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VERA AND BILL CLEAVER

# *Where the Lilies Bloom*





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WHERE

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THE LILIES

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BLOOM

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*Vera and Bill Cleaver*

*A Harper Keypoint Book*

玛丽·考尔是一位性格坚强的女孩，她象阿拉契山一样不可动摇。一天一位为了寻找记忆的旅行者漫游到玛丽居住的峡谷，玛丽将永远记住这位旅行者的话：这是一片最好的土地，是百合盛开。

玛丽的父亲临终前要玛丽许下承诺，要她永远和姐妹们片土地上，并且决不要外人帮助。玛丽相信依靠自己的力量这个家庭，她决定无论如何也要信守诺言。

起初，在罗玛和艾玛的帮助下，她们上山采集草药，直富维也厚厚的积雪压塌时，玛丽终于意识到这片百合花盛开的屋也被是一片残酷无情的土地，也是一片需要她付出代价的土地。同样，该书内容有趣，语言流畅，是英语学生及英文爱好者的

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## **WHERE THE LILIES BLOOM**

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Standing there on the gloomy trailway, waiting for Romey to recover, I wondered how I could be so calm—how I could just stand there in the gray darkness with the cold handle of the wagon in my hand and the cold tree moisture dripping down on me and the dead body of my father there before me and not be afraid of how grisly it all was.

It's because I'm tough, I thought. I'm so tough that if a bear came out of the side of the mountain over there I could knock him cold without even breathing hard. And that's all and if anybody's got a better idea how I should handle this and all the other things left to me just let them come on and tell me about it but I don't hear anybody saying anything.

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**To Jeanne Vestal**

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# One

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ONCE IN SOME near-forgotten time a traveler, making his way across these mountains on foot, wandered into our valley which is known as Trial. Warm and dusty and over-wearied, he came to our door and eased his heavy pack and asked for refreshment and Devola brought him a pail of water from our spring, pure and so cold it made him clench his teeth.

“Where have you been?” we asked.

He raised a khaki arm and pointed first to Sugar Boy that rises to our east and then to Old Joshua that lifts darkly to our west. “Up there.”

“What for?”

“For the memory.”

Devola thought this a funny answer. She



laughed and ran down into the yard and hid herself behind a flowering rhododendron and peered out at us through its white, lacy veil.

I said, "Don't pay her any mind. She's cloudy-headed. Why did you say you had been to Sugar Boy and Old Joshua for the memory? That wasn't a real answer, was it?"

"Yes," replied the traveler. "That was a real answer."

"They're pretty now," I said, "because everything is in bloom. Trillium and shadbush and the violets and all the other spring beauties but we've just come through a terrible winter. There was snow six feet deep in this valley with drifts up to ten. Everything was frozen; we thought it would never thaw. Romey and I couldn't even get to school."

"Who is Romey?" inquired the traveler.

"He's my little brother. In the winter when everything's frozen I hate the mountains. Then they're ugly."

The traveler said, "Today at noon I leaned my back against a cloud and ate my lunch. And afterward, coming down the slopes, I saw a lake of blue flowers and then a long, wide scarf of deep maroon ones. This is fair land; the fairest I have ever seen."

I never saw the traveler again. An hour later he disappeared into the mists that sometimes cover this valley in the spring. But I have never forgotten what he said—that this land was fair land, the fairest of them all. This is where the lilies bloom.

Like I say, Devola is cloudy-headed and this is one thing I cannot understand because none of the rest of us Luthers is that way but Devola is for sure, so each day I have to explain the whole of our existence to her. Her confidence in my ability to do this is supreme though there are four whole years' difference between her age of eighteen and mine of fourteen.

Devola cannot remember twice around a gimlet. When we go, of a morning, to the lower slopes of Old Joshua or Sugar Boy to gather witch hazel leaves she always acts like she's never seen any of it before.

"Look!" she exclaims. "Look at how pretty it all is. Don't you think it's pretty, Mary Call?"

"Yes, it's pretty but we haven't got the time to stand around and gawk now, Devola. Oh, here we are. Here's where we left off yesterday.

Aren't these leaves nice and thick? Shall we fill your bag first or mine?"

Devola shook her bag open and looked down into its emptiness. "It don't differ. Either way it's just plain work." She moved around to the north side of the witch hazel bush and began snatching the smooth, wavy-toothed leaves from its limbs. "How many pounds did we get yesterday?"

"Three. Don't put in twigs, Devola. Just leaves."

Devola fished two twigs out and discarded them. "How much is that?"

"Oh, forty-five cents, maybe."

"If that man at the drug company or Mr. Connell from the General Store had to come out here and do this for just one morning I'll bet it'd be a sight more than that. People are stingy with money, aren't they, Mary Call?"

"Some are."

A lance of clear sunlight wavering through the overhanging boughs touched Devola's face and hair. She stepped back away from it and turned and looked across the valley. In the distance Kiser Pease, high on his tractor, was creating clouds of furious, black dust. Between

him and us the lonesome fields were a bright, shimmering yellow.

Devola said, "Kiser wants to marry me again but still Roy Luther says no. I told him it didn't differ to me one way or the other but that's all he says. No."

