

KENTUCKY *Brides*

Three Romances Complicate
a Simple Way of Historic Life

LAURALEE BLISS • IRENE B. BRAND • YVONNE LEHMAN



BARBOUR
PUBLISHING

Into the Deep © 2006 by Lauralee Bliss
Where the River Flows © 2006 by Irene B. Brand
Moving the Mountain © 2006 by Yvonne Lehman

ISBN 978-1-59789-850-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

All scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, and/or events is purely coincidental.

Published by Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683,
www.barbourbooks.com

Our mission is to publish and distribute inspirational products offering exceptional value and biblical encouragement to the masses.



Printed in the United States of America.

Chapter 1

Kentucky 1843

A bang on the door awoke Jared Edwards with a start. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and gazed out the window to see the faint rays of a new dawn just beginning to brighten the sky. He struggled to stand, even as a yawn broke across his face. Shuffling to the fireplace, he lit a candle from a banked ember. It was time he got up anyway. The cow needed milking, and he promised Uncle Dwight he would help plow up the fields.

Jared came to the door, still bleary-eyed from sleep, to find the shadowy image of his uncle standing outside. The man's nightshirt hung out of his pants, which he had obviously donned in haste. The silhouette of horses hitched to a wagon stood against the backdrop of the rising sun. Within the wagon were piles of quilts and what appeared to be his aunt Mattie's trunk.

"Something's wrong, Jared."

Instantly, he found himself alert. "What? What's the matter, Uncle?"

The older man was visibly trembling. Jared stepped aside to allow him in. "It's Mattie. Someone came by to tell me she's doing very poorly. She's in a deep sleep and won't wake up."

Jared stared. *How can that be?* They had only left Mattie a short time ago in Dr. Croghan's care.

"We're going to the cave just as soon as you're ready." Uncle Dwight shuffled inside. He sat down heavily at the small table that Jared had pieced together with leftover oak planks. He ran fingers through his brown hair streaked with gray. "Why did I let you talk me into taking her to that terrible place? A cave of all things! Mattie was safe here. She was happy. She had me to take care of her and not some strange doctor." He again ran his fingers through his hair. "I have to get her out of there. She needs to leave that place and come home."

Jared bit his lip as he headed to the back room to put on some clothes. Just yesterday, when he visited his uncle's place, he found Uncle Dwight staring at a small portrait of Aunt Mattie as a young woman. His stubby finger traced every part of her features while his blue eyes filled with tears. Even then, Jared began questioning the decision he had made. But in his opinion, they had no choice. If they didn't do something, Mattie would have surely died.

When Jared heard that Dr. Croghan had built huts inside a nearby cave to help cure those sick with consumption, he had immediately gone to inquire.

Standing there among the curious onlookers, he saw the man with his head held high, his strong voice echoing in the wooded glade.

“Mammoth Cave has given proof of its magical qualities,” Dr. Croghan had stated to the awestruck throng massed before him. “As you know, we have found the remains of Indians perfectly preserved within the cave, without a hint of decay. We have found the air to be of a constant temperature and humidity. And in Mammoth Cave, I have built cottages where the invalids may be cured of their pulmonary infections, rheumatism, even diseases of the eye. And I say that it will do far better for them than any medicine an apothecary can dispense.”

Raucous applause accompanied the cheers. What the good doctor described was nothing short of a miracle from on high. Jared couldn’t wait to tell Uncle Dwight what he had learned.

When he came home that night, he found his dear aunt doubled over in a coughing spell, clutching a lacy handkerchief tinged with bright red blood—the telltale sign of the dreadful disease that had plagued her for several months. He immediately told his uncle the doctor’s claims that the cave could cure Aunt Mattie’s consumption. “This must be the answer we’ve been praying for.”

“By putting her in some dark cave?” Uncle Dwight frowned, shaking his head, his broad forehead creased in worry.

“How else could Indians from long ago be kept without decay as the doctor said? The air in the cave must have something miraculous in it. We have to try, Uncle. If we don’t do something, she’ll die.”

“But Mattie will be so far away from me. So far away.” He looked back at the bedroom door, slightly ajar. The sounds of her hacking cough echoed from within. “Can I visit her there?”

Jared shook his head. “Not from what I hear, not while she’s in the cave anyway. It won’t be long until she starts feeling better. Then she’ll be home.”

“Mattie and I haven’t been separated since the day we were married. We’ve always been together, through the good and the bad. Even when the good Lord didn’t give us children, at least we had each other.”

Jared sighed. “But the only way you can stay together is if she gets well,” he continued in earnest. “Please, Uncle. I believe this is the answer.”

A look of resignation finally fell over his uncle’s weary features. “All right; I will let her go for a short time. Better we are parted now than forever. And you’ve always had a good head about things, Jared. Better than that brother of mine who takes his family off to some strange place. I’m mighty glad you didn’t go with them. I don’t know what we would do without you.”



