade of the porch. It was gettin warm out.

After while, Daddy came up the road. He had a paper sack in his hands.

"How was the berry huntin? He asked, with a big grin on his face.

Hoppy ran out to greet Daddy, "What you got in that sack, Daddy?" Hoppy wanted to know.

"Got us some new seeds for the garden," he said. "We got more land at this house, so we'll have a bigger garden." Daddy stepped up onto the porch and was headin' for the door.

"Mom and Glenna are fussin outback," Roland warned Daddy.

"You all stay out here fer now, but don't run off. I'll need your help in the garden directly." Daddy warned.

We set out on the front porch for a while. The dogs were sleepin' near Roland's feet as he and Hoppy practiced with their pea shooters, seein' how far they could shoot. I was pickin' a scab on my knee when suddenly, Glenna came flyin' out the front door. She was high tailin' it down the road. I looked after her but kept my mouth shut. Then I looked at the doorway where Mom was standin'.

"You boys, go help your Daddy in the garden," Mom ordered. She looked at me then and said, "let's you and me get to work on the jam. Glenna won't be helpin."

I wasn't too surprised. Glenna was out of the house more than she was in it. At 16, Glenna was seven years older than me, and she was boy-crazy in a way I could not understand.

Last week her and Mom had a big fight. I heard Mom tell her, "Those boys just tell you things so's they can get what they want."

Glenna spat right back at Mom and told her, "well, I get what I want too!"

Mom sure didn't like that too much.

Daddy told Mom that Glenna was too much of a free spirit. I didn't know what that meant, but I don't think it's a good thing.

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By August, everything was heatin' up.

The garden was spittin' out vegetables faster'n we could pick 'em. It's the biggest garden we've ever had, and we'd planted every inch of that land. Mom was cannin' with every free minute, and I know'd she sure 'preciated all of the help I gave

her. The boys pumped water in the mornin' and evenin' carrying buckets from the pump to the garden, dumpin' cup after cup on the thirsty plants, and when that was done, they pulled weeds. Daddy was right proud of that garden.

Glenna wasn't around much, but she musta been makin' money somehow cause she had a pretty new store-bought dress and new shoes to boot. When she was around, her and Mom didn't speak much, so I knew Mom was still mad at her for somethin' she'd done.

One sunny Saturday morning, Daddy came lookin' for me in the front of the house where I was shooting marbles with Hoppy and Roland.

"Muff, let's you and me take a walk," Daddy said.

"Yes, sir," I said, getting' up and dustin' off my clothes. I ran into the house, put on a pair of shoes, tied back my long brown hair with a string, and came back out to where Daddy was waitin' on me.

"Where we goin?" I asked.

"Well, it's about time we get us some honey to store up for the winter, so we're gonna track bees." Daddy said.

I had never done that afore, so I just walked along the dirt road with Daddy, curious about how to find the honey hive. We walked a good bit before Daddy spoke up.

"Muff," he said.

"Did you see a honeybee?" I asked, lookin' up at Daddy as we walked. I was always happy when it was just him and me. Daddy wasn't tall, but he was bigger than life in my eyes.

"Not yet," Daddy said. "I wanna talk to you about somethin"

"What, Daddy?" I asked, wonderin' why he seemed so serious.

"Mom and I were talkin'," he paused, "we believe you're getting' a might too big to be hangin' about and playin' with Roland and his friends."

"But Daddy, all's we do is shoot marbles," I cried. "I win marbles all the time and give all them marbles to Hoppy," I felt hot tears burnin' my eyes.

"I know Muff, but yer almost a young lady, and it weren't right for you to still be playin' with boys, specially cause they's older than you," Daddy said in a gentle voice.

I knew Daddy wasn't bein' mean. He was just tellin' me a truth I already knew. Sometimes I'd seen Ben Hawkins lookin' at me funny. I knew Daddy was right, but it hurt my feelin's just the same.

"Yessir, Daddy," I whispered.

We walked for a bit more, and Daddy stopped near a sunny opening where flowers were growin' everywhere. We stood still and waited a long time. Then I saw that Daddy was trackin' bees with his eyes. I followed Daddy as he started walkin' again, keepin' his eyes on those bees, knowin' they would lead us back to their hive. Every now and again, Daddy stopped, waitin' and watchin'for 'em, then we moved on, lookin' up at the trees for a knot hole or branch where a hive might be. Onest Daddy found the right tree; he put a mark on it with his pocketknife.

"Why'd you do that, Daddy?"

"Well," he paused, "this here mark tells anybody else that might come by that the honey in this tree is spoke for, so they can't take it." Then Daddy turned to me and said, "Let's go."

I guess he saw all he needed to. He walked faster this time, and I had to move my legs faster to keep up.

While we was walkin' back home, I knew to keep quiet. I knew to wait for Daddy to talk first cause he was thinkin'.

"Muff," he said as we neared our house, "Mom will be happy we found a hive so's we'll have honey for the winter."

"How you gonna get the honey?" I asked, knowin' those bees wouldn't give it up easy.

Daddy stopped, lit a cigarette, and pointed to the lit end after he took a long pull on it. "You see this here, smoke?" He asked as he showed me the smoke comin from the lit cigarette.

"Yes, sir," I nodded.

"Well, two things make bees easy to move. One of them is dark, cool weather, like at night when the sun sets. The othern is smoke. Smoke makes them get lazy and tared, so they fly slow like they are stuck in a jar of molasses. The ones that stay to protect the queen slow down and don't fuss if you move 'em," he said.

"When are ya gonna get 'em?" I asked.

"I'll take Roland with me, and we'll get 'em tonight," he said. I knew this was men's work, so no amount of arguing would change Daddy's mind.

After supper, when Mom and me were washin' up, Daddy told Roland it was time to get the honey.

"Me too?" Hoppy asked Daddy.

"You're too little right now," Daddy said as he patted Hoppy on the head.

They left with the fixin's to make a fire and two big pails to catch the honey.

I helped Mom clean up and get Hoppy ready for bed. I knew she had a pile of mendin' to do and if Daddy bought honey hive back, she'd be up late putin' it up. Mom almost smiled at me cause I helped without bein' told. When the kitchen was clean, Mom set out to do her mendin' and I filled the heatin' stove with coal from the back porch so Daddy wouldn't a had to do it later.

Daddy and Roland came back after dark, two pails filled with honeycomb and honey, with some cloth covering the pails as they carried them. As they walked down the front path, they both looked happy, smilin' like they had a good secret.

"Did ya get stung?" I asked, lookin' them over as they neared the front porch.

"Nope," Roland grinned, "Daddy knows what he's doin." Roland was all proud of hisself for bein' Daddy's partner in the job.

I felt sick on jealousy cause I saw Daddy and Roland actin' thick as thieves.

Daddy smiled at me as Mom took the pails into the house. Mom had a night's work ahead, but I could tell she was grateful to have the honey and honeycomb for the jars. When the time came, and the honey's all used up, Mom might let us chew the honeycomb until it was spent. It all depended on whether she was mad at you or not.

Muffy: Roland's Almost a Man

No matter what company town we were in, it was in a holler at the bottom of Cadle Ridge. The holler is beautiful if you know how to look at it. Cool and shaded by the trees in the mornin' causin' us to shiver with chill bumps as we ran out the door to school. But when you were headin' home after school, the warm sun would heat you even through the trees, warmin' your skin and invitin' you to play outside.

But after school, there are always chores to do, and when the sky got dark quicker and quicker, the playin' outside time grew less and less. Tired at the end of the day, I loved hearin' the nighttime sounds of the mountain singin' us to sleep. Every now and again, we'd hear other animals besides, like tree frogs, crickets, and coyotes. We didn't startle much at those sounds; they were expected. In the mornin' time, the roosters woke us, and on school days, Daddy was long gone to work by then. But on Saturdays and Sundays when he was home, Daddy would wake to the sounds of the roosters, and sometimes after breakfast, he would go huntin' with Roland. Daddy always hunted squirrels and rabbits up on Cadle Ridge; we'd eat good on the days he hunted and if there was extra, Mom would dress them or salt them for the winter and hang them in the smokehouse to cure. We always had a huntin' dog or two to help Daddy out. Mostly they were mutts, part rat terriers, part hound. Daddy knew someone that always had a supply of huntin' dogs, so that's where we would get 'em when we needed a new one. When they got old and couldn't do the job of huntin' no more, they would lay around on the porch til their time came, or they'd just walk off into the woods and die. I remember one morning, Pete didn't get up to greet me, it was just Buster waggin' his tail, lookin' for a piece of my biscuit. Daddy said Pete's time was short.

So, we weren't surprised none when one fall mornin' Daddy decided it was time to put Pete out of his misery. Me and Roland came down the stairs to find Daddy still at the table eatin' his breakfast. He looked up at us for a minute, then looked down at his plate again, pausin' as he took a sip of his coffee. Daddy put his coffee down and went back to eatin' and said, "Roland, you need to put down old Pete today. So, get you a shotgun from the cupboard and get it done before I come home tonight." Daddy went on eatin' and moppin' up the milk gravy with his biscuit.

Roland looked pained, "I don't think he's ready yet, Daddy." We both stood still, waitin' on Daddy to say more. I turned to look at Roland; he was workin' hard not to cry.

"I don't remember asking you to think, boy," Daddy paused in his biscuit chewin' and looked up at Roland.

"Yes sir," Roland said.

Daddy finished his breakfast, and Mom handed him his dinner bucket and Daddy headed toward the front door.

As Daddy walked out, he half turned, looked at Roland, and said, "You're about a man; it's time for you to take more responsibility." Then, Daddy turned back and left.

I helped Mom get breakfast on the table for Roland and me. As I ate, I watched Roland pushing his breakfast around on his plate with his fork. He looked up at Mom and said, "Daddy never asked me to put down a dog before," he mumbled to anyone left listenin'.

"Well," Mom said, "you're almost a grown man."

"I know it," was all Roland could say. He was almost 14, and Daddy was relyin' on him more and more.

We finished our breakfast, and I brought the plates to Mom for her to clean. We grabbed our book sacks and headed out the door to school.

"I don't want to kill no dog," Roland said, his voice hitchin' in his throat as we walked to school.

I didn't know what to say, so I said nothin' to him. Hoppy trotted behind us; he was too young for school, but he followed us anyway.

After school, Mom was waiting for us at the door. She handed Roland the shotgun as he put his book sack down by the door.

"Now you take old Pete up on Cadle Ridge and put him down," Mom said to Roland. Hoppy and I just looked down at old Pete, sleeping on the floor. We looked back at Roland and saw his face workin' to keep back tears.

Roland took the gun from Mom and said, "Come on, Pete," to the dog sleepin' on the floor.

Old Pete lifted his head and slowly worked his way up to his feet. Daddy was right; old Pete was sufferin' in his bones. His squirrel-chasing days was over.

Roland and Pete disappeared out the back door and up the mountain. Hoppy and me stood there for a few minutes, not knowin' what to do.

"Go and git your chores done," Mom snapped at us. I guessed she was upset at the thought of Pete dying, or maybe she was upset for Roland, knowin' it was gonna be hard for him to pull the trigger on Pete.

I put my book sack down. “Come on, Hoppy, let's bring in the wood for the cookin’ stove.” I knew it was a good idea to get one of Roland’s chores done for him cause I didn’t know how long it would take him. When was were done, I picked up the broom and began sweeping the coal dust toward the door and out of the house.

