

Exclusive Excerpt + Bonus Information!

NEW YORK
TIMES
BESTSELLER

a novel

THE BOOK WOMAN *of* TROUBLESOME CREEK

"An unputdownable work that holds
real cultural significance."

—SARA GRUEN, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Water for Elephants*

KIM MICHELE RICHARDSON

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"The intelligence of the Kentucky mountaineer is keen. All that has ever been said about him to the contrary notwithstanding, he is honest, truthful, and God-fearing, but bred to peculiar beliefs which are the basis of one of the most fascinating chapters in American Folklore. He grasped and clung to the Pack Horse Library idea with all the tenacity of one starved for learning."

—R. DAVIS HUTCHCRAFT,
"Pack-Horse Library' Supplies Mountain People With Books,"
Cincinnati Enquirer, March 18, 1937

Exclusive Excerpt

Kentucky, 1936

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, swirling lines that frame the text below.

The librarian and her mule spotted it at the same time. The creature's ears shot up, and it came to a stop so sudden its front hooves skidded out, the pannier slipping off, spilling out the librarian's books. An eddy of dirt and debris lifted, stinging the woman's eyes. The mule struggled to look upward, backward, anywhere other than at the thing in front of it.

The book woman couldn't keep her eyes off the spectacle as she shortened the reins and clamped her legs against the mule's sides. Again, she prodded her mount. Baring tall, sassing teeth, the beast lifted its muzzle into the balsam-sweetened air, the quavering brays blistering the sleepy mountain.

The woman stiffened, drawing the reins in tighter. In front of her, a body swayed back and forth below the fat branch from which it hung. A rope, collared tight around the neck, creaked from the strain of its weight. A kettle of turkey buzzards circled above, dipping their ugly, naked heads toward the lifeless form, their tail-chasing shadows riddling the dying grass.

From the scorched earth rose strange cries, and the librarian pulled her stunned gaze away from the corpse and toward the ground.

Beside a large toppled can, a baby lay in the dirt, the tiny face pinched, scalded with fury.

Mountain breezes dipped lazily, shifting, carrying the stench of death and its soiling. The weighted branch crackled, groaning

under its burden. A bloodied sock inched down from a limp, cerulean-blue foot. The librarian gawked at the striking blue flesh and cupped a trembling hand over her mouth. The stocking slipped off, landing beside the squalling baby's head.

The wind rose higher, then plunged, skittering across the sock as if trying to lift it, but it stayed stubbornly put, rooted to the earth—too heavy to be sent off by a mere summer breeze.

The book woman looked up, lifted one darkening hand in front of her own blue-colored face as if comparing her color to that of the hanging corpse. She examined her cobalt-blue flesh, then dared to peek back up at the dead body, bound, eternally rooted like the black oak to the hard, everlasting Kentucky land so many tried so hard to escape.

One



The new year was barely fifteen hours old in Troublesome Creek, Kentucky, when my pa adjusted the courting candle, setting it to burn for an alarming length of time.

Satisfied, Pa carried it out of our one-room log house and onto the hand-hewn porch. He was hopeful. Hoping 1936 was the year his only daughter, nineteen-year-old Cussy Mary Carter, would get herself hitched and quit her job with the Pack Horse Library Project. Hoping for her latest suitor's proposal.

"Cussy," he called over his shoulder, "before your mama passed, I promised her I'd see to it you got yourself respectability, but I've nearly gone busted buying candles to get you some. Let this stick hold the fire, Daughter." He hoisted the old wrought-iron candleholder higher by its iron-forged rattail and once more played with the wooden slide, moving the taper up and down inside the spiral coil.

"I've got a respectable life," I said quietly, following him out to the porch, taking a seat on the wooden chair, and huddling under the patchwork eiderdown I'd dragged along. The first day of January had brought a skiff of snow to our home in the cove. Pa set the candle down and struck a match to light a lantern hanging from the porch.

Two winter moths chased the light, circling, landing nearby. A clean wetting mingled into woodsmoke and umbrella'd the tiny cabin. Shivering, I buried my nose into the coverlet as a

cutting wind scraped down mountains, dragging soft whistles through piney boughs and across bare black branches.

In a minute, Pa picked back up the courting candle, raised a finger above the wick, and jutted his chin, the approval cinched in his brow.

"Pa, I have me a good job making us twenty-eight dollars a month delivering books to folks who's needing the book learning in these hills."

"I'm back to work now that the mine is running full time." Pa pinched the wick.

"They still need me—"

"I need you safe. You could catch your death in this cold, same as your mama. You're all I have, Cussy, all that's left of our kind. The very last one, Daughter."

"Pa, please."

He reached down and brushed a lock of hair away from my eyes. "I won't see you riding that ol' mount up and down them dangerous passes and into dark hollers and cold creeks just because the government wants to push their foolish book airs into our hills here."

"It's safe."

"You could be struck ill. Just look what happened to that book woman and her mount. Foolhardy, and the poor steed was punished for her temerity."

Snow gusted, swirled, eddying across the leaf-quilted yard.