"You don't know anything about marriage, Devola. Aren't you going to help me pick any more?"

Devola came back to the bush. "Kiser's got a nice house. I just love his kitchen. Everything in it's yellow. Of course, he doesn't keep it good but I would. I'd wash everything every day."

"You would, huh?"

"Yes."

I referred to one of Kiser's superstitions, a keyhole opening he had made near the top of his chimney as an exit for witches. I asked, "Would you wash his witch's keyhole, too? Or would you plug it up so no more witches could get in or out?"

Devola smoothed her long cascade of glowing hair. "I wouldn't bother his keyhole. His witches wouldn't bother me. I just love his house. Just think; all of us could live in it if I



married Kiser. You and Ima Dean and Romey and me and Roy Luther. All of us. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"No. We like it where we are. Devola, are you going to help me pick or aren't you?"

With a languishing look Devola picked two leaves. "Roy Luther owes Kiser money."

"Yeah, well he might get paid back someday."

Gently Devola deposited three twigs. "If Roy Luther was to give his say-so for me to marry Kiser, Kiser would forget about the money and give him twenty acres of land and the house we're living in."

"Roy Luther has already earned the land, Devola. Twenty times or more over. And he might just as well give us the house. It's falling down. Nobody else would have it."

"You don't like Kiser, do you, Mary Call?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because he's ignorant. Nobody but an ignorant person would have a witch's keyhole in his house. And he's an old greedy gut and a cheat. There isn't another man in the whole world would come in here and sharecrop for him the way Roy Luther has for so little. Just

years and years of it and when the time comes for tallying up, Kiser always getting the hog's share and Roy Luther always having to settle for the meanest."

Devola gazed at me. "I wish you wouldn't be so mad at everybody all the time. It makes you ugly. Kiser's lonesome," she offered. "He told me how lonesome he was."

"Yeah. Well, it's his own fault he hasn't got anybody. I've heard him brag about how he ran all his kin off years ago. This bush is stripped clean, Devola. Let's move on up a ways."

The August sun, full now in midmorning, was warm on our bare heads. Far above us Sugar Boy's spine loomed black-green. The air was richly peppered with the cool, sharp perfume of balsam and the soft, tepid scent of summer-fresh vegetation. Deep in a tangle of wild honeysuckle, a Carolina junco trilled his sweet bell-song.

Devola wears a look of suffering when she's made to come on these work-jaunts but it's like no other suffering I've ever seen. It's tender and sly and secret.

We located a new, fresh bush and I took one half and assigned the other half to Devola and

obediently she moved around and began plucking, but in a minute parted the branches and looked at me through the wavy, green light. "Mary Call?"

"What?"

"I forgot my sack. I left it back yonder."

For Devola I have many fears and I have others, too. Some for our paternal parent, Roy Luther, and some for Ima Dean and Romey and a few for myself also. They are not rash. They are not just things that happened to fritter into my mind because nothing else was there to busy it. They are old fears with me.

Oh, I feel it, this bottomless stomach of fright when I look at Devola and see her so free and innocent, so womanly in form but with a child's heart and a child's mind. I feel it when I watch Ima Dean and Romey at their make-believe games. So carefree they are with never a thought in their little heads as to how they're going to get decently raised. And when I look at Roy Luther who is coughing his life away. (We know now that it isn't just worms that turn him so white and panting weak though we keep doctoring, laying out hope each time along with the salves and other medications.)

Roy Luther has made me promise him some things:

When the time comes, which he hopes will be in his sleep, I am to let him go on as quietly as he can, without any wailing and fussing. I am not to call any doctor or allow anyone else to call one. If it happens at night I am to wait until morning before I tell the others. I am not to send for the preacher or undertaker. The preacher has a mighty voice in these mountains but he expects to be paid for his wisdom. And the undertaker, for all his hushed, liquid speakings of how paltry his tariff will be, can be ill-humored and short-tempered when the time comes to divvy up as we found out in the case of Cosby Luther, my maternal parent, who died of the fever four years ago.

So it is that Roy Luther has requisitioned me to give him a simple, homemade burial when the time comes. After I am sure his heart and breathing have stopped, I am to wrap him in an old, clean sheet and take him to his final resting place which will be within a stand of black spruce up on Old Joshua. We have not talked about how I am to get him there. Were you to ask Roy Luther it would shame him to have to say aloud that it will have to be in



Romey's wagon and he'd have to say what for me to do with the feet which will surely drag because the vehicle is but a toy.

I am worried about Roy Luther dying and how I am to get him decently and honorably buried but more than that I am worried about the other responsibilities he has charged me with, the other promises he has wrung from me.

Number one: I am always to take pride in having the name of Luther and instill this pride in the others, too. Number two: I am to strive with everything in me to keep our family together and not ever take charity from anybody even if our tongues hang out parched down to our knees because charity is seldom of real service to those upon whom it is bestowed and those who receive it are always looked upon with suspicion, every need and want scrutinized. Number three: I am to keep Devola with me always. I am to be good and kind and loving to her and see to it that the others are, too. I am not to let her marry Kiser Pease. If ever it looks to me like this is about to happen then I am to go to town, find the nearest judge, tell him about how Devola is, and get him to stop it.