Jared hoped that same trust his uncle had laid in him back then, when he agreed to take his aunt Mattie to the cave, still remained today, with this latest news of his aunt’s deteriorating health. He feared a worse fate might have befallen them, a fate more dreadful than the consumption itself. He yanked on a pair of broadcloth

INTO THE DEEP

trousers and shrugged into a shirt and coat. He stomped his feet into a pair of leather boots and lit a lantern with his shaky hand. *What if Aunt Mattie dies?* The mere thought made him shudder. *God, please help her. She can't die. She can't.*

He ventured into the main cabin where his uncle still sat, staring into the fire. "I'm bringing her back here," Dwight barked. "No use talking me out of it. Mattie's coming home with me. No more doctors and no more living in that cave."

Jared said nothing. The sun had barely begun to reveal the tip of its golden head when they stepped outside. A faint mist hung over the rolling Kentucky landscape. A distinct pattern of lantern light glowed in the distance as neighboring families went about their morning chores. Jared and his uncle climbed onto the jockey seat of the wagon. Jared took the reins and ushered the horses to the main road that led toward the cave.

"I don't care what you say," Uncle Dwight continued. "I know you told me to do this. But if she's getting worse, what are we gonna do?"

Jared had no answer. Without a miracle, Mattie would die—whether in the cave or at home. But he prayed it was not the former. Many times Jared had sought the Lord for a miracle that would revive his aunt. Dr. Croghan and his cave seemed God's perfect answer.

The creaking of the wagon along the rutted road provided a sad serenade to the ride, its melancholy tune broken only by an occasional bird singing merrily from an overhanging tree limb. Jared wished for the right words to say to comfort his uncle, but his mind was a blank. Maybe he should tell his uncle to keep praying and trusting in the Lord.

Long ago, Jared explained to his uncle how, after a preacher on horseback shared with him the message of the Savior's love, Jared accepted Christ as his personal Savior. It was the power of Jared's rebirth, experienced here in Kentucky, which kept him home while his father took his siblings and mother and headed for St. Louis. His father had grown weary of trying to make a living in the exhausted Kentucky soil. Uncle Dwight thought his brother foolish to leave, and he told him so. Dwight then begged Jared to stay on and help him keep up the farm. At first, Jared found the prospect of leaving this place for another intriguing. But he also loved Ol' Kentuck. Not only had he been born here physically, but spiritually as well. This land had left its imprint on his heart and soul. And here he stayed to help his aunt and uncle and to live out his own life, by the grace of God.

It was midmorning by the time they reached the Mammoth Hotel, where visitors came to rest, eat a good meal, and take tours of the famous cave nearby. He had not yet stopped the wagon when an attractive woman bounded from the hotel entrance, her face all smiles. She wore a large straw hat tied with a blue ribbon. The white lawn of her dress, peeking out from beneath the dark cloak, shimmered like new-fallen snow in early winter. She was a vision of bright sunshine on a cool, foggy morning.

"Good morning. And how are you this fine day?"

Jared stared, taken aback by the cheery greeting on a somber day like today. “We are about ready to leave for the first tour of Mammoth Cave this morning,” she went on. “Only fifty cents for the short tour. And it is the most popular.”

Fifty cents! Who has that kind of money to spend on a hole in the ground? “We aren’t here for any tour,” Jared stated flatly. “We came to see Dr. Croghan.”

She stepped back as if surprised they were not going to be a part of some frolic within the cavern depths. “I’m sorry. The doctor is inside the cave at the moment, caring for the poor invalids.”

“One of them is my aunt. We were told she is very ill. Please send for him.”

She stood there as if uncertain what she should do. Finally, she whirled, her cloak billowing about her like a dark cloud. A trace of the sweet scent she wore lingered in the air and reminded him of wildflowers amid the tall grass. Jared had to admit that women were not in the forefront of his thoughts these days. He had too much work to do, what with tending to his place and looking after Uncle Dwight’s fields. But the brief encounter with this lovely lady—her smile, her charm, her beauty—awakened something within him, something he would have liked to consider further were it not for his concerns over Aunt Mattie and the farm to tend.

Jared turned his sights back to the hotel into which she had disappeared. Built close to the famous hole in the ground, the hotel formed an impressive sight, comprised of many wooden dwellings, some with several floors. No doubt the young woman knew little of a farmer’s life. She had grown up wearing fancy frocks and spending her days in large rooms with fine furniture. He lived in his own small two-room cabin that he and his uncle built by the sweat of their brow. The furniture was handmade. The only items of finery were those provided by Aunt Mattie to “spruce up the place and make it more of a home,” as she would say. Lace doilies, a tablecloth she had sewn, a quilt on the straw-filled bed, and occasionally, a vase filled with flowers gathered from the meadow. He couldn’t imagine the fine lady he’d just seen living in his humble cabin, even walking with him down some path or sharing a wagon ride under the rays of the fading sun. They were far too different, like night was to day.

Jared sat still in the wagon seat, fiddling with the leather reins. Beside him, Uncle Dwight had not uttered a word. While they waited, Jared saw the wide road leading down to the cave’s entrance. It beckoned him and the other visitors to come and enter the murky depths. What was it about this cave that tempted people to pay good money to behold? He had to admit there was a strange lure to it. It drew him in a way he did not understand. Maybe it was the excitement of the unknown, of a new place he had never laid eyes on and existing right beneath his feet.