"It was along in years, Pa. My rented mount is spry and sure-footed enough. And I'm fine and fit as any." I glanced down at my darkening hands, a silent blue betrayal. Quickly, I slipped them under the folds of fabric, forcing myself to stay calm. "Sound. Please. It's decent money—"

"Where's *your* decency? Some of the womenfolk are complaining you're carrying dirty books up them rocks."

"Weren't true. It's called literature, and proper enough," I tried to explain like so many times before. "*Robinson Crusoe*, and Dickens, and the likes, and lots of *Popular Mechanics* and *Woman's*

Home Companion even. Pamphlets with tips on fixing things busted. Patterns for sewing. Cooking and cleaning. Making a dollar stretch. Important things, Pa. Respectable—”

“*Airish*. It ain’t respectable for a female riding these rough hills, behaving like a man,” he said, a harshness rumbling his voice.

“It helps educate folks and their young’uns.” I pointed to a small sack in the corner filled with magazines I’d be delivering in the next days. “Remember the *National Geographic* article about Great-Grandpa’s birthplace over in Cussy, France, the one I’m named for? You liked it—”

“Dammit, you have earned your name and driven me to nothing but cussing with your willful mind. I don’t need a damn book to tell me about our kin’s birthplace or your given name. Me and your mama know’d it just fine.” He raised a brow, worrying some more with the flame on the courting candle, resting the height of the taper to where he wanted. And as always and depending on the man who came calling, how long he wanted the old timekeeper to stay lit.

Pa looked off toward the creek, then back at the candle, and set his sights once more over to the banks, studying. He fought between raising the timekeeping candle and lowering it, mumbling a curse, and setting it somewhere in the middle. A taper would be cranked up tall to burn for a lengthy visit, or tamped down short for any beau Elijah Carter didn’t favor as a good suitor.

“Pa, people want the books. It’s my job to tend to the folks who are hungry for the learning.”

He lifted the courting candle. “A woman ought to be near the home fires tending that.”

“But if I marry, the WPA will fire me. Please, I’m a librarian now. Why, even Eleanor Roosevelt approves—”

“The First Lady ain’t doing a man’s job—ain’t my unwed daughter—and ain’t riding an ornery ass up a crooked mountain.”

“People are learning up there.” Again, I glimpsed my hands and rubbed them under the quilt. “Books are the best way to do that—”

“The best thing they need is food on their tables. Folks here are hungry, Daughter. The babies are starving and sickly, the old folks are dying. We’re gnawing on nothing but bone teeth here. Not two weeks ago, widow Caroline Barnes walked nine miles for naught to save her babies up there.”

I had heard the poor woman staggered into town with the pellagra rash and died in the street. Many times I’d glimpsed the rash set in from starvation. And last month a woman up in a holler lost five of her twelve children from it, and farther up in the hills, a whole family had died the month before.

“But folks tell me the books eases their burdens, it’s the best thing that could happen to them,” I argued.

“They can’t live off the chicken scratch in them books,” Pa said, flicking the wick and hushing me. “And this”—he rapped the candleholder with a knuckle—“is what’s best for you.”

Jutted up high like that, the candle’s nakedness seemed desperate, embarrassing. I caught the unsettling in Pa’s gray eyes too.



It didn’t matter that for a long time I’d shared Pa’s fears about what might become of his only daughter, until the day I’d heard about Roosevelt creating his relief program called the New Deal to help folks around here during the Depression. We’d been depressed as long as I could remember, but now, all of the sudden, the government said we needed help and aimed to do just that. The president had added the Works Progress Administration last year to put females to work and bring literature and art into the Kaintuck man’s life. For many mountainfolk, all of us around here, it was our first taste of what a library could give, a taste to be savored—one that left behind a craving for more.

I’d seen the flyers in town asking for womenfolk to apply for the job to tote books around these hills on a mount. I snuck an application and filled it out without Pa knowing, applying to be a Pack Horse librarian a month after Mama died.

"They gave *you* the job?" Pa had puzzled when I got it last summer.

I didn't tell him I'd bypassed the supervisors here by picking up my application at the post office. The job application said you could turn it in to the head librarian in your town or send it to the Pack Horse libraries' manager directly by mailing it to Frankfort. It didn't say anything about color, and certainly not mine. But I'd taken my chances with city folks I'd never meet instead of trusting it to the bosses here in Troublesome.

"Did no one else apply?" Pa had questioned me. "You can't work," he'd added just as quick.

"Pa, we need the money, and it's honorable work and—"

"A workin' woman will never knot."

"Who would marry a Blue? Who would want me?"

I was positive no one would wed one of the *Blue People of Kentucky*. Wouldn't hitch with a quiet woman whose lips and nails were blue-jay blue, with skin the color of the bluet patches growing around our woods.

I could barely meet someone's eyes for fear my color would betray my sensibilities. A mere blush, a burst of joy or anger, or sudden startle, would crawl across my skin, deepening, changing my softer appearance to a ripened blueberry hue, sending the other person scurrying. There didn't seem to be much marriage prospect for the last female of blue mountainfolk who had befuddled the rest of the Commonwealth—folks around the country and doctors even. *A fit girl who could turn as blue as the familiar bluet damselfly skimming Kentucky creek beds*, the old mountain doctor had once puzzled and then promptly nicknamed me Bluet. As soon as the word fell out of his mouth, it stuck to me.