After while, we heard the shotgun go off, and a bit later, Roland walked in the door. Nobody said nothin’ as Roland handed Mom the gun. Mom checked the barrel to make sure no shot was left in it, then put the gun away.

When Daddy got home that night, he looked right at Roland, but Roland couldn't meet his eyes.

That night, we heard a dog howlin’ from somewhere up on the mountain. I began to cry. All I could think was that it might be Old Pete, but maybe not.

Daddy’s footfalls sounded loud as he came down the hall to Roland and Hoppy’s room. “What happened, Roland?” I heard Daddy ask in a mad voice he most never used.

“I shot him, Daddy, then I pushed him in the mine crack so no critters would eat him,” he cried, realizin’ his mistake. He was so worried about critters eatin’ Pete that he never made sure Pete was dead.

That was a long, long night. I remember cryin’ in bed and thinkin’ about that sick old dog, cryin’ as I held my little cat curled up close to me. I didn’t know who I was mad at, Daddy for not putting down the dog hisself, or Roland for not killing the dog right, or that dog for not just walkin’ off to die on his own.

The next mornin’ we were all tired after a rough night of no sleep. Daddy was sure mad at Roland for not makin’ sure Pete was dead, so he whipped him with a switch.

As I watched Roland getting whipped, tears fell from my eyes. I saw Daddy and Roland was cryin’ too.

Muffy: Ginseng and Cash Money

Come Fall, there's a whole new set of work to do. Days was getting' shorter, and we'd barely get in the door from school, and Mom'd have work ready for us.

"It's time to get apples, so you two go on up the mountain to the wild orchard, and see what's there," Mom ordered, handing me and Roland a sack each.

"Can I go too?" Hoppy begged. He was just itchin' to go up in the mountain and climb trees; he's good at it too.

"Alright, I guess," Mom said, "but don't stay too long. It'll be getting' dark soon."

I was glad we're bringing Hoppy. He's the best tree climber you ever saw. He'd climb up the trees and knock down the bigger apples growin' near the top.

"We bringin' Buster?" I asked Roland.

"Nah," he said, "Daddy and me are gonna take him squirrel huntin' this weekend, so let'm just stay back."

I swear that hound went crazy scoutin' for squirrels in the fall. The squirrels were everywhere gathering nuts to store up. Buster'd gets so excited, and he'd bark 'em up a tree, and Daddy and Roland would shoot 'em down for the Buster to shake 'em dead and then bring 'em around. The dogs generally only really listen to Daddy. It was only sometimes they'd listened to Roland.

We hiked up the mountain to the orchard and gathered all the apples we could reach, but somebody'd already been there pickin' the low ones, so our sacks were only half full. Finally, Roland gave Hoppy the nod and Hoppy climbed up the tree faster than

any squirrel could. He picked apples bigger than his hand and drop ‘em down to us, and we’d catch ‘fore they’d hit the ground to bruise.

After while, our sacks were full, and the sun was getting’ weak. We’d done good, fillin’ our sacks, and Hoppy was proud as he could be. He knew he helped a lot.

We were headin’ down the mountain when I heard the crack of a broken twig under foot. I looked around and spotted a man diggin’ up ginseng in one of Daddy’s favorite ‘seng spots. I chewed on my lip for a minute thinkin’ on what I should do. Now, most people knew to stay ginseng huntin’ in their own spot, but the mountain didn’t belong to us, so I knew we couldn’t yell at the man to go away. I never had seen that man before. I turned to say somethin’ to Roland, but he’d already seen what I saw. He put his finger to his lips tellin’ me to be quiet, so I said nothin’ as I followed him. We hurried down the hill before it got dark and ran home quick as we could.

“Mom!” Roland yelled out to her as we came through the door. “They’s a man up the mountain diggin’ up ginseng in Daddy’s spot.”

I never heard Roland sound so worried before.

“Did you know him?” Mom asked, lookin’ at us both.

“He weren’t no miner I’d seen round here,” Roland said, “but I reckon I don’t know everyone.”

Mom considered this as she unpacked the apples. “We’ll you all got some fine apples,” she said. “Wash up for supper, and we’ll talk to Daddy when he gets in.”

Mom didn’t seem too worried, but I knew Daddy planned on that cash money he got for the ‘seng. Most weekends when the weather started coolin’ down, Daddy took me and Roland huntin’ for ginseng up in the woods. Daddy had his spots memorized in

the thickest part of the mountain forest; we knew to look for three or four leafed plants, low to the ground, and sometimes there were red berries on them if they hadn't been eaten by animals. Daddy would plant those berries right there in that same spot, hopin' they would sprout up new plant in years to come. Now I was hopin' that man didn't take it all.

We went out front to get some water, brought the pail back in, and filled the water pitchers for drinkin' water and to wash up. I poured water in a bowl and washed me and Hoppy's faces and hands. When I turned to give the soap to Roland, he was gone.

"Mom, where'd Roland go?" I asked her, a bad feelin' workin' in my gut.

"He probly went down t'ward the mine to meet your Daddy and tell him what's goin' on," Mom said. She looked tired more than upset.

"Want me to peel them apples in the sink, Mom?" I asked, hopin' to lift her spirits.

"That'd be fine," she said.

We was cuttin' up some apples for applesauce with supper and some for Daddy's dinner bucket the next day when Daddy walked in.

I turned around and looked at Daddy to see if he was upset about the 'seng. Roland wasn't with him.

"Where's Roland?" I asked.

"How should I know?" Daddy said as he put his dinner bucket in the sink.

I looked at Mom. She took a deep breath and told Daddy what we saw up on the mountain. Daddy went to the back door to look out. Then he whistled the special whistle he has for us. We heard Roland whistle the same whistle back, but it sounded far away. I

turned to see if Buster were with Roland or in the front room. Buster wasn't there. He woulda been sittin' by the fire near Daddy's tub.

"He'll be back," Daddy said as he hunched over tryin' to get his boots and socks off. Daddy groaned in pain, so Mom bent down to help. Bendin' over in the mine all day sure hurt his back sometimes. Daddy didn't seem worried, but he's hard to read sometimes. Mom was quiet too.

After Daddy had his bath, I helped get supper on the table. We sat and ate, just Daddy, Mom, Hoppy, and me. We didn't wait for Glenna no more. She was practically living with her friend Mary Lou, practicin' their dancin' routines to try and make the high school twirlin' team, but we always did wait for Roland. But Daddy said we should eat, so we did.

After supper, Daddy went outside to smoke his evenin' cigarette. After I helped Mom clean up, I went outside to sit and wait with Daddy. It was late, past our bedtime, and still no Roland.

Daddy did the whistle again. Roland whistled back, and he sounded close.

"Roland!" Daddy called.

"Comin' directly, sir!" Roland called back.

Roland and Buster came up the road a few minutes later.

"Where'd you go?" I asked him. I was kinda mad at him for just takin' off and not tellin' nobody where he was goin' to.

Roland was grinnin' ear to ear. "We chased off that 'seng thief," he looked proud of hisself.

"Howed you do that?" Daddy asked, puffin' away on his cigarette.

"Slingshot," Roland said, and we knew what he meant. "I got the 'seng he dug up, too," Roland bragged. "Stashed it in a hole under the tree in the apple orchard. Muff and me'll go get it tomorrow after school."

"You best do it 'fore school," Daddy said with a smile. "I reckon that guy will be back."

The next day, we woke 'fore sunup. We had the apple sack again, but this time we weren't getting' no apples. Roland and me made our way up to the orchard, and Roland pointed out the spot where he buried the 'seng. We dug it up and were headin' down the mountain just as the sun was comin' up.

"Daddy'll be happy. This here'll fetch a good amount of money," Roland told me as we headed home.

"Cash money," I said.

Muffy: Men's Work

Sometimes when I look at Roland, I wonder what he's thinkin'. When Glenna was born with her bright red hair and big hazel eyes, Mom loved her first. Three years later, Roland was born, but he didn't suck the air out of the room like Glenna did. He was quiet, like Mom.

Roland was quick to pitch in thout being told; there was no quicker way to earn Daddy's admiration. Roland most always ran to the mountain with his friends when the chores was done. Cadle Ridge was a big ole playground for them boys. Roland's best friend was Ben Hawkins, and they was always making pacts and "buddy plans." They was friends with two other boys named Clyde and Bernard, and all together they built a log cabin in the woods where they would play whenever they could get free.

One cold morning, I came down to breakfast late. I hadn't slept too well 'cause I'd heard a ruckus downstairs through the night. Mom was making milk gravy and biscuits and yellin' at Roland. Mom didn't usually yell, and Roland didn't usually get in trouble, so I watched and waited.

"Your dad was up all night trying to hush Buster," Mom said.

Roland kept his head down and said nothin'.

"What happened to the dog?" Mom asked.

"He got in a fight with a groundhog," Roland mumbled.

"Well, Buster's hurt pretty bad," Mom spat out loud for us all to hear.

Daddy always got up at four in the morning to light the heatin' stove so the house would be warm when we all got up. Mom came down at five to start the cookin' stove

and make breakfast. I looked over by the heatin' stove where Buster looked to be sleeping.

"Roland, do not take that dog out unless you goin' huntin, you hear me?" Mom asked.

"Yessum," Roland mumbled.

I knew Roland loved Buster. Buster was an ugly dog, part rat terrier, part feist, but he was smart and a good hunter; he followed Roland everywhere. I knew Roland liked to take him coon hunting, but I'd never heard of a groundhog picking a fight with a dog 'fore, so I knew Roland was lyin'.

After we ate breakfast, we grabbed our book sacks off the floor and rushed outside onto the dirt road that led to the school bus stop. Roland didn't look at me or talk to me. He got on the bus and sat with Ben Hawkins. I sat behind them, hopin' to hear the boys talk about what happened to Buster. Ben was sayin' somethin' to Roland I couldn't hear, but Roland wasn't talkin' back to Ben. Roland just sat lookin' straight ahead.

Clyde and Bernard came right over to Ben and Roland when we got off the bus. I watched as Clyde tried to give Roland a quarter, but Roland pushed it away. My mind was racin'. I wondered if Clyde was the reason Buster got hurt. If Buster died, Daddy would have to come up with a lot of cash money for a trained huntin' dog. We had to have a dog to help with the squirrel huntin, but a good dog worked hard to keep the groundhogs outta the garden too. While I was standin' there thinkin' and watchin' those boys, Roland pushed away from 'em and walked into the school. He wasn't gonna talk to nobody.

After school that day, we was walking back to the house when we heard Mom curse loudly. We ran to her voice at the back of the house.

"What's wrong, Mom?" Roland asked her.

"There's a damn Copperhead in the woodpile on the back porch, and Buster wants to go after it." Mom complained.

"I'll git it," Roland yelled.

I held Buster back in the kitchen with Hoppy while Mom stayed outside with Roland.

"Stand back," Roland's voice sounded angry. He watched the woodpile, and we all stood still. After a while, Roland said very softly, "I see it." Roland pulled away some of the split wood, and the Copperhead hunkered in. Roland picked up a rock and kicked the wood pile. When the snake went to move, Roland smashed its head with the rock. "It's okay, Mom he ain't gonna hurt you or Buster now."

"Good" was all Mom could say.

They came back into the house, and there was Buster, his tail thumpin' on the wood floor as he looked at Roland. Roland went over and pet Buster's head. It looked like Buster was gonna be okay.

A week later, Daddy seemed to forget the Buster-groundhog fight. I expect he knew Roland and his friends was bettin' money over Buster fightin' a groundhog. I guess since Buster mended, there was too much else to think about. Anyways, Daddy said to Roland, "I got a job for you."

Now there was chores, and there was jobs. When Daddy said "job," you were going to get paid cash money.

“Mr. Downing has a job he wants you to do,” Daddy told Roland. “You get your gravel shooter and head over to the company store.”

“Yessir,” Roland said and left the house.

“What’s the job?” Mom asked Daddy.

“There are a lot of rats in the trash heaps behind the store. Coming from the mines, I reckon,” Daddy said, rubbin’ his chin like he needed to shave.

Shoot, I thought, Roland will get a quarter and some candy. No wonder he ran out of the house so quick. He didn't want me and Hoppy to come ‘cause he wouldn’t want to have to share money or the candy.

Mr. Downing liked Roland because Roland kept quiet and didn’t gossip or chatter. I knew Mr. Downing sent Roland on errands and such because sometimes I could hear the jingle of change in Roland's pocket.

Muffy: The Drunk on the Tracks

"Daddy's late," I said to Mom as I walked back into the house with the water for Daddy's bath.

"He'll be here soon," Mom said without any worry in her voice.

It was true. We hadn't heard no whistle blow tellin' us somethin' was wrong.

I turned round and walked back outside. Daddy's bath was ready for him, and Mom had supper ready, so I just sat down on the porch steps with Hoppy. Hoppy liked to run out and greet Daddy cause Daddy always saved him something sweet from his dinner bucket. I closed my eyes and let the last of the settin' sun warm my face before the cool night breeze came in. After while, Hoppy got tired of waitin' on Daddy. He went back in the house and threw himself down in a chair. I guessed we'd be eating supper late tonight.

I looked up a few minutes later to see Daddy coming up the road.

"He's here!" I shouted as I stood to greet him.

Mom came out the front door. "Everything alright?" Mom asked.

"Fine," Daddy said, "Mr. Downing wanted to sit a spell."

Daddy was friendly with Mr. Downing, the mine overseer hired by Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins don't allow no drinkin' places in the town, but Mr. Downing liked shine, and Daddy helped him out by fetchin' him some of his homebrew when he was thirsty for it. Mr. Downing knew Daddy had a still up in the mountains somewhere, but he turned a cheek as long as he got his. I guess you could say he and Daddy had an 'rangement.

One Saturday afternoon a couple weeks later, after Roland was done his chores, he walked up to me real quiet and whispered in my ear, “Muff, I’m headin’ to colored town to do some tradin’, he lifted the copies of his comic books in his arms to show me. “Wanna come?”

“Mom,” I yelled back into the house, “I finished beatin’ the rugs. Can I go with Roland?” I asked hopin’ she’d let me go.

“Take Hoppy with you,” Mom yelled out to us.

“I guess,” Roland said, not soundin’ too happy about it. I realized then he was bein’ quiet, so’s we didn’t hafta bring Hoppy.

“Sorry,” I said to Roland, “I wasn’t thinkin.”

The three of us walked toward the mine and the colored town right beside it. There, settin’ out on the porch, was a boy ‘bout Roland's age, and he had some comic books settin’ on his lap, just waiting for us. He and Roland musta had a ‘rangement like Daddy did with Mr. Downing.

“Let's see what you got,” Roland said to the boy I knew was called Johnny.

Johnny came down off his porch with his comic books and headed over to us. No one had money to buy new comics, so sometimes you just read your comics ‘til you got too tired of them, and you could trade with your friends or with the boys in colored town. Roland had already traded with Ben, Clyde, and Bernard. But the boys in colored town had different comics, and Roland was ready for something new to look at.

Johnny and Roland were barterin’ for the comics when we heard the nearby train brakes squeak real hard. The train whistle was blowin’ hard, and the brakes squeakin’ so loud it gave me pain in my ears. Somethin’, was wrong.

We ran down near the tipple and on to the C & O train depot.

The top part of a man was layin' beside the track. His eyes were open. The rest of him was layin' inside the track. The train had cut him in two. My brain did not understand what I was seein'. There weren't any blood I could see; it looked like a man in two parts. We all just stared.

The train driver finally got the heavy train stopped. A minute later, he hopped off the train and ran toward us, yellin' fer us to, "Go get Mr. Downing."

Roland said, "I'll go," and he ran toward the white part of town where the foreman lived in a fancy house. If Mr. Downing were with Daddy or at his house, Roland knowed where to find 'em.

"You kids get on home," the train driver yelled at us, "y'all don't want to look at this."

Johnny ran quick as a shot back to colored town. His new comic books pulled tight to his chest. I tried to turn and run, pullin' Hoppy with me, but Hoppy wouldn't turn away. He was frozen. His mouth opened up, and his eyes were real big.

"That man's dead!" Hoppy said.

"He sure is," I said quietly, like I was already at his funeral.

Finally, I drug him away, pullin' him toward home. I knew Mom woulda heard the whistle, and she'd be waitin' on us.

I went to tell Mom what happened, but she already knew.

Daddy and Roland came walkin' in around supper time.

"What happened?" Mom asked knowin' Daddy would know more.

"Drunk fell asleep on the track," Daddy said in a whisper voice.

Mom didn’t say anythin’ at all. We all knew Daddy sold pint jars of shine to the miners for fifty cents apiece. Daddy made a lot of cash-money from sellin’ shine.

“Did the drunk have a shine jar with him on the track?” Mom asked.

I weren’t sure who she was askin’, so I just said, “I don’t recall.” Nobody had been lookin’ for a jar. But I could see Mom was worryin’ on it.

Hoppy: The Slate Dump

Daddy said I was the best climber he ever saw. Me and Roland were settin' on the steps waiting for Daddy's friend to show up with his pick-up truck. We was goin' over to the slate dump to collect the piles of coal we'd put aside. We was livin' in Hotcoal just then cause we'd just moved that summer. Daddy said he could save us about six dollars in cash money if we woulda had to pay for the coal for the heatin' stove.

When Daddy's friend got here, me and Roland hopped into the back of the truck, and Daddy set up front. Daddy lit up one of his Lucky Strikes and reached his head out the winda yellin' at us to "hold on." Since school let out, me and Roland had been walkin' up the hill from the holler with Daddy in the mornin' afore it got too hot. Daddy went to the mines, and me and Roland went to the slate dump. Daddy would give us each a cardboard box from the company store, and when we was done collectin', we could use to use it to slide on down the slag hill. Roland was big, so he would hafta watch out for me slidin' too fast or too close to the hot smokin' slur.

We didn't get a ride in a pickup much and we laughed at the wind in our hair and getting' pitched side to side and back when the truck was climbin' up Cadle Ridge. We saw the black hill ahead, still smokin' in parts, and got ready to hop out cause we was close.

"Daddy," Roland hollered, "our piles over there," he yelled as he pointed to the a big Pin Oak tree. Daddy's friend aimed the truck to where Roland was pointin' at.

When the truck stopped, we hopped outta the back and ran ahead to show off our pile.

"That's quite a pile," Daddy's friend said.

"You boys done a good job," Daddy nodded as he looked at our pile.

We loaded up the coal into the back of the pick-up truck and drove back to the house. We all helped Daddy load it into the coal bin by the back door. Tomorrow we would start makin' piles all over again.

On the days we went to the slate dump, me and Roland would climb up the big hill of crushed-up coal and rock, huntin' for lumps of coal to collect in our boxes. Roland could collect 30 pieces afore he drug the box down the hill. I was little, but I could collect most 20 pieces afore I drug my box down. Sometimes, if I had pockets on, I would put some lumps in 'em too. I could fit in 'em tight spots and reach into cracks to find big pieces. We would climb and pick coal 'til we got too hot and thirsty. When we was about done, we would break out the bottom of boxes and slide downhill in 'em, careful not to let our skin get cut by the hot slag. We always hid our pile so's no one would steal it.

On our walk home, we passed by the little Baptist Church we went to on Sundays. There was always sengin' and piana music coming outta its little windas, but we never went in less we had to. On Sundays, when we went to church, we would lessen to the music for hours as Mom would read on the bible and Daddy would set still and lessen to the preacher talk. I liked the music and the sengin', but nothin' else about it.

When we got home, Mom'ed let us sit and rest a spell afore we had to do chores. But me and Roland were out the door as soon as we had some lunch and a drink of water.

One hot day, Roland ran out so fast I could hardly catch up.

"Hey, wait fer me!" I cried.

“You can’t come today, Hoppy. I’m doin something with Bernard and Clyde,” Roland yelled back at me.

“Why can’t I come?” I cried.

“Roland, take Hoppy with you,” Mom ordered.

“Aw Mom, do I hafta?” Roland begged.

“Yes, you do,” Mom said.

So, I got to go with Roland to meet up with his friends.

Bernard and Clyde Dove were his friends’ names. Clyde Dove was the biggest boy I’d ever seen. His britches were too short, and his hair was long. He looked strong.

Roland turned to look at me and said, “no tellin' Mom or Daddy what we’s gonna do, you hear?” He warned.

I nodded.

“Why’d you bring that little fella?” Bernard asked, noddin’ at me.

“I had to, or Mom wouldn’t a let me come,” Roland said with a scowl.

“Ok,” Bernard said.

I followed them, boys, up Cadle Ridge. Roland was behind me makin’ sure I didn't fall when the climbin’ got hard.

“You don’t have to worry about me! I'm a good climber!” I said to anyone listening.

“It’s true,” Roland nodded, “you ain't never seen anyone climb that slate dump as fast as Hoppy.”

Those boys turned and looked at me. They saw I was keepin’ up.

It seemed like we was climbin' a long time when we got to a big boulder near the top. "I ain't never been this high before," I said to them boys. Roland helped me climb up the bolder. Then we took a look down into the holler below.

Clive Dove helped me offa the rock. He bent down and looked at me eye to eye. "We gonna do somethin we shouldn't," he warned, "You can't tell no one."

I nodded so hard my neck hurt.

Then Clyde pushed on that boulder with all his might. When it wouldn't budge, Bernard and Roland got behind the boulder and pushed on it too. That boulder started to move a little.

"I know!" Roland piped up, "wedge a rock under it when we move it a bit."

Those Dove boys weren't nearly as smart as Roland.

We all shoved around some more on that big boulder, usin Roland's smart idea, proppin that boulder up a bit each time it moved. Finally, that boulder slowly started down the hill, then picked up speed and was startin' to bounce.

"That big boulder is bouncin!" I cried out. It bounced light as a ball, chunkin' out the dirt with cuts when it hit and squashin' anything in its way. Some trees got broke as it went faster and faster down the hill.

"Tomorrow, we can get an old tire from behind the company store and roll on down in it," Clyde shouted.

"Nope," Roland said. "We got to roll an old tire down a few times to see how fast it goes and where it lands. We don't wanna end up on the train tracks."

I looked at Roland. He might not be as big and strong as those Dove boys, but he was a might smarter.

"Let's go," Roland said. "Mom will be lookin' for us."

As we climbed down Cadle Ridge, I felt so tired. Roland was in front a me this time, makin' sure the path he's takin was safe for me. When we got to the hollow, Bernard and Clyde went home, and me and Roland aimed to home. As we got close, we saw Muffy sweepin' out the house; coal dust was just flyin' out the door.

"Mom," Muffy called back into the house at Mom, "here they come."

Mom came up aside Muffy.

"Where you boys been?" she asked. Her hands were on her hips, and she looked mad.

"We was just hikin' up on Cadle Ridge lookin' to see if there was anything to hunt," Roland said.

"I seen some squirrels," I told Mom.

"Hmm," Mom said. "Now go fetch some water so I can heat up a bath for your Daddy when he gets home."

Me and Roland went in the house for the tin buckets so's we could go to the pump for the water.

"I didn't tell Mom what we done," I said, lookin' for Roland to be proud of me.

"You best never," Roland warned, "she'd be mad if she knew we were messin' round with all them chores to do."

"Muffy's doin' the chores," I said.

Roland looked at me hard and said, "it ain't fair Muffy does all them chores."

"She's a girl. She's supposta to help Mom," I told him.

Roland didn't say any more about it.

When Daddy came home, he had his bath and Mom helped him clean up. When Daddy finished up and got dressed, Mom'd wash up too, and then we kids cleaned up some. We all had grit and coal dust on us from the day. Me and Roland helped Mom dump the water after we was all done while Muffy worked on dinner.

By the time the fireflies were out, we was in bed. We had to be quiet then cause Daddy was restin' cause he was hurtin' some. Sometimes we would talk real quiet, but if Daddy heard us, he would come upstairs with his belt. Those times, Roland and me would get a whippin'. But not Muffy. She never got the belt.

Muffy: The Church Shoes

Daddy was up before five most mornings. He'd get the heatin' stove, and cookin' stove stoked up and hot, so when Mom came down, she could get right to cookin' breakfast. Most mornings, we ate a big breakfast with biscuits and gravy. I got up early some mornings so I could spend some extra minutes with Daddy fore he went off to work.

One mornin', I woke early to hear Daddy's voice comin' up from the kitchen. I looked over at Glenna; she was still fast asleep. I got outta bed quick, put on my clothes, and tippy-toed down the steps to see Daddy and find out why his voice was raised up.

"It's good money," Daddy was sayin' to Mom as he sopped up his milk gravy with a biscuit and then filled his mouth with it.

"He's not a good man," Mom stood with her hands on her hips, like she was squarin' up for a fight.

'He ain't my friend," Daddy argued. "I'm getting' paid to cut his hair."

Daddy was always sockin' cash away from the shine and the ginseng, but he found other ways to get cash every now and again. He had started cuttin' hair for most of the men workin' in the mine, including Mr. Downing. Word had spread about Daddy doin' a good job as a barber. Once, he took the train to Beckley to cut someone's hair who was sick in bed. Another time he even gussied up a dead man's hair so he would look good in his casket.

"If anyone sees you with him," Mom warned, "It'll get out that we hate colored folk. You want that?"

"No, I do not," Daddy was raisin' his voice at Mom again. "I'll take the train to Thurmond, go straight to his house, cut his hair, and then take the train back. No one will know my business."

"I don't see why he can't just go to a barbershop like most rich folks do," Mom was raisin' her voice too.

"He can't," Daddy said in a voice that would shut Mom up, "He has too many enemies since he started the local chapter of the Klan."

Mom turned away from Daddy and went back to cookin' breakfast. Daddy looked at me, and his face turned kind.

"Daddy, do you like ridin' the train?" I'd never had rode on a train before. I wondered if it was loud and if the seats were soft.

"I wouldn't say it was fun, Muff," he smiled when he talked to me, "it's just a way to get from here to there right quick."

Daddy began takin' the train inta Thurmond or Beckley more and more, almost every Saturday now. His parents lived in Beckley in a house Daddy bought when Pappy was too old to work in the mines. Daddy was makin' cash payments on that house. You couldn't use scrip to buy a house, so Daddy needed that cash-money.

"Daddy, do you make a lot of money cuttin' hair?" I wondered about how much a house payment would be.

"Well, I have a rich man who wants me to trim his hair every Saturday," Daddy said. "He is an important political man in West Virginia, and he has some important appointments comin' up. He wants to look good for the newspaper pictures."

I knew better than to ask Daddy how much money the man paid for the haircuts. I knew he charged the miners in town a quarter a haircut. So, the important man must have paid a lot more for Daddy to go out there.

Mom kept her back to us. She had said her piece, and I knew she would say nothin' more. She most never talked mean to him, 'cause I knew she never wanted Daddy worked up before he went into the mine.

After work that night, Daddy came home in a snit. Hoppy was waitin' on the front porch, hopin' to get a treat from Daddy's dinner pail. I remember fore Hoppy was born; I would get the dinner pail treat. Now it was Hoppy's time.

"Hi, Daddy!" Hoppy yelped from the front porch as Daddy walked up the road.

Daddy didn't say anything back. He just handed Hoppy his dinner pail when he came up the steps and walked on into the house. Hoppy looked like he was gonna follow him in, but I held him back on the porch.

"Let's stay out here," I told him, "It looks like Daddy's got somethin' on his mind."

That night at supper, nobody spoke much. We ate up, and then I went about helpin' Mom clean up like I always did. Mom was quiet, and I knew well enough to mind my business and not ask any questions. I was sweepin' crumbs out the back door when Roland, who was standin' near the woods, waves to me to come talk. I held up a finger to let him know I would be out in a minute. Mom was sittin' at the table sewin' a shirt. It looked like she was turnin' the collar out on Daddy's white dress shirt.

I took the broom to the back porch with me and swept it some. I then put the broom aside and walked down the steps heading towards the privy; I knew Roland was waiting for me behind it.

“Hey,” I said to him.

He motioned for me to follow him a ways up the mountain. Then he turned to me and said, “Ben told me there was a roof collapse today in a mine in the next town.”

“How's he know that?” I asked. Ben could be a liar.

“His Daddy told his Mom during supper,” Roland said. “Ben’s Daddy said a man got hurt and that the man was a friend of Daddy’s.”

“Was the man hurt bad?” I asked.

“Yep,” Roland nodded.

I thought about this. I guess that’s why Daddy was in a mood. Daddy looked so tired, and I knew his back hurt him some. I sometimes wished Daddy worked for the railroad where he could breathe fresh air every day and didn’t have to bend over so much, but I knew minin’ was in Daddy's blood.

“Well, let’s get back,” I said, it’s gettin’ dark, and Mom will be lookin’ for us.

The next day, Daddy was gone before I came down for breakfast. Mom was quieter than usual, so I ate real quiet and was about to take my plate to the sink when Hoppy and Roland came downstairs.

“Roland, Daddy has to work on Saturday. He’s gonna have a list of chores for you to do fore it gets cold, so don’t make any plans.” Mom said.

“Yes’um” Roland said.

“Is he goin’ to Thurmond or Beckley to do haircuts?” I asked.

Mom turned to me. “No, he has to work in the mines. They’re short men in the next town, and they offered Daddy extra pay if he’d help with the work.”

Daddy ended up workin’ every Saturday after that, either in the mines or givin’ haircuts in Thurmond or Beckley. We all missed Daddy, and sometimes Mom would let us stay up and listen to *Mr. and Mrs. North* on the radio as a special treat; I think she was just lookin’ to kill time in the evenin’s ‘til Daddy got back. We hardly saw him ‘cept for Sundays.

One Sunday mornin’ I woke up to Mom yellin’ at Daddy.

“Where are they?” Mom screamed at Daddy.

“Down at the company store!” He was yellin’ back at her.

“Why are they there?” Mom shot back at him.

“Well, I brought them down to Ruth Jenkins for her to wear ‘em.”

“You gave Ruth Jenkins my church shoes?” Mom’s voice was cold and mean. Mom was real proud of those shoes. She was one of the only women in town with two pair of shoes.

“I didn’t give them to her; she borryied them so we could go dancin’ in Beckley. She didn’t have no shoes.” Daddy told Mom.

It got real quiet downstairs.

Then, we barely heard Mom’s next words.

“You took HER dancin?” Mom’s voice sounded more hurt than mad.

“It didn’t mean nothin!” Daddy’s voice was quiet and sad, “I just needed a break. I needed to have a little fun.”

We heard someone run down the steps, then we heard the door slam shut out front. We ran to the window and saw Mom marching toward the company store. She had what looked like a lead pipe in her hand. Daddy looked to be followin' after her. He still had on his good white shirt from the night before. I turned to look at Glenna with tears in my eyes. I had never heard Mom and Daddy fight like that before.

Glenna looked back over at me. She had a smile on her face like she knew a strange secret. "Men get to have all the fun," she said.

Muffy: Glenna's Gonna Be a Dancer

Roland and me got off the bus, I headed down the road to town and Roland waited for Hoppy to get let off. I knew I had to get home and help Mom with the laundry. It was hot, and the road was dry. My feet kicked up puffs of dirt, shale, and coal dust when I walked. My shoes were getting' tighter as the school year neared the end, and they hurt a bit. It'd soon be time to kick off these old shoes and wait for my back-to-school pair in the fall. I dusted off my socks and shoes as I neared the house. Mom would fuss if my only pair of socks looked too dirty. I walked around back and dropped my book sack on the back steps. I thought the pins and laundry would be outside waitin' for me, but they wasn't. So, I walked in the house and saw Mom and Glenna sittin' at the table. They musta been fightin' cause Mom's face looked red, and she was frownin' hard.

"What are you gonna do?" Mom asked Glenna.

They were in the middle of somethin' and I didn't want no part of it, so I stood quiet.

"I'm gonna be a dancer, Mom. I told you!" Glenna hissed at Mom in aggravation.

"You ain't gonna be no Rockette! Think straight, girl," Mom said.

"Says who?" Glenna shot back at her. "Everyone says I'm a great dancer!"

"Well, I can't stop you from makin' a mistake." Mom shook her head as she lit her cigarette.

Glenna got up from the table and gave me a hard look, darin' me to say somethin'. I picked up the basket of wet clothes Mom had left by the door and grabbed the tin can with clothespins in it. I was careful not to bump the gun that rested next to the clothespin can. Daddy made sure Mom had a gun nearby in case those hobos jumped off the train to steal clothes off the line again.

I went out back and pinned up the clothes nice and neat, so Mom would be happy with my work. Mom was startin' to slow down cause the baby in her belly was getting' bigger. I picked up my book sack and went back inside when I was done. Mom was snappin' green beans, the bowl barely fittin' on her lap.

"Mom, is there anything else you need me to do?" I asked, not sure about her mood. When Mom was quiet, it could mean lotsa different things. But one thing was for sure, she was thinkin' on somethin'.

"You can peel the taters," she said quietly.

I took the taters out back, I started peelin' 'em and diggin' out the eyes, makin' a pile of the peelin's to feed to the pigs later. When I was done, I brought the taters back to the kitchen and added water to the bowl from the pitcher on the counter so's they wouldn't turn brown. I picked up the scraps from the snapped-off beans Mom left on the table and added them to the tater skin pile out back.

I went back inside and stood waitin' for Mom to tell me what to do next. She stayed quiet and kept to herself, so I went to find my cat to hug on it for a while. I found Glenna in our room; she was paintin' her mouth with a new tube of bright red lipstick. She was lookin' into a little round mirror that had a powder puff in it. I'd never seen that afore neither. I knew what my Daddy would say if he saw her, but I didn't say a word. I didn't want her mean snake tongue whippin' out at me.

Glenna looked over at me and said, "you need to comb your hair and clean your face," as she looked me up and down. "Not that it matters. You're as skinny as a stick."

I looked at her. Glenna was six years older than me and as beautiful as any pin-up girl you ever saw. Everyone told her she was prettier than Rita Hayworth. I thought they could pass for twins.

Glenna puffed up the finger curls in her hair and looked at me hard. “When I graduate next month, Mary Lou and I are leavin’. We are gonna be dancers in Philadelphia and New York.”

“Oh,” I said. I didn’t know what else to say.

She let out a snort as she pushed around me and out the door. I went over to the winda to wait and see her. I watched as she came out the front door and threw it back with a slam. She never helped Mom no more. She was just bidin’ her time, like a cat waiting to pounce. I watched her sashay across the road as she headed toward the company store. She would never have walked like that if Daddy were around ‘cause he knew some of the men in town were sniffin’ hard around her. Glenna wouldn’t give them the time because she had big city plans.

When Glenna and Mary Lou took off on the C&O to Philadelphia a month later, she left Big Stick without a word to me. As soon as she and Mary Lou Hawkins graduated from Mark Twain High School, their bags were packed, and they bought one way tickets for the train. Glenna had on a new dress and a new pair of shoes. I wondered where she got the money to buy such new things. I knew Mom and Daddy would never have bought them for her, so someone else had to pay for them. I heard talk about a room upstairs in the company store where you could be invited and could trade something for a new pair of shoes, but I never had anything to trade, so I just had to wait ‘til fall for my new pair.

Supper was quiet that first night with Glenna gone, not that she was ever home much for dinner anyways, but I think it was knowin' she wouldn't be livin' at home anymore that made things quiet. Me and the boys ate quick as we could, we saw that Mom was in a snit. Daddy said she was always in a snit when she was pregnant, but I knew she was upset Glenna was gone. Glenna was Mom's first baby, so that made her special, but Daddy favored me, so it was okay that Mom loved Glenna best.

Muffy: Cash-Money, at a Cost

I was the uglier of the two sisters, but that didn't bother me much. Before Glenna moved away, I'd watched the boys come to the house to court Glenna. She wanted them all to be sweet on her so she could practice her ways on them. She would act real nice, but they didn't know her true self. Glenna was as mean and selfish as a fat raccoon in the garbage can; there didn't seem to be any room in her heart for anyone. I didn't care about boys much; I had other wants to set my mind to. Mostly, I wanted to spend my time with Mickey.

My whole world was Mickey. Mom was thirty-eight years old when Mickey was born, and she was almost wore out. I was so in love with him that Mom even let me name him; he was like my very own baby doll. After school, I would run home, head straight to the back porch, and begin scrubbin' the shitty diapers Mom had tossed in an old barrel while I was at school. But I didn't mind. Once the diapers were washed clean and hung to dry, Mickey was mine 'til he went to bed. He would reach his chubby arms out to me and laugh and I'd tuck him in under my chin, huggin' on him like I'd never been hugged before. My heart felt full to burst.

On the weekends, if I did all of my chores and tended to Mickey in the morning, Mom would let me meet up with my girlfriends to play marbles, or jacks, or jump rope. But our favorite thing to do was to go to the movies. That was a treat. The movie theatres didn't take scrip, so we had to find ways to get cash money. Sometimes we could earn money by doing small jobs around the town. We knew real money could get us into the movie theatre for a dime, and we could get popcorn and a drink for another nickel. The trick was how to get the money. Once, when Hoppy was six, he got whipped

with a switch ‘cause he stole a dime from Daddy’s dresser. When I asked Hoppy why he’d done it, he said, “I ain’t never seen a dime afore, so I took it.”

I did find ways to earn money. At the mouth of the mine, along the dirt road, is where the colored families lived in what we called a colored town. Next to them would be hunk town, where the I-talians lived, and then there was white town, where we lived. White town was closest to the company store and the mine managers’ home. Our houses were bigger and nicer than the ones in hunk and colored town.

Always looking for money-making chores to do, I would walk through hunk town and into colored town. Whenever I did go to colored town, I most always could find Miz Mabel shuckin’ corn or foldin’ laundry on her front porch. Miz Mabel was a big woman who spent her days cookin’ and takin’ in laundry for the foreman’s wife. Miz Mabel’s husband worked as a coal loader in the mine and was pretty hunched over and crippled up. I never did hear Miz Mabel about her boys, but I knew one of ‘em was killed in the mine when he got crushed by a fallin’ rock. Miz Mabel herself couldn’t hardly stand up, let alone care for herself, her husband, and her livin’ boy.

One day, when I was walking through colored town, I saw Miz Mabel walkin’ slowly up her porch step.

“Hey, Miz Mabel” I waved to her with my greetin'.

“Well, Muffy!” Miz Mabel looked happy to see me, “How you?”

“I’m fine,” I said. I stopped walkin’ and turned toward the porch. “I’m lookin’ to find chores to earn some cash money for the pictures.”

“Well, I can give you a quarter if you scrub up my feet fer me,” Miz Mabel offered.

I looked down at Miz Mabel's swollen and coal-dust-covered bare feet. “Well, I’m a good scrubber,” I promised at the thought of that quarter.

“Okay then,” she pointed to an old bucket by her back door, “go fill that there bucket at the pump and bring it on back here so’s we can heat it up some.”

“Yes, Miz Mabel,” I said and ran over for the bucket. The pump was down aways nearer to the company store. I took off, runnin’ to the pump as fast as I could. Droppin’ the pail under the pump, I cranked with all my might, fillin’ it almost to the top. Liftin’ the heavy bucket, I slowly walked back towards Miz Mabel’s house, trying not to spill the water or slam the bucket against my shins.

“Bring it on into the kitchen,” Miz Mabel guided me with a sweet voice my mother never used. Miz Mabel waddled toward the door to open it for us. Miz Mabel reached down to take on some of the heft, and together, we lifted that bucket into the room and onto the bare wooden floor. Miz Mabel scooped cups full of water into a pot on her stove to boil. Then she hobbled to the corner where a large washtub stood on its side. Miz Mabel rolled the tub over and set it down in front of a wooden chair.

“Now git you some of that lye soap that’s next to the sink,” she pointed with her finger “and grab you the scrubin’ brush under the sink.”

I knew what to do. I’d seen Mom help scrub Daddy clean in a washtub in our kitchen when he come in from the mines at night. I got to work addin’ some soap to the cool water she’d poured into the washtub. Miz Mabel watched me pick up the rag by the sink to use so’s not to burn my hand. I picked the pot up and poured the near-boilin’ water into the washtub. I touched the water; it was plenty hot.

“Okay Miz Mabel,” I said, “I think it’s ready.”

Miz Mabel moved over to the chair real slow. I could tell she was hurtin'. She dropped down onto the chair, picked up her dirty feet one at a time, and slowly put them in the water. I watched the water get dirty real quick. Miz Mabel cried in pain as the lye soap burned the sores and cracks in her feet.

"Now don't you worry none if I cry out," Miz Mabel warned, "they need a good cleanin' and I can't reach 'em."

I knelt down by the wash basin, pickin' up the rag I used to carry the boiling pot over to the wash basin.

"Use the scrub brush Muffy; they's mighty dirty." Miz Mabel said.

I did as I was told, pickin' up the scrub brush and easin' it into the water. I gently began to scrub Miz Mabel's feet.

"Put some elbow grease into it," Miz Mabel said through her gritted teeth.

"Does it hurt?" I asked.

"It do," Miz Mabel said, "but some things gotta be done."

I lowered my head and set to work. I could tell I was hurtin' her a bit, cause I saw her feet was bleedin'.

When I was done, I sat back on my heels.

"Okay Muffy, just let me set here," Miz Mabel whispered.

I waited, not sure what to do.

After a bit, Miz Mabel stood and stepped out of the tub. I looked down at Miz Mabel's raw feet. I quickly stood and looked up at her face.

"It's okay, Muffy," she smiled, "they'll be right in the mornin'."

I helped Miz Mabel empty the washbasin and clean the kitchen up. Finally, Miz Mabel reached into her pocket, pulled out a quarter, and handed it to me.

"You done a good job, child," Miz Mabel smiled, "We'll do it agin in a month."

I ran home with that quarter burnin' in my pocket. I was happy at the thought of seein' Mickey and excited to tell Ruth we could go to the movies.

That next Saturday, I quick did my chores, and when Mom said I was done, I took my quarter and headed up the mountain path, excited to meet Ruth. We was goin' to the new Mount Hope movie theatre in Beckley. The old theatre, the Royal, had burned down two years before, so we hadn't been to the movies in a long time. The day before, Ruth had told me she only had a dime, so I said I would buy popcorn and a drink at the snack counter this time; she said she would pay next time when she had more money. Just thinkin on the fun we was gonna have made me excited. We had been waitin' and waitin' to see *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. I was thinkin' about what the ghost might look like when I walked smack into Hoppy and Roland.

"Where are *you* going, Muffy?" Roland asked me. He seemed like he was in a snit when he said it.

"I'm going to the movies with Ruth," I said.

"Why don'tcha take Hoppy with you," Roland said, "I need to go help Daddy, and Mom wants you to watch Hoppy."

"You're lyin," I said, "I helped Mom with laundry all morning, so she said I could go meet Ruth."

"Well, you want to go to the movies too, don't you, Hoppy?" Roland asked with an evil grin.

"I want to go to the movies!" Hoppy wailed.

Crap, I thought. "Too bad," I said, "I only have enough money for me and Ruth." Roland knew I only had a quarter. I didn't know why he was being mean, so I just turned and ran down the hill leadin', me to the movie theatre. Hoppy's crying faded as I ran my fastest.

After the movie, I worried about goin' home. I knew Hoppy went home with his tear-stained face and that Mom might be mad. I patted the taffy and licorice in my pocket, knowin' it would work as my get-out-of-jail-free card if Mom was worked up.

I walked up to the house and saw Mom was out front on the porch rockin' Mickey. She looked mad.

"Was the movie good?" She asked.

"Oh yes Mom," I said, "I loved it!"

"Hoppy was upset you didn't let him come with you," Mom said in a voice that told me I was in trouble.

"But Mom, you said I could go. You said I helped enough."

"You shoulda taken Hoppy with you. We all deserve a treat now and again," she said, her icy blue eyes starin' hard at me.

"I know," I said as I pulled the treats from my pocket and opened my hand to show her. "I spent my extra money on treats to share with him," I proudly announced.

"You had your treat," she spat as she grabbed the candy in my hand.

After dinner, I watched as she gave the candy to Roland and Hoppy. Roland smiled at me as he ate my candy.

Mom had me doing extra chores all that week. Even after Mickey went to bed, Mom thought of more work for me to do.

One night after dinner, Daddy slowly stood up from the kitchen table and said, “Muffy, walk with me to the store so’s we can talk.”

“Are you coming home tonight?” Mom called after us as we walked out the door.

“Nope,” Daddy said, “I’ll be home for church Sunday morning.”

Daddy and I walked. I looked sideways at him but knew better than to ask any questions. I was old enough to know he was steppin’ out on Mom.

“Muffy, I know Mom is hard on you.”

“It’s okay,” I said quickly, cuttin’ him off before he said anythin’ more about Mom. Mom was hard on me, but I felt bad for her cause I knew Daddy was hurtin’ her heart.

“You know you are my best girl” Daddy smiled as he looked at me. I could see the love in his eyes.

“Yes, sir, I do,” I said real quiet.

Once we got to the company store, Daddy bought me a piece of licorice.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Muffy,” Daddy said as he disappeared behind a door at the back of the store.

“Bye, Daddy,” I whispered as I walked away, headin' back to the house. Where I knew I’d find Mom rockin’ Mickey on the front porch.

Hoppy: Train to Philadelphia

By the time I was ten years old, Glenna'd been gone awhile, but Mom'd get mail from her every week or two. Every now and again, she'd send a toy or somethin' to us. One time she sent us a Monopoly game, and we played and played it wherever the chores was done. Daddy's back was sometimes hurtin' him, and at the end of the day he'd just be wore out, so he'd lay back and watch us from the couch. Mom would sit up in her hard chair as she worked her needle and kept her eye on Mickey; she never did have no time to play games, so me, Muffy and Roland would play.

School was no fun; I could hardly wait to get home and play ball with Roland, Clive and Bernard once chores was done. Used to be Mom who made 'em play with me, now I was a better ball player than all them put together. No matter how good they think they is, I'd always win. I was thinkin' on it when the bus stopped. I hopped down off it, and Roland was waitin' fer me.

"Hey," I said to him.

"Come on," Roland said as he grabbed my book sack. "No chores today; Mom went to Beckley with Daddy to a doctor appointment, and Muffy's watchin' Mickey, so you and I can go play ball with Clive and Bernard."

Roland didn't seem as happy about it as I was.

"How's Daddy?" I asked.

"I just really don't know," he said. "I reckon he's just getting' old."

I felt the air come outta me like an old hog bladder ball that bursted - Daddy was forty-two years old, I reckoned that was old enough to be wore out. We walked slowly

back to the house to drop off my book sack. Muffy was on the front porch rockin' Mickey; she looked like she'd been worryin'.

"Hey, Muff, how's Daddy?" I was hopin' for a better answer, and Muffy always had an answer.

"I guess, I don't know," she said. Her face looked like she was gonna cry.

I wasn't gonna worry on it. Muffy was always thinkin' too much.

We played ball for a while, and when we got back to the house, Daddy and Mom were sittin' at the table in the kitchen.

"Daddy, how was your pointment?" I asked. I was glad to see him.

Daddy sent me over a smile, "It's fine; I just need to rest some." He never did talk much.

Mom looked up at me with her tared eyes, "The doctor said he didn't know why Daddy had pain in his back; he said it probably was just ware and tare."

I looked at Muffy with a smile. She'd done all that worryin' for nothin'.

Some weeks later, when I came down early to breakfast, I was all alone with Mom. Daddy had already gone to work.

"Why'd Daddy leave early? "I asked Mom.

"He's got some things to figure out," was all she said.

"I got some good news fer you," she said with a smile, "You're gonna go visit with Glenna in Philadelphia this summer."

"What about t'others?" I didn't understand why I was the only one getting' to go.

"Daddy has some appointments with doctors and such, so Muffy's gonna take Mickey and go up thair to visit with Aunt Mabel, and Roland's gonna stay here at the house and take care of the animals and garden and such."

"I could stay here and help Roland," I said.

"Hoppy, Glenna wants you to come. She's sendin' a ticket for you to ride the train all the way to Philadelphia, then she's gonna take you to a real baseball game. Her beau already bought the tickets." Mom had made up her mind.

"Okay, Mom." I looked up at her as I ate my breakfast. Now I was excited; I was gonna ride the train to Philadelphia!

That summer, I had me my first train ride. Mom packed me a snack and a sack with my things in it. She pinned a note to my shirt for the train men to read. Daddy said the train would take me from Thurmond to Washington, where President Truman lived in the White House. I'd been to Thurmond onest before when I had a bad toothache. I'd never seen no other kinda trains but a coal train. This one was gonna be different; I'm not for sure I'd ever expected anything like it.

Daddy borried his friend's truck and drove us to Thurmond. He was real quiet; I expect he was thinkin' on somethin' bout his sickness. He pulled us over to the train depot and turned round to look at me.

"You mind your sister," he said.

"I will Daddy," I told him.

I opened the door to get out, and Mom did too. But Daddy stayed in the truck where he was comfortable.

Mom and me walked into the train station and she walked up to the counter to talk to the man in the winda about me. She pointed to the note she'd pinned to my jacket, and then Mom gave him the ticket Glenna sent, so now we just had to sit and wait for the train. Mom sat with me and told me again what I was supposed to do.

"This here note tells the train men to get you off in Washington, then catch you a different train to Philadelphia. It's okay if you fall asleep. They promised to wake you and keep an eye on you," she said.

"Yes'm," I said.

"Are you excited?" Mom asked.

"I reckon I am," I said.

We sat there some and waited. I knowed I weren't supposed to ask, but I had to know.

"Mom, how will I know if Daddy's poinments go alright?" I asked her.

Mom turned in her seat and looked at me. "Hoppy, the doctors think Daddy might have arthritis; they can give him some medicine for the pain, and he'll be fine. He just ain't a young man no more is all."

After while, the man behind the counter told us the train was ready to get on. Mom walked me outside and helped me step up onto the train.

"I'll see you in a week," she said as she turned to hurry back to Daddy. She didn't wave or nothin'.

A different trainman met me at the top of the steps and showed me to my seat. He told me he was the conductor, and his name was Mr. Clifton.

I looked at Mr. Clifton from the top of his head, where he wore a hat, down to his shiny black shoes. He was dressed fancy.

"This here is a long train ride," he said, "but don't you worry none, I'll keep an eye on you." Then he winked his eye at me. "Now, if you have to use the toilet, it's that there door at the end of the train car on the left." He pointed down the aisle a ways.

"Thank you, kindly sir," I said, just like Daddy told me to when a stranger was helpin' me out.

I sat on the seat Mr. Clifton took me to and set to lookin' out the winda. When the train started up, it jerked a bit and was off. After we pulled outta Thurmond, the trees were flyin' by. I sat on that train lookin' out that window for a long time fore I had to use the privy. Some people were in the seats behind me and I smiled at them all as I walked to the back of the train.

I opened the door of the little privy room and they was a little toilet. I opened up the lid that was on it and looked down the hole right onto the track that was passin' by as fast as I'd ever seen anythin' move. I stood and watched, just guessing how far I was movin'. I was scared to sit on the seat but peed through that hole right down onto the track anyway cause the pain to pee was pullin' at me. I stood there and watched the track 'til someone knocked on the door.

"All right in thair?" someone asked.

"Yessir," I said.

I opened the door and came out. I looked up at the man and said, "I ain't never seen a train privy afore."

The man smiled at me as I moved past him and walked on back up the aisle to my seat.

I sat back down and kept on lookin' out the winda 'til I fell asleep.

I woke up to the train whistle just as Mr. Clifton was comin' to wake me up. It was dark out, and the train was slowin' down. Mr. Clifton helped me out of the train and down the step. I rubbed the tared out of my eyes and followed him out into a big room. It was the biggest room I'd ever seen; I looked up and saw a big curved ceiling that was white and in front of me were wood benches with backs on 'em. There were people everywhere.

Mr. Clifton led me to a bench, and we sat there for a bit, then someone yelled from somewhere over my head that the train to Philadelphia was ready to go.

Mr. Clifton put me on the newer, fancier train and talked to another conductor; they's pointin' at me and talkin' about my note. This here new train was real nice and new lookin' and it smelled new too. I sat right there in that seat and waved goodbye to Mr. Clifton as he left the train. Oncest the train started movin' I fell asleep again. It was nighttime, and I was tared.

The next thing I knew, the whistle was blowin' and the train readyin' to stop. I looked up and waited while people got off the train. The conductor came up to me and said he would take me out to find my sister.

When I got off that train, I looked around but didn't see Glenna. It'd been a while since I'd seen her, but I'd a know'd here anywhere.

Then I saw her. Her hair had got redder and there was a man with her I didn't know. She looked right at me, kinda stumblin' with a cigarette in her hand. The cigarette

had a brown tip with red lipstick on it, and she wore a pretty store-bought dress. She looked like a magazine picture.

"Hoppy!" she called to me and waved. She was smilin' like she was glad to see me.

"Hi Glenna," I said, not for sure how to act cause she seemed different.

"Billy, this is my brother Hoppy," she said as the man with her looked me over.

"Hey, Pal," Billy said as he put a hand on my shoulders.

Nobody'd ever called me Pal before.

"Hey," was all I said.

Glenna grabbed my hand and pulled me with her as we walked out of the station.

"We live just a few towns away. You're gonna get a ride in Billy's new car!" Glenna sounded different too.

Billy had a fancy blue car. Glenna opened up the back door that opened inside out, and I climbed in. I ain't never seen nothin' like it; it was like the hinges were put on the wrong side of the door.

Glenna opened her door and threw her half-smoked cigarette into the street. I ain't never seen no one waste half a cigarette afore neither. She must be rich now.

We rode for a while and I tried to look out the winda, but it was too dark to see much. Then Billy pulled the car over to the side of the road.

"Here we are!" Glenna said.

"Y'all live here? I asked. It was a big building.

Glenna said, "In this building, there are apartments. Each apartment is like a little house. We have an apartment on the third floor," she said it like I knew what she was

talkin' about. Glenna hopped outta the car and opened my door. I grabbed my sack and got out.

"I'll be right back," Glenna said to Billy, who was stayin' in the car.

"Ain't he comin'?" I asked.

"We're gonna go out for a bit, but we'll be back soon," Glenna said.

We walked up the steps and into the building and more stairs was right in front of us and there was a bunch of doors on the side goin' all the way down a hall. I followed Glenna up the steps. We walked down a ways to a door with the number 352 on it. Glenna took out her key and opened the door, pushin' it open like she wanted me to see it first. I walked into a room with a couch, chairs, and a big TV.

"Wow," I said. We didn't have no TV at home.

Glenna opened doors pointin' out the kitchen, a bedroom, and a bathroom. It looked real nice to me. Then Glenna pointed to a pallet on the sofa she'd made up for me to sleep on. I took off my shoes and laid down on it.

"This is nice," I said.

"Okay then. There are sandwiches and chicken in the icebox if you're hungry. Billy and me are going out for a drink. I'll lock you in, and you can watch TV 'til we get back." She walked over to the TV and turned it on. "Look," she said pointin' to the screen, "the Lone Ranger is on."

I was scared to be by myself. So, I just sat on my pallet and watched the Lone Ranger. After a while, I got up to look around. The kitchen had a fancy stove and a nice big ice box. Weren't a lot in it, but I got me some cold chicken and a glass of milk. I walked into the bathroom and looked around. There was a sink and a toilet and a tub, and

they was all blue! In the tub, there were great big crawfish swimmin' around. I couldn't believe my eyes! I thought, *Rolands, gotta see this*! I watched them for a while, but they's claws were so big I reckon they could snap off my finger if I tried to touch 'em, so I just let 'em be. After while, I was tared, so I put the milk glass in the kitchen sink and wiped my hands on my pants. I went back to my pallet, laid down and watched me some more Lone Ranger 'til I fell asleep.

The next mornin, I got up, went into the bathroom to pee, and stared at them crawfish some more. Billy walked in and shooed me out so he could use the toilet. When he was done, he called me back into the bathroom to look at the crawfish some more.

"Why'd you have big crawfish in your tub?" I asked.

"They're lobsters, and we're gonna eat them for dinner tonight." Billy was lookin' proud as a peacock.

"Where'd you get 'em?" I asked, not sure where they coulda come from. Billy didn't look like he'd know how to catch 'em.

"I got them in a South Philly fish market," Billy said. "I am in the food business Pal, so a buddy of mine got me these beauties for a deal."

I didn't know what he was talkin' about, but he was smilin' a big smile, so I just smiled back at him.

Later, when we ate them lobsters, I pretended I liked them cause Billy and Glenna kept tellin' me they were a special treat. But I'da rather had me some ice cream.

That whole week went by real quick. Glenna and Billy locked me in the partment every night when they went out, I got used to it, but I was lonely some. In the mornin's Glenna slept late, Billy went to work, and I watched TV or looked out the winda. One

morning I was lookin' acrost the street, I could see a big tower down aways that looked like a giant mushroom. When Glenna woke up, I was gonna ask her about that big mushroom. I was still starin' at it when Glenna came outta the bedroom.

"Are you hungry?" Glenna asked me. Well, it was about lunchtime, and I was starvin'.

"Yes!" I said, "course I am!" She know'd I'm usta a big breakfast every mornin.

"I'll fix you a sandwich," she said. I never know'd Glenna to fix any food for anybody, but I kept my mouth shut cause I wanted that sandwich.

"What's that there?" I said, pointing out the winda to the big mushroom building.

"It's a water tower," she said.

I just looked at her.

"It's storage for extree water," she explained.

I looked at the water tower and wondered how much water was in it and when the water would fall down outta it. I sure didn't wanna be on the street when that happened.

Glenna put a sandwich and a pickle on a dish and brought it out to the couch where I was sittin'.

I looked at Glenna some more. "What do you do when you go out at night? I asked. I figured they went to the movies or sumthin' fun.

"I go to work," Glenna said. She lit up a cigarette and smoked some while I ate my lunch.

"You a dancer?" I asked.

"No," She said, "I'm a Cigarette Girl.

"What's a Cigarette Girl?" I asked her.

"Well, I walk around in a fancy outfit and carry a tray of cigarettes, cigars, and candy." She looked kinda sad. "I sell them in a nightclub in the downtown part of the city."

"So, you make cash-money doin' it?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she smiled, "I make a lot of money."

"What's Billy doin' when you's workin'?" I figured he just sat around and looked at how pretty Glenna was.

"Well, he has some other ways he makes money," she said.

"Do y'all need a lot of money to live in this here partment?" I wondered how expensive a fancy partment was.

"We're savin up all the money we can to buy a restaurant," Glenna said.

"Why ya'll wanna do that?" I asked. Glenna never did cook none, so I knew she wouldn't be in the kitchen doin' anything.

"Maybe I could dance at the restaurant on a little stage, and Billy is a businessman; he's got it all figured out. He says we can hire someone to do the dirty work." Glenna looked just like a cat who caught a mouse, smilin' like she already had what she wanted.

On the day before I had to take the train back home, Glenna and Billy took me to my first real baseball ball game. The Philadelphia Phillies were playing the New York Mets. I was so excited. I ain't never seen a real baseball game 'fore.

Billy drove us to the stadium nearby.

"This here is Connie Mack Stadium," Billy shouted to me in the backseat. It was hot outside and Billy had all the winda's down in the car, so I could hardly hear him.

Glenna turned to me with a big smile on her face. She was all dressed up in a bright green dress. She'd fixed up her hair and put a hat on top of her head. She didn't look like she was goin' to a ball game.

"Are you excited?" she asked. I could tell she was excited too.

"Yes'm," I said.

"It's hat day," Billy shouted back to me as he parked his fancy car.

"What's hat day?" I asked Glenna.

"All the kids who come to the game today get special souvenir hat with pins on it. All those kids back home will be green with envy when they see it," Glenna seemed real excited for me to get that hat.

We walked up to the stadium, where Billy gave the ticket man our tickets. The ticket man ripped them up and gave us half tickets back.

"Why did that man rip the tickets? I asked.

Billy kept readin' on the ripped tickets, then said, "the ripped tickets have a number on them and the number matches the seats we were supposed to sit in."

I followed him, and Glenna followed behind me; I guess she was worried I'd get lost in the crowd. Oncet we'd found our seats; a man came up to us and gave me a beanie cap. Then he gave me two pins to pin on the hat. One pin was red and white and had the word "Phillies" on it, anothern was red, white and blue with a ball and a bat on it.

"Wow," I said to the man, "thank ya kindly." Daddy woulda been happy to hear me use my manners. I couldn't wait to show him and Roland my hat.

We had just sat down when Glenna got up and said, "I have to powder my nose," and she squeezed past me and Billy and walked back the way we came.

I wasn't payin' her no mind, but Billy kept lookin' at her. "Well, there she goes," he said. He was smilin' as he watched her walk away.

"Look all you want, gents," he said to anyone listenin' or lookin', "she's with me."

I looked at Billy like he was tetched in the head. Who cared about that, we were watching the Philadelphia Phillies play baseball!

Muffy/Sissy: Whipple and Beyond

I rolled over in bed and opened my eyes. Mickey's face was right in front of me.

"Wake up, Sissy!" He shouted at me.

"Mickey, why are you up?" I groaned as I rubbed my eyes awake.

"I'm hungry, Sissy," he whined as his chubby little hand touched my cheek.

"Okay," I said with a sigh. I sat up in bed and swung my feet to the floor. "Lemme get dressed and wash up."

"I'll wait here," Mickey said, and he climbed up onto my bed. For a three-year-old, he could climb pretty good.

I grabbed the summer dress Mom had made me a week ago. I wore it every other day, switchin' it out with an old hand-me-down dress from Glenna. Daddy still didn't like to see a girl in pants, but I sure wanted to wear the pedal pushers Glenna sent me for my birthday. They's my only store-bought clothes. I still didn't understand how Glenna knew they would fit me. Maybe Mom had told her my measuring tape numbers.

I went down the steps into the parlor where Daddy was settin' in a chair readin' the paper, smokin' his cigarette, and drinkin' coffee.

"Mornin' Daddy," I said, smilin' at him.

"Mornin' Muff," he smiled right back.

"Where's Mom? I asked as I started makin' Mickey's breakfast. Daddy couldn't help with the cookin' no more cause he needed to have his hands on his crutches when he was on his feet.

"She's at the store. I reckon she'll be back soon," he said, still lookin' at the paper.

"I'm gonna make Mickey somethin' to eat. You want for me to make you somethin'?" I asked.

"I'm not too hungry," Daddy said.

Daddy wasn't as hungry as he used to be. He hardly moved much, 'specially on the weekend when he needed to relax some.

I fixed Mickey some toast with Mom's homemade strawberry jam and an egg.

"Here you go," I said as I put the plate on the small kitchen table in front of Mickey.

Mickey climbed into his seat and ate his breakfast like he ain't never seen food before.

I washed up the dishes and cleaned the kitchen so Mom wouldn't a had to worry about it. I took the plate from Mickey when he was still lickin' the jam off it.

"Come on, Mickey, let's get outside so Daddy can read his paper," I told him, and he grabbed my hand, pullin' me to the door.

I smiled at Daddy as we was headed out, but he was too busy with his paper to notice.

We went out onto the front porch and saw Mom and Roland were walkin' up the street, Roland was carryin' her sacks for her, and they looked to be talkin' about somethin' serious. I noticed Mom's eyebrows looked stitched together. Mickey ran to her, and Mom picked him up and swung him to her hip.

"Hey," Roland said.

"Hey" I said right back to him.

"They's a letter from Glenna. She and Billy opened up that restaurant, and business is good." Roland said in a happy way.

"Yep, she sent some money," Mom added.

"Mom and I was talkin', I think I should go up thair and go to work for her and Billy," He looked me straight in the eyes so I'd know he was serious.

I knew there weren't many jobs around here. Roland didn't want to be no miner, and besides, machines were doin' most of the minin' nowadays. On top of that, Buster and Ole Pete were gone and Mom and Daddy weren't fixin' to get any more hounds since Daddy's huntin' days was over.

"What about school?" I asked him.

"I don't care none about school, Muff; I'm just getting' a job when I graduate anyway, so why not start now?"

I knew he was right about that. But still, I didn't want to see him go. There'd been so much change these past few weeks I could hardly wrap my brain around it. I turned and followed them back into the house.

"Hey, Daddy," Roland said as he carried the food sacks to the kitchen table.

I could hear it in Roland's voice, he was readyin' to tell Daddy somethin' that might be upsettin'. Daddy musta heard it too, 'cause he put down his paper and waited for Roland to say some more.

"There's a letter from Glenna," Mom held up the money to show Daddy, "I reckon the restaurant business is good."

Daddy looked from Mom to Roland, then to me. He waited.

Roland squared up his shoulders and looked straight at Daddy. “Daddy, I’m gonna go to Philadelphia to work for Glenna and Billy,” he said, waitin’ for Daddy to say somethin’.

I could see Daddy thinkin’ on this. Daddy looked at me and said, “What about you? You gonna move up thair with him?”

The look of surprise on my face gave Daddy his answer. Movin up thair was never on my mind. I never wanted to leave Daddy or Mickey.

Mom looked around the room at each of us. “Well, that’s not a bad idea,” she said, like she was surprised she hadn’t thought of it.

Roland looked at me, it showed on his face that he was happy with the idea. “It’s good money,” he said into the room so’s we all could hear.

“Mmm hmm,” was all Daddy could say. He couldn’t argue ‘bout that.

“Cecil and Martha’s kids all moved up North together, and they’s sending lots of money back home,” Mom said, warmin’ to the idea. “‘Sides,” she said, “we’s all gonna need to move off soon, now the works goin’ away.”

I looked at Daddy; he’d worked forty-one years in the mines, and he was sick from it. He could hardly raise a garden no more ‘cause he was so feebled.

“I’m stayin' where I’m at,” Daddy said.

“We can go,” Roland looked at me, “we can make money and send it back here for y’all.”

Everyone was lookin’ at me, even Mickey.

“Sissy, outside!” Mickey grabbed my hand and was pullin' me to the front porch door. I went with him, needin’ a minute to think on it all. But Roland followed us out. I

wasn’t sure if he was leavin’ Mom and Daddy time to talk or if he was gonna try to talk me into goin’ with him up North.

We walked away from the house as Mickey ran ahead. He was such a happy kid, my heart about busted at the thought of leavin’ him. Hoppy’d be here with him, but it wouldn't be the same.

Finally, Roland had got his thoughts enough together and he spoke up. “Muff, it’s good money. We can send money home, and with what Glenna sends, it might be enough to make life a bit easier for ‘em.”

I knew he was right. I knew it was what we had to do.

Muffy, Robert (Daddy), and Mickey, 1953

Glenna and Muffy, late 1950s

Epilogue 1: The Skillet

Long before my mother died, she had given me her Granny's Griswold cast iron deep fry skillet and matching lid. My mother had several of her Granny's cast iron housewares and milk glass, but I had no interest in the other things; I only had eyes for the fry skillet. My mother's hands had become addled with arthritis, and she could no longer lift the heavy cast iron. Hence, it just sat on her stovetop, a tribute to a former life.

"Hey, Mom," I cautiously prodded, "are you going to use Mom Mom's skillet anymore?

"Actually, it was Granny's skillet," she corrected.

"Okay, Granny's skillet."

"Why?" she paused, "Do you want it?"

"Kinda," I shrugged.

"Oh really," she smiled. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know. It's cool, and I'd like to try to make Mom Mom's fried chicken in it." I vividly remember Mom Mom cutting up a whole chicken with a sharp knife. She would put the cut-up pieces into a brown grocery bag pre-loaded with flour. Then she would close the top sides of the bag together, fold it over, then roll down the top of the bag tightly and shake it to ensure the chicken pieces were coated in flour. She would then carefully drop the chicken into the deeply greased cast iron skillet to sizzle and pop. I licked my lips just thinking about that fried chicken. I knew she would drain the chicken on brown paper bags and then place the chicken in the oven to stay warm. I'd watch her re-oil the skillet with lard and begin working on the home-fried potatoes.

"It's yours then." Mom said.

I could tell my mother was secretly pleased I wanted it. My sister-in-law had been eying it up, and I was sure my mother did not want her to have it.

The skillet mattered to my mother. My Mom Mom knew my mother was the family's cook; her other daughter, Glenna, was not very domestic; she was more of a go-out-to-dinner type of gal, although she had also expressed interest in the skillet. Perpetually jealous of my mother, I was sure my Aunt Glenna had asked Mom Mom for the skillet at some time, but at this point, my Mom Mom had clearly not given in. Because there it was, mine for the taking.

Over the years, as I've cooked with it, I have often wondered about the different foods cooked in this skillet. I once asked my Mom's younger brother Hoppy about his favorite childhood foods.

"Biscuits and gravy," he did not hesitate to answer.

"With meat?" I asked.

"No," he laughed, "for breakfast."

Milk gravy had been a staple in my mother's childhood home. My mother told me she never cared for it, but I knew her brothers loved it.

"Granny kept a can of lard under the kitchen sink. She used to take a big spoonful and heat it in the skillet, adding flour, milk, salt, and pepper. That's how you make milk gravy," he laughed again, "It was good!"

He knew from the look on my face I was not convinced. This story did bring back a memory I had forgotten, though. My mother used to keep a tin Maxwell House coffee can under our kitchen sink. She would dump bacon grease, or the oil left in the

skillet after she fried food, into that can. I don't recall her cooking with the hardened fat; I thought she let it cool in the can because it was too hot for the sink drain or the trash can.

"That's right," Uncle Hoppy nodded, "your mother wouldn't use that grease, but if Mom Mom came to your house to cook, she expected that can of grease to be under the kitchen sink."

He was right. Mom Mom always used the grease in the can, but she called it lard. I also remember Mom Mom used Crisco to bake, though my mother wouldn't touch the stuff. Mom did not like Mom Mom cooking in her kitchen because Mom Mom was a messy cook, but maybe because of the lard too. I'll never know for sure.

I also have is a vivid memory of Mom Mom cooking with our kitchen lard one weekend around 1975. Near the beginning of that summer, my parents announced a weekend getaway for themselves, informing us that Mom Mom would be coming to babysit. My little brother Joe and I were thrilled. Mom Mom would make us fudge, peanut butter candy rolls, and chocolate coconut cookies for dessert. She would fry chicken, home fries, and bake cornbread for dinner. We wouldn't have to wash our face before breakfast or shower before bed. This would be a vacation for us, too.

The Friday morning Mom Mom got there; my mother clearly was having some second thoughts. She looked around her pristine kitchen, knowing it would not look the same when she returned in three days. Sensing she might change her mind, my father hustled her toward the front door. She gave us a quick kiss goodbye as my father ushered her out the door and into the car.

"Let's go visit Uncle Hoppy!" Mom Mom announced after my parents left. My older brothers Mike and Greg were nowhere to be found, so only Joe and I were there. We always liked visiting our cousins and gladly followed her out the door. Mom Mom started her 1974 green Oldsmobile four-door sedan, and Joe and I climbed into the back seat. There were no seat belts, and we knew what we were in for: Mom Mom would drive fast over the hilly back roads to Uncle Hoppy's house, and Joe and I would catch air, our heads tapping the ceiling of the back seat as we hit the bumps in the road.

Mom Mom backed out of the driveway and headed away from the major roads; a country girl at heart, she always chose the winding back roads. Mom Mom would speed up as she lit her filter less Pall Mall cigarette and puffed away as she sang,

Here we go, loop de loop.

Here we go loop de li.

Here we go, loop de loop.

All on a Saturday night!

Joe and I would sit on the green fabric bench seats and hold onto the armrests for dear life. Now and again, she would spot pokeweed on the side of the road and pull over.

"Go over there and pick that," she would point to the tall green stalk. "I'll fry it up with the chicken for our dinner."

Later that afternoon, when we returned home, exhausted from chasing Uncle Hoppy's giant St. Bernard, Caesar, around his back yard, Mom Mom went to work, and Joe and I watched TV. She bent in front of the sink, reached for the grease can underneath, and lubed up Granny's cast iron skillet. Heavenly smells filled the kitchen as she fried and baked well into the evening. Mike and Greg magically appeared, lured in

by the tantalizing aromas of warm chicken and potatoes. Dinner that night was a southern feast, and the fried pokeweed was the final touch.

After dinner, Mom Mom cleaned up some, but not nearly as thoroughly as my mother would have. She washed all the dishes, put the leftovers away, and poured the grease from the hot skillet back into the Maxwell House coffee can she left on the drainboard to cool. She left the hot cast iron skillet to rest on the filthy stove.

"It's gotta cool before you wipe it out," she told me as I watched her.

"Do you mean before you wash it?" I asked.

"You never wash cast iron with soap and water!" She looked at me, surprised I didn't know better.

When I came downstairs the following day, the cast iron skillet rested on its regular spot on the stovetop; the crumbs had been wiped clean, but it still glistened inside with an oil sheen. I knew my mother would scrub the stove as soon as Mom Mom left. I hoped the weekend away with my father was worth the additional kitchen clean-up she would have to do when she got home.

I grabbed a homemade biscuit off a plate on the counter and looked around the house for Mom Mom. I finally found her in the front yard. She had taken the aluminum chair off the back patio and plopped it down in our front yard.

"Mom Mom, what are you doing?"

"People watchin," she replied, as she smoked her cigarettes and said hello to a neighbor walking their dog along the sidewalk. Occasionally, she would pause to pick a piece of tobacco off her tongue.

I don't remember how old I was, but I knew I was embarrassed. But then I remembered a story my Mom told me about Granny spitting in a spittoon while sitting in a rocking chair on her front porch. That would have been worse.

Not long ago, I told my Uncle Hoppy about Mom Mom and her messy stove cleaning habits. He looked at me with disappointment.

"You know, Suzanne, we had a cast iron stove when we was livin in the company towns."

This had never occurred to me. She had never had to scrub the cast iron with soap and water. She would have wiped it clean of crumbs and spills, but ultimately, the stove had to be slightly oiled to be protected from rusting.

Even now, as I look at the skillet that rests on my stovetop and has passed through the hardworking hands of my Granny, survived my Mom Mom, and was resurrected by my mother. I feel ashamed of my youthful embarrassment. I am proud to be the owner of this century-old treasure and to have learned so much about frying chicken from my Mom Mom.

Epilogue 2: How it Ends

Muffy and Roland moved to Pennsylvania in 1953, where they both worked for Glenna and her husband at their restaurant. A year later, needing income and opportunity, the rest of the family moved to the Philadelphia suburbs to be nearby, pursue "a better" life and have access to more advanced medical treatments to help with Robert's illness, which turned out to be kidney cancer.

Pearl (Mom Mom) and Robert (the grandfather I would never meet, so I do not know what I would have called him), with Glenna's help, secured paying jobs at the Charles E. Ellis School for Fatherless Girls in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. Robert drove a school bus and Pearl worked in the kitchen. Despite access to better medical treatment, William Robert Eden's died of kidney cancer in 1959; he was 52 years old. Pearl quit her job at the school and briefly moved back to her beloved West Virginia, where things were never quite the same. She later returns to Pennsylvania to be close to her children. She missed the mountains of West Virginia until the day she died, February 15, 1995. We played "Almost Heaven, West Virginia," by John Denver at her funeral; there wasn't a dry eye in the funeral home.

Hoppy briefly attended Marple Newtown High School in Pennsylvania but quit after a year or two in order to take advantage of a work opportunity. Despite making the varsity football team as a freshman, the pull to earn cash-money was just too great. On the day he left high school his teacher warned that if he quit school, he would never amount to anything. Those words stayed with Hoppy and motivated him to prove her wrong. Hard work and marrying someone who partnered with him in a shared vision, helped to elevate Hoppy and his family to great wealth. I spoke to Uncle Hoppy several

times while researching the family history for this dissertation, and he told me on several occasions how he wished that high school teacher could know he was a millionaire.

When we were little, my brother Joe and I would visit Mom Mom. She drove her Oldsmobile like a demon, relishing long car rides on country roads surrounded by trees punctuated with dappled sunlight. All the while smoking her Pall Mall cigarettes, which always led to our begging her to let the car windows down. She would take us strawberry picking every May. She would encourage Joe, my youngest brother, and me to eat all the hot juicy strawberries we picked, arguing that we only had to pay for the ones in the bucket. We lost Mom Mom to lung cancer in 1995.

Uncle Roland joined the army, and afterwards, ended up settling in Chicago, where he was a successful entrepreneur. We never saw much of him, but Mom spoke of him often and with great affection. He died in 2014 at the age of 80 from complications related to diabetes.

Glenna lived her life on her own terms, and my feelings toward her are fraught. Glenna was a very selfish person - this is not an opinion; it is a fact. She faced forward, always putting her wants and needs first, leaving many broken hearts along the way. I witnessed her selfishness and unkindness on several occasions, but said nothing, just letting it all stew inside me. Despite these feelings, I do give her all the credit for making the break from coal camp life and eventually getting the family out of the endless cycle of poverty, thus providing opportunities for my mother's family. They might not have had these opportunities without Glenna's determination to get out. Hard living took its toll on Glenna, and she died in a care facility after multiple strokes. My mother visited her frequently, despite Glenna's unconscious state. Glenna died in July of 2012.

Mickey, the baby of the family, had the shortest life. He, like Glenna, faced forward and played hard. His lifestyle proved too much for his heart and he died in December of 2000 at the age of 50.

Uncle Hoppy and his family lived close by, and our families spent a lot of time together. His children were the cousins I was closest to. He is still alive as of this writing but suffers from advanced Coronary Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and prostate cancer.

Similarly, Muffy married a man with a shared vision and a strong work ethic. Their hard work and commitment forged a close knit, loving family with financial stability. I am, and my three brothers are, the product of their happy union.

My mother did not speak often of her childhood. She walked away from West Virginia and focused forward. I never heard her speak with any sort of southern drawl, nor did I hear her use hillbilly slang. She was elegant and well-mannered both at home and in public. She stayed trim, dressed well, polished her fingers and toenails with fresh lacquer every Sunday night before the workweek, and she kept an immaculate home. She hugged and kissed us often and made sure my brothers and I felt loved and supported. Mom passed away in October of 2015 of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Her asthma worsened by the coal mining camp air, and fifty years of smoking did irreparable damage to her lungs.

1928

DOCK EDENS, ROBERT EDENS, ALLAN TIPTON

PEARL AND MUFFY, 1984

GLENNA, MICKEY AND PEARL, 1990s

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