

# Spirited Souls

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*Faith, Love and Moonshine: An Appalachian Tale*

*Our Time Together*

*Ripple in the Moonlight*

## **Faith, Love and Moonshine: An Appalachian Tale**

Frank Jamison grabs a few more pieces of the seasoned hickory and carefully places them in the bottom barrel of the copper still. The homemade apparatus sets in a remote hollow in which no other human has likely stepped foot. There is no beaten path or blazed trail leading to such a place. This virgin land makes for the ideal location.

While he stands at a distance smoking his pipe, the fire begins to take hold. Frank is physically a solid man. Dressed in his only pair of denim overalls, he watches and assesses. His once coal black hair, now greying, rests on his shoulders, and his long, grizzly beard hangs to his broad chest. The dark bags under his eyes have long set in due to worry and despair. He has entered his fortieth year this year, nineteen-hundred and twenty-three. Frank Jamison has invested thirty of those years into the mysterious trade that has now become the basic means to his family's survival. As a boy, he watched and learned from his father. Now, his son stands by his side and observes the family secrets of moonshining.

"See there, Raymond," Frank says to his son. "You have to get your water boilin' nice and hot so the steam'll rise up through your lines."

Raymond is a miniature version of his father. He stands in bare feet, wearing tattered overalls, consumed by intrigue. The eight-year-old watches as his daddy fires the still.

"How much you reckon this'll make, daddy," asks Raymond.

"I'd say 'bout twenty jars, son," says Frank, as he stirs the mash with a wooden oar.

"We gonna make another batch tomorrow?"

"Doubt it. Not for a few days any way."

"You gonna let me help?"

"You're my helper, ain't ya?" Frank gives a pat and a rub to his son's curly head.

"Yes, sir!" Raymond cheerfully answers.

As the corn mash boils and condenses into the copper coils, the liquid begins to trickle slowly into a quart jar. When the jar reaches its capacity, Raymond skillfully exchanges the container for an empty one. From the stack on the ground, he grabs a lid and places it onto the

filled jar, turning it to a snug fit. The jar's clear contents depict innocence equal to that of the young eight-year-old boy.

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The road that leads to Frank Jamison's house is windy and narrow. It snakes for miles through the hills and hollows of what many would consider unknown land. His two-bedroom home sets deeply nestled and secured in the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern Kentucky.

Raymond's wife, Mary, sits at the family dinner table. Her belly protrudes from her homemade dress, prohibiting her from sitting at a comfortable distance. She has birthed three wonderful children, while the fourth is less than a month away from making its arrival. Her golden hair rests snugly in a bun atop her head, just the way it does every day. Peeling potatoes, she works intently, preparing the evening meal.

"Anna, honey," Mary says to her daughter. "Go draw the water from the well, please. And take Jake outside 'til we finish our supper."

"Yes, ma'am," says Anna. With one last brush stroke to her doll's hair, the little girl springs from her seat opposite her mother. "Come on, Jake. Come on, boy," she says to the Golden Retriever. Jake follows her out the door with a floppy tail wag.

Inside the home are signs of a humble and modest living. The handmade dinner table is the centerpiece of the kitchen, a gift from Frank to his wife on their first wedding anniversary. It has been the gathering station for many conversations over the last fourteen years. Across the room, the fireplace steadily burns. An unlit oil lamp sits on the mantel, along with the family Bible and reading spectacles. Above the front door is a plaque with the words *Bless this Home* inscribed into it.

Anna returns with the kettle of water and sets it on the table.

"Thank you, honey," Mary says.

"You're welcome, mamma."

"You best get washed up. Your daddy and brother'll be along directly."

"Yes, ma'am."

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As the sun starts to drop behind the horizon, Frank and Raymond make their final climb up the steep ridge. Having placed the liquor into pine crates and secured on the back of his packhorse, Frank carefully leads the animal through the dense forestry, making his way back to the family farm.

Walking along, Frank is pleased with his son's willingness to learn, and thinks a simple praising is in order.

"I'm proud of you," Frank says, looking down at Raymond. "You did good today. Pretty soon you'll be able to do this all by yourself."

Looking up, Raymond answers, "Hopefully I'll be as good as you someday, daddy."

"You're already good as me, son." The boy grins, swells out his chest, and proudly marches alongside his father. Frank sees Raymond's reaction and produces a smile of his own.

Although Frank is feeling jovial, his moonshining business hasn't always brought satisfaction. The federal revenueurs are wreaking havoc on the backwoods distiller. And it was only three years before they destroyed Frank's operation and eliminated his only means of

financial stability. That following winter became an enduring struggle. His oldest daughter, Doris, lay sick with pneumonia and fever. With his funds stripped, Frank was unable to purchase the proper medicine, and after a two-week struggle, Doris succumbed to her illness. The young girl died in the same house that she was born in only twelve years before. It was then Frank Jamison vowed that no one would ever come between him and his family's survival again.

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