Whenever we'd talk about it, Pa would say, "Cussy, you have a chance to marry someone that's not the same as you, someone who can get you out of here. That's why I dig coal. Why I work for scratch."

And the disgrace would linger in the dead air to gnaw at me. Folks thought our clan was inbreeds, nothing but. Weren't true.

My great-grandpa, a Blue from France, settled in these hills and wedded himself a full-blooded white Kentuckian. Despite that, they'd had several blue children among their regular white-looking ones. And a few of them married strangers, but the rest had to hitch with kin because they couldn't travel far, same as other mountain clans around all these parts.

Soon, we Blues pushed ourselves deeper into the hills to escape the ridicule. Into the blackest part of the land. Pa liked that just fine, saying it was best, safer for me, the last of our kind, *the last one*. But I'd read about those *kinds* in the magazines. The eastern elk, the passenger pigeon. *The extinctions*. Why, most of the critters had been hunted to *extinction*. The thought of being hunted, becoming extinct, being the last Blue, the very last of my kind on earth, left me so terror-struck and winded that I would race to the looking glass, claw at my throat, and knock my chest to steal the breath back.

A lot of people were leery of our looks. Though with Pa working the coal, his mostly pale-blue skin didn't bother folks much when all miners came out of the hole looking the same.

But I didn't have coal to disguise me in black or white Kentucky. Didn't have myself an escape until I'd gotten the precious book route. In those old dark-treed pockets, my young patrons would glimpse me riding my packhorse, toting a pannier full of books, and they'd light a smile and call out "Yonder comes Book Woman... Book Woman's here!" And I'd forget all about my peculiarity, and why I had it, and what it meant for me.

Just recently, the head librarian of the Pack Horse remarked about my smarts, saying the book job had given me an education as fine as any school could.

I was delighted to hear the librarian's words. Proud, I'd turned practically purple, despite Eula Foster saying it to the other Pack Horse librarians in an air of astonishment, "*If a Blue can get that much learning from our books, imagine what the program can do for our normal folk... A light in these dark times, for sure...*"

And I'd basked in the warm light that had left me feeling like a read woman—a normal folk.

But when Pa heard about Agnes's frightening journey, how her packhorse up and quit her in the snow last month, his resolve to get me hitched deepened. And soon he'd shone a blinding light back on my color and offered up the generous five-dollar dowry plus ten acres of our woodland. Men, both long in the tooth and schooling young, sought my courtship, ignoring I was one of *them Blue people* when the prospect of land ownership presented itself. A few would boldly ask about my baby-making as if discussing a farm animal—seeking a surety that their Kentucky sons and daughters wouldn't have the blueness too.

Why, for all Pa cared, it could be the beastly troll in "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" who wanted my hand. Lately, he'd been setting the timekeeping candle uncomfortably long for *whoever* was keen on calling.

But I couldn't risk it. The WPA regulations said females with an employable husband wouldn't be eligible for a job because the husband is the logical head of the family.

Logical. I liked my sensibility just fine. I liked my freedom a lot—loved the solitude these last seven months had given me—and I lived for the joy of bringing books and reading materials to the hillfolk who were desperate for my visits, the printed word that brought a hopeful world into their dreary lives and dark hollers. It was necessary.

And for the first time in my life, *I* felt necessary.



"Right there'll do it." Pa fussed one last time with the slide on the courting candle, then finally placed the timekeeper on the table in front of my rocker and the empty seat beside me. He grabbed his carbide-lamp helmet off a peg and looked out to the dark woods across the creek that passed through our property.

The snow picked up, dropping fat flakes. "Reckon he'll be showing up any minute, Daughter."

Sometimes the suitor didn't. I hoped this would be one of those times.

"I'll be off." He dropped a matchbook into the timekeeper's drip tray, eyeing the candle one final time.

Frantic, I grabbed his sleeve and whispered, "Please, Pa, I don't want to marry."

"What's wrong with you, Daughter? It ain't natural to defy the Lord's *natural* order."

I took his palm in mine and pressed the silent plea into it.

Pa looked at my coloring hand and pulled his away. "I gave up my sleep to ride over to his holler and arrange this."

I opened my mouth to protest, but he held up a shushing hand.

"This harsh land ain't for a woman to bear alone. It's cruel enough on a man." Pa reached for his hand-carved bear poker with the razor-sharp arrowhead tip. "I've been digging my grave since the first day I dug coal. I'll not dig two." He tapped the poker against the boards. "You will take a husband so you'll have someone to care for you when I no longer can."

He buttoned his coat and grabbed his tin lunch bucket off the porch boards, ambling off to his night shift down at the coal mine.

Hearing a horse's strangled whinny, I turned to the rustling, straining to hear above the prattling song of creek waters. The courter would be here shortly.

I leaned over the wood railing and peered out. When I could no longer see the flicker of Pa's miner's lamp and was sure he'd disappeared into the woods, I reached over, adjusted the wooden slide on the timekeeping candle, and lowered the taper to where the wax would touch the old spiral holder's lip within a few minutes of being burnt—a signal to this latest suitor that a prompt and swift departure was in mind.