But at that moment, the lure of a hole in the ground paled in comparison to his concern for Aunt Mattie’s failing health. A hard lump filled his throat. What would he do if something happened to her? What would his uncle say?

“Uncle, I’m going to see if I can find this Dr. Croghan myself.” Jared jumped to the ground.

INTO THE DEEP

“Yes, find him, nephew, and bring him here. In fact, if you can manage it, bring Mattie back, too. I want to take her home. I have plenty of quilts, so she’ll be snug and warm. Even brought her favorite dress to wear.”

Jared nodded. He left the wagon and ventured down the trail that led to the opening of Mammoth Cave, nicknamed the Wonder of Wonders. He remembered the day he and Uncle Dwight left Mattie here. His uncle clung to her, weeping, even as she patted his shoulder. “Now don’t you go fussing, Dwight. I’ll be fine and dandy.” Jared had to admit a cave seemed a strange place to leave a frail woman. The cave breathed like some living thing. A cool gust of wind blew from within, carrying with it a strange, earthy odor. Jared’s breath caught, remembering how Aunt Mattie and others like her were led away into the darkness to some huts built inside. But that doctor was confident the cave would cure them. This must be God’s answer to Jared’s heartfelt plea. Mattie walked in there sick, but she would come out healed of her affliction. Jared believed it. He had to believe it, even now.

Just then he heard a commotion. Several men appeared from the hotel and headed toward the cave entrance, bearing an empty stretcher and several lanterns. Another man lagged behind and stopped short when he saw Jared.

“You aren’t supposed to be here unless you’re taking a tour.”

“I need to find out about my aunt who is in Dr. Croghan’s care,” Jared said to him. “Do you know where the doctor can be found?”

The man grimaced. “Go back to the hotel, and we will let the doctor know you were inquiring.”

“But my uncle wishes to see him. He wants to take my aunt home. Her name is Mattie Edwards.”

“We will let the doctor know. Now go on.”

When they turned their attention away, Jared hastened for a stout tree, ducking behind it to observe the goings-on. The men with flickering lanterns entered the mouth of the cave. The breeze from within blew out several of the lanterns. He waited, wondering what would happen. He rubbed his arms. His teeth began to chatter. This wasn’t from the effects of cold but a growing fear mixed with uncertainty. To him, the cave entrance was like the opening of some gigantic beast, swallowing up the innocent like the huge fish that consumed Jonah. He prayed it had not swallowed up his aunt in death.

For a long time, he waited. Then a new noise erupted from the entrance, startling him. He heard excited voices and then saw the men appear once more, bearing the stretcher. Rubbing his eyes, he stared harder, only to have his stomach lurch. The men carried a white shrouded figure, the face covered by a cloth.

He swallowed hard. His limbs trembled. *Please God, no.* He rushed forward.

“Go back!” they ordered. “You are not to be here!”

“Please, you must tell me who this is. Please, I have to know.”

The men paused and looked at each other.

“W—we were told she was very ill,” Jared went on, unable to steady his tremulous

voice. "Her name is Mattie Edwards. Please tell me if that's her or not."

He saw the glow of recognition in their faces. Then came the nods that confirmed his fear. "Yes. She died this morning. I'm sorry."

Sweat broke out across his brow. He covered his face. What he dreaded most had come to pass.

Aunt Mattie. Dead.

He turned away and stumbled up the path. The tears clouded his vision. How would he ever tell his uncle the terrible news?



Jared gazed upon the ghostlike face of the woman whom he had come to love like a mother. Mattie's final resting place would be the burial ground not far from the Mammoth Hotel. Beside him, loud wails rose from Uncle Dwight. His uncle's grieving began the moment Jared gave the sorrowful news and continued until now, as they looked upon her in a silent state of death. She was dressed in her wedding gown of flowered calico, which Dwight had packed in her trunk. Her hands clasped the few yellow lilies the young lady at the hotel offered. Jared fingered a lone flower from the bouquet given by the woman in the white dress and gazed at its beauty before looking at his aunt one last time.

When the coffin was nailed shut and the burial completed, Uncle Dwight's wails came to an abrupt end. He turned to face Jared. His face grew red. His fists clenched. It began as a mutter within him and then grew to a roar filled with pain.

"You killed her!"

"Uncle?"

"You did it. You're to blame. You killed her just as sure as I'm standing here."

Jared stared in disbelief. "Uncle, please." Tears clouded his eyes. "I loved Aunt Mattie. I would never. . ."

"Y—you made me send her to—to that death cave. You told me I could trust you. You told me that doctor could cure her. Now she's gone! My sweet Mattie is gone forever." He waved his fist, nearly striking him.

"Uncle. . ."

"Get out of my life! I don't ever want to see you again!"

His throat clogged. His stomach rolled into knots. He shook his head, even as Uncle Dwight continued to shout at him. The death knell had sounded, not only for Mattie but also for himself.

He whirled, not knowing what to do. In the distance stood the young woman from the hotel, the one who had given him the flowers. She had witnessed this whole, awful scene unfold in this place of death. Jared caught but a fleeting glimpse of her white dress, so like an angel, before he ran off into the rolling hills.