Raising my hands, I watched them quiet to a duck-egg blue.

Setting the Scene

APPALACHIA AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION



Goodman-Paxton Photographic Collection, Kentucky Digital Library

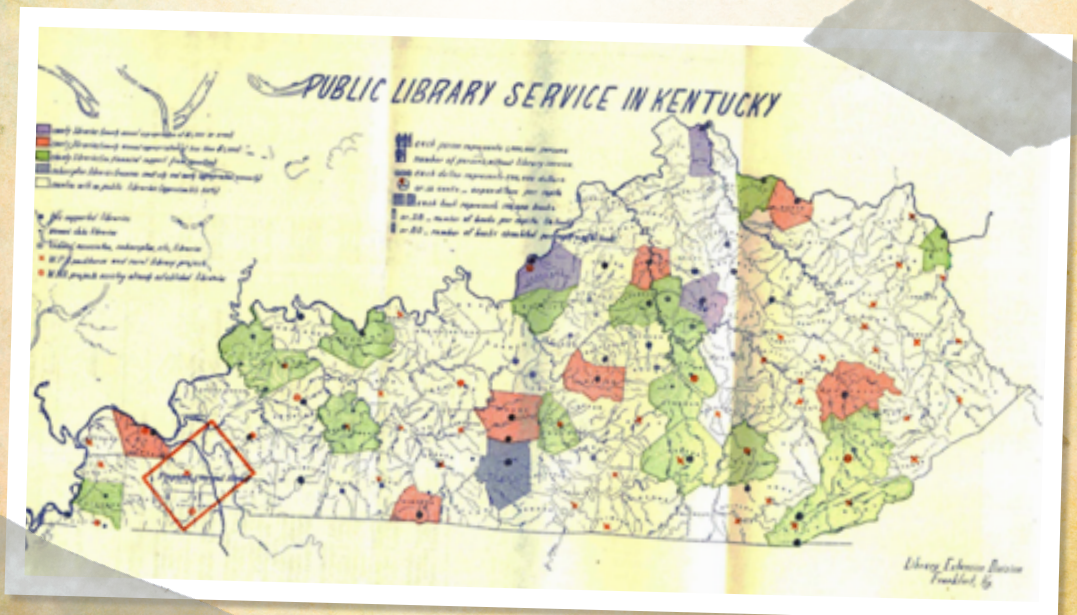
Spanning across fourteen states and covering nearly two thousand miles, the Appalachian Mountains are as vast as they are magnificent. The mountains themselves boast a varied topography, ranging from balsam firs to sycamores and everything in between. The total population in the 1930s amounted to just under five million, less than 4 percent of the national population.

Our little town of Troublesome Creek resides by the Cumberland Mountains in Kentucky. Though living here was a source of natural wonder, it came with a price, especially once the Great Depression hit. Unemployment in some areas was as high as 80 percent, and many families struggled to put food on the table. But what held these communities together and made them so distinct was their strong sense of shared identity and values. Though the physical isolation of Appalachia provided setbacks, it also allowed a vibrant and fascinating culture to flourish.

THE NEW DEAL

During the Great Depression, natural resources in Appalachia were exhausted, and subsistence farmers struggled to make a living from the land. Families abandoned their farms in hopes of earning money in the coal mines or textiles factories, only to find that both industries had dangerous working conditions and low wages. The New Deal attempted to address these economic issues with the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act, which supported laborers' rights to unionize and resulted in a number of workplace regulations.

Many New Deal programs were aimed at ameliorating the social and financial impact of the Depression. The Rural Electrification Administration brought electricity to hundreds of thousands of rural households, and the American Red Cross was enlisted to bring emergency aid to the impoverished residents of Appalachia. Relief workers brought medical and nutritional assistance to isolated mountain communities lacking even the most basic resources. Along with this welfare system, employment opportunities created by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided relief for many Appalachians during the Great Depression.



THE PACK HORSE LIBRARY PROJECT



Pack Horse Librarian Photo Collection, Archives and Records Management
Division—Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

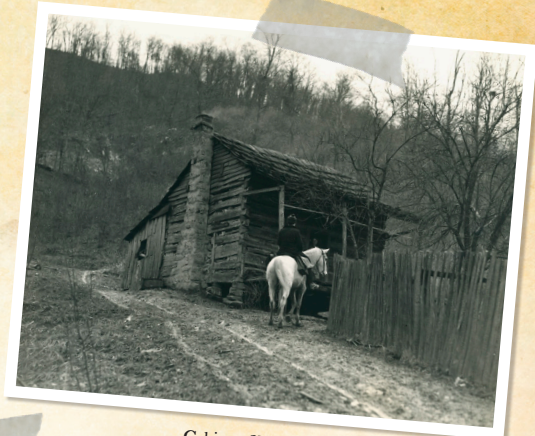
These days, libraries are nothing short of a staple in a community. No matter who you are, their doors—and their books—are open to readers of all ages, races, and genders. Of course, this wasn't always the case. During the Great Depression, the American Library Association estimated that more than a third of all Americans had no access to public libraries. This problem was especially rampant in the Appalachian Mountains, where the residents were isolated and often illiterate. It was the mission of the Pack Horse Library Project to change that.

Founded in 1935 as a part of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA), librarians set out on horses and mules to traverse the rugged terrain of eastern Kentucky in a bid to deliver books to residents across the region. The WPA could pay their librarians a wage of \$28 per month, but they could not afford to stock their saddlebags. All the books and magazines came from private donors across America. Most of the women were unmarried and the sole earners of their households. Roads were not what they are today, and these women would trek across cliffs, rivers, and mountains to bring books to their eager readers. Their work carried them far: they traveled an average of 4,905 miles per month, with around 30 pack horse libraries serving more than 100,000 people in the Appalachians. Though this program ended in 1943, the Pack Horse librarians' ambition to spread the joy of reading lives on in every librarian you meet.

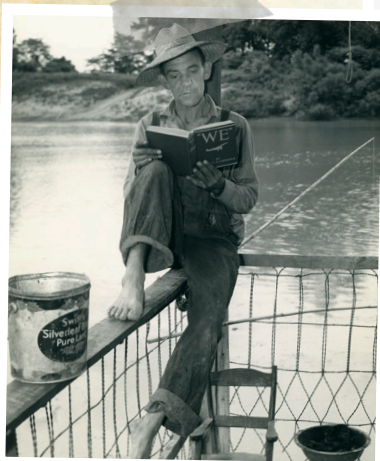
PHOTOS FROM THE TIME PERIOD



Kentucky coalminer reading to his children



Cabins of Patrons



"A book for the husband, a magazine for the wife, and a scrapbook for the child. WPA libraries met every literary need."



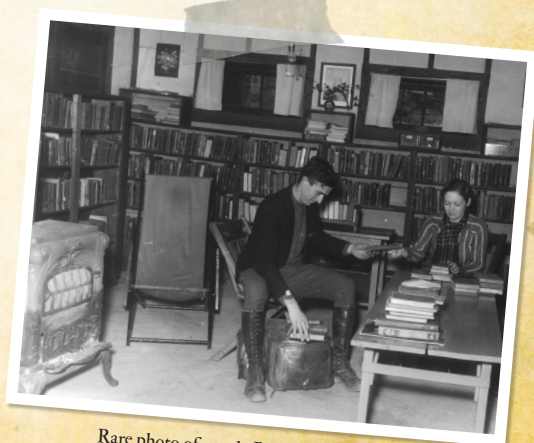
Firetower lookout, Robinson Forest
by Matt Burton,
UK Agriculture College



Cabins of Patrons



"Wherever the reader may be, there the book goes. "Houseboat Henry" likes to soar in fancy through the skies while reposing on the bosom of a slowly flowing stream"



Rare photo of a male Packhorse Librarian

A Conversation with the Author



What drew you to the stories of the Pack Horse librarians and the blue-skinned people of Kentucky?

Years ago, I stumbled across these heroic librarians of the Great Depression and the rare blue-skinned Kentuckians, and I couldn't stop thinking about them. I wanted to embrace their strengths and uniqueness in story. There was such rich, magnificent history in the two, I was surprised I hadn't seen them in a novel, that neither had been given a footprint in literary history. I knew it was time for the wider world to experience them in a novel, to learn about, to see, the glorious Kentucky female Pack Horse librarians and the precious blue-skinned mountain folk.

Your novel is deeply rooted in the history of Appalachia. What research did you do to bring this time period to life?

Research is my favorite part of the writing process. I spent thousands of hours exploring everything from fauna to flora to folklore to food, as well as longtime traditions indigenous to Appalachia. I'm also able to live in that landscape and spend time with native Appalachians who have taught me the lyrics and language of their people and ancestors. Other research took me to coal-mining towns and their history, visiting doctors, speaking with a hematologist to learn about congenital methemoglobinemia, and exploring fire tower lookouts and their history. Years ago, I started collecting everything I could find on the Pack

Horse librarians, poring over archives, old newspapers, pictures, the history, etc. I spent many hours on Roosevelt's New Deal and WPA programs and conducted interviews. And last, there was the fun and interesting research on mules.

What does your writing process look like?

I've long been a kitchen table author, one who sets aside the recipe, forsakes the rules—the do's and don'ts, the shant's, shouldn'ts, and won'ts. This doesn't mean I don't respect the rules—it simply allows me the unleashed freedom to create the story intimately and lyrically, as if I'm sitting at my kitchen table across from you and telling it. There's the occasional detour, of course, and sometimes I take out the guardrails going one hundred miles per hour. And there's piles of research papers, the countless scraps and sticky notes littered everywhere in my office, on my desk and shelves. My dear husband usually creates cool, detailed drawings of my fictional towns to anchor and keep me straight. At all times, there's my beloved rescue pets wandering in and out of my office. Music is a must-have, and I try to create a playlist to reflect the moods and themes in my stories. My music influence is broad, passionate, and can dip into everything from opera to bluegrass to rock, and on to classical, big band, jazz, rap, country, and indie. During edits, all is quiet, and I'm slow, turtle slow, and also painfully meticulous, and can absolutely sit on a single paragraph for days, working and fretting it. I generally devote anywhere from eight to fourteen hours a day to writing, research, and book-related stuff.

Did your own experiences living in Kentucky inspire or influence any of the descriptions in the book?

Yes, Kentucky is both a beautiful and brutal place full of fascinating history, varied landscapes, complex people and culture, and I'm fortunate to live in a region that I can draw on from the heart.

Do you see any similarities between yourself and Cussy? Differences?

I grew up under the grinding heels of poverty, spending my first decade in a rural Kentucky orphanage and then on to foster care, and beyond, to finding myself homeless at age fourteen. I can relate to marginalized people and have much empathy for Cussy and her family, anyone who has faced or faces prejudices and hardships. It's easy to feel their pain deeply, particularly if you've gone through hardships in your own life.

If you had to choose, what is one of your favorite moments from the novel?

One of my dearest is when young Angeline takes Cussy Mary's hand, despite knowing the implication of being friendly with a blue, and rings a simple truth by saying, "Hain't no harm. Our hands don't care they's different colors. Feels nice jus' the same, huh?"

Throughout the novel, we see the positive effects the Pack Horse library service has on this small, remote community. Do you think libraries still have that kind of impact today?

Absolutely, and now more than ever. As I mentioned earlier, I was raised in an orphanage. Later, as a foster child in 1970, I remember going to my first library one lonely summer and checking out a book. The librarian sized me up and then quietly said, "Only one? You look smarter than a one-book read, and I bet we can find you more than just *one*." She reached under her counter, snapped open a folded, brown paper sack, handed it to me, and then marched me over to shelves filled with glorious books. I was shocked that I could get more than one book, much less a bag full of precious books, and I was moved by her compassion, kindness, and wisdom. Librarians are lifelines for so many, giving us powerful resources to help us become empowered.

What are some of your favorite libraries to visit?

I love hitting the backroads to seek out small-town libraries. These places are treasured cornerstones filled with special mores—hidden gems that offer an opulence of customs, inspiration, and warm hospitality.

Who are some of your favorite authors to read?

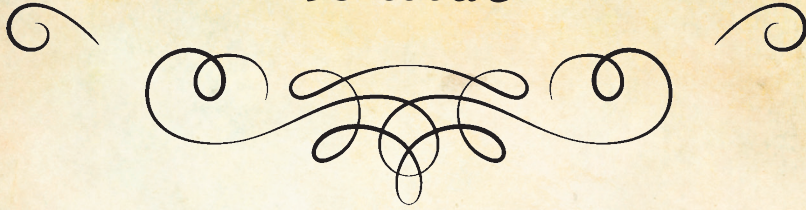
There are so many talented writers out there to pick from, it makes the choice difficult. However, one influence and much-loved author of mine has always been E. B. White. *Charlotte's Web* is a jewel that tapped into my love for nature and animals. And every time I read it, I learned something new. It has that wonderful Hitchcockian first line—"Where's Papa going with that ax?"—and is infused with magical verses of dewy spider webs, "Some Pig" miracles, and unconditional friendship. *Some Book—Some Author!* Harriette Simpson Arnow, John Fox Jr., Gwyn Hyman Rubio, and Walter Tevis are some of my longtime favorite Kentucky novelists who wrote unforgettable masterpieces. Each one brings the pages to life with rich, evocative landscapes, beautifully told stories, and highly skilled prose.

What do you hope readers will ultimately take away from Cussy's story?

Poverty and marginalization are not so much economics or politics or societal issues as much as they are human issues. They are best grappled with by reaching deep into the lives of those suffering them. Knowing one small piece of this world—the earth, the sky, the plants, the people, and the very air of it—helps us understand the sufferings and joys of others ourselves.



Reading Group Guide



1. The Kentucky Pack Horse program was implemented in 1935 by the Works Project Administration (WPA) to create women's work programs and to assist economic recovery and build literacy. Looking at the novel, how did the program affect the people in this remote area? Do you think library programs are still a vital part of our society today?
2. How has a librarian or booklover impacted your life? Have you ever connected with a book or author in a meaningful way? Explain.
3. Missionaries, government, social workers, and various religious groups have always visited eastern Kentucky to reform, modernize, and mold hillfolk to their acceptable standards. Do you think Cussy faced this kind of prejudice from the outside world? Is there any prejudice or stigma associated with the people of Appalachia today?
4. How do you think Cussy's father feels after he marries her off to an abusive man? Why do you think he agrees to Charlie Frazier's proposal in the first place? What do you imagine life was like for an unwed woman at that time?

5. Imagine you were making a community scrapbook like the ones Cussy distributes to the people of Troublesome. What would you include? Do you think these materials were helpful to Cussy's library patrons?
6. When Cussy receives the cure for her blueness from Doc, she realizes there's a price to pay for her white skin and the side effects soon become too much to handle. If you were in Cussy's shoes, would you sacrifice your health for a chance at "normalcy"? If there weren't any side effects, do you think Cussy would have continued to take the medication? Would you?
7. How do you think Cussy feels when she is ostracized at the Independence Day celebration, despite her change of skin color? Can you relate to her feelings of isolation? Do you think there are still these kind of racial prejudices prevalent today?
8. Cussy has to deal with the loss of many loved ones in a very short amount of time. How do you think she handles her grief? Which loss was the most difficult for you to read?
9. What do you think life was like for the people of Troublesome? What are some of the highlights of living in such a remote place? What are some of the challenges the people on Cussy's library route face?
10. Back then, entering into a prohibited or interracial marriage in Kentucky was a misdemeanor that could result in incarceration, and we see these racial tensions attempt to sever Cussy and Jackson's relationship. Discuss anti-miscegenation laws and marriage laws. Do you think this kind of prejudice still exists toward interracial couples?

11. What do you think happens to Cussy, Jackson, Honey, and the other inhabitants of Troublesome after the story ends? Imagine you were Cussy. How would you feel leaving Troublesome for good?

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Recipes from Appalachia



Potato Candy

INGREDIENTS

- 1 potato the size of an egg
- 1 pound confectioners' sugar
- peanut butter spread
- 2 tablespoons Kentucky bourbon (optional)



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil the potato with the skin on. Peel and mash.
2. Mix in the confectioners' sugar while the potato is hot, adding sugar a little at a time.
3. Knead like dough. Sprinkle a biscuit board with powdered sugar and knead.
4. Roll out and spread with peanut butter. (If using bourbon, mix it in with peanut butter before spreading.)
5. Roll up like a jelly roll. Let cool before slicing.

—Compliments of Gladys Richardson

Scripture Cake

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon Judges 5:25 (butter)
- ¼ cup raw Jeremiah 6:20 (sugar)
- 1 cup coarsely chopped Genesis 43:11, divided (walnuts)
- 1 cup Judges 5:25, softened (butter)
- 1½ cups granulated Jeremiah 6:20 (sugar)
- 4 Jeremiah 17:11 (eggs)
- 2 cups Exodus 29:2 (flour)
- 2 teaspoons Amos 4:5 (baking soda)
- ½ teaspoon Mark 9:50 (salt)
- 2 teaspoons ground Exodus 30:23 (cinnamon)
- Chronicles 9:9 (cloves, allspice, nutmeg) to taste
- 4 cups cored, peeled, and coarsely chopped Psalms 17:8 (apples)
- 1 tablespoon 1 Samuel 14:25 (honey)
- 1 cup chopped Numbers 17:8 (almonds)
- 8 ounces dried, chopped Song of Solomon 2:13 (figs)
- ½ cup 1 Samuel 30:12 (raisins)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grease 12-cup nonstick Bundt pan with the 1 tablespoon butter. Sprinkle raw sugar into pan, turning pan to coat. Sprinkle ⅓ cup of the chopped walnuts evenly into bottom of pan; set aside.
2. In large mixer bowl, beat the 1 cup butter and granulated sugar at medium speed until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs, one at a time.
3. In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Add optional spices to taste: cloves, allspice, and nutmeg. Add to butter mixture; beat at low speed until well combined.
4. Stir in chopped apples, figs, raisins, honey, almonds, and remaining ⅓ cup walnuts.
5. Spoon batter into prepared pan. Bake in 350 degrees F. oven until wooden pick inserted near center comes out clean, about 50 to 60 minutes.
6. Cool in pan 15 minutes; invert onto wire rack to cool completely. Best if prepared 1 day before serving. Store cake covered at room temperature.

Authentic Recipes
from the
Pack Horse
Librarians!

COURTESY OF MCKEE-JACKSON CO.,
KENTUCKY, DISTRICT #3



W. P. A.

Pack Horse Library -

W. C. Kee - Jackson Co, Kentucky

District #3.

This book contains "Auld Tyme"
Cooking and Canning recipes.

Corn Bread

- 1 egg well beaten
- 3 cups buttermilk
- 1 level teaspoon salt
- 1 level teaspoon soda
- 3 cups corn meal

Beat egg, add milk, salt and soda. Stir untill well dissolved and mixed. Add corn meal and stir untill mixture is smooth.

Grease muffin pan and bake in a hot oven untill browned, very thoroughly. This recipe makes 12 muffins.

By

Helia P. Young
Natha, Tex.

Biscuits

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 cups flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon soda
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- Lard size of an egg

Sift dry ingredients together, work in lard until flaky. Add milk to make stiff dough. Roll to $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, cut and bake in a moderate oven. This recipe makes 15 biscuits.

By
Larene Gabbard
Bond, Ky.

Apple Dumplings

Put on water to boil.

Peel and cut apples into quarters. Make dough as for biscuits, roll out thinner than for biscuits, cut into squares about 2 inches. Fold apple quarters into dough and drop in boiling water and let boil untill apples are tender.

Note _____

Cold packed apples which are still in the large piece can be used satisfactorily and does not require so much cooking.

Serve with Sauce made of sugar and creamy milk. Use flaxseed if desired. If cold packed apples are used the juice can be used in the sauce or water that dumplings are boiled in leaving more flaxseed.

Buck Wheah Pancakes

2 eggs well beaten
1 level teaspoon salt
1 cup sweet milk

Mix well -

Stir in enough buck wheah flour to make thin batter. Drop with a spoon into hot fat. Let fry to a golden brown and serve with honey and butter or syrup and butter.

Old Fashioned Ginger Bread

- 1 cup molasses
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup buttermilk
- 1 egg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shortening - butter or lard.
- 1 tablespoon ginger, cinnamon
and allspice.
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 3 teaspoons Baking Powder

Mix molasses, milk, spices and eggs together. Sift dry ingredients, add to first mixture, make dough stiff enough to roll out. Cut and bake in moderate oven.

By
Lucy Allen
Maulden,
Ky.

Pumpkin Preserve

Cut pumpkin into squares.
Put into vessel, cover with sugar,
let stand over night. Put on
stone and boil untill the syrup
is thick. Put into cans while
hot and seal.

By
Berene Callihan

Plain Cake

2 eggs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening
1 cup sugar
1 cup sweet milk
Flour to make stiff batter
2 teaspoons Baking Powder
Flavor if desired

Separate eggs, beat yolks.
Mix sugar, butter and cream
Add egg yolks. Add flavor, milk
and flour. Put in greased pan or
pans and bake in moderate
oven.

By
Armanda Harmer
Herd, Ky

Sponge Cake

- 1 cup wheat flour
- 5 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 3 teaspoons lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon rind grated

Beat eggs together untill yokes & whites are well mixed. Add sugar, then lemon juice and last add dry ingredients which have been sifted 3 times. Bake in moderate in any kind of pan desired.

By

Lizzie Shorb
Herd, Ky.

Chocolate Cake

- 2 cups sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cocoa
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Sour milk
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 1 teaspoon flavor if desired
- 2 cups flour

Disolve cocoa in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hot water.
Rub coal before using. Beat eggs well,
add sugar and butter, milk and
Cocoa mixture. Add dry ingredients
and bake in layer pans.

By

Dorothy Boken
Mummic, Ky.

Sour Milk Cake

4 eggs
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
Flavor if desired.

Sift together flour, soda, salt and baking powder five times.

Separate eggs. Cream butter, add sugar + egg yolks. add flour + mix and beat well. Beat egg whites till stiff and fold into mixture. Bake in layer tins.

By

Lizzie Bond
Egypt, Ky.

Dough Nuts

- 4 cups flour
- 4 level teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs beaten together
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 cup sweet milk

Make dough stiff enough to roll $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick and cut with doughnut cutter. Fry in kettle of hot fat.

Sue Young
Batha, Ky.

Pie Crust

$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup sifted flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup lard

4 to 6 tablespoons cold water

Sift salt & flour together. Cut lard into flour until mixture is flaky. Add water using as little as possible to get it to stick. Roll out on floured board, spread evenly on pie tin. Prick well with fork & bake in moderate oven.

By

Lerene Gabbard

Bond,

Veg.

Christmas Fruit Cake

2 pounds raisins
 $\frac{3}{4}$ " " currents
 $\frac{3}{4}$ " " figs
1 " " butter
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ " " Brown sugar
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ " " flour
12 {one dozen} eggs.
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup molasses
Brown 1 lb. sugar & use the $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.
plain.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon soda
3 teaspoons cinnamon
3 " " allspice
3 " " cloves
2 rub. meg. grated
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups grape juice
Soak fruit over night with grape
juice

Line cake mold bottom and sides
with greased paper.
Cream butter and sugar
add egg yolks & at a time, beating
after each addition.
Add flour, grape juice & molasses.
Add fruit last & thoroughly mix.
Place in a 12 lb. mould & bake
6 hours at 300° F.

Amanda Farmer.

Rhubarb Pie

2 cups rhubarb
1 cup sugar
1 tablespoon flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt.

Cut off root ends and peel, cut into small pieces, mix with sugar, flour + salt. Fill deep pie pan lined with pastry. Adjust top crust, prick with fork and bake 25 minutes in hot oven.

Elma McQueen
High Knob,
Ky.

Old Time Pumpkin Pie

- 2 cups stewed pumpkin
- 2 cups rich milk or cream
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ginger
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ " " allspice

Mix pumpkin with milk, sugar, beaten eggs and salt. add spices, beat 2 minutes. Pour into pie tin which has been lined with pastry. Bake untill filling is firm. Cover with beaten egg whites & brown.

Elmer M. Green
High Knob,
Ky.

Raw Vegetable Salad

2 cups finely cut cabbage

1 cup raw carrots

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup celery

2 cups tomatoes

1 cup cucumber

1 red sweet pepper

1 green

add salt, black pepper, sugar
and vinegar to taste.

Lizzie Bond
Egypt, Ky.

Patato Salad

- 6 irish potatoes Cooked untill tender
 - 2 medium sized onions
 - 1 green rings
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ tea cup Vinegar
 - 1 tablespoon sugar
 - 2 tablespoons salad dressing
- mix ingredients, add to first mixture.

Josie M. George
Teyner, Tex.

Dried Apple Rolls

Cook apples untill tender, mash with potato masher and sweeten. Flavor with alspice, cumiamon or anything desired.

make crust by biscuit recipe and roll out on a floured board.

Cut in strips, spread thickly with apples, roll up and bake in large bread pan, sitting on ends.

Make sauce of milk, flour, sugar + flavor. Pour over baked rolls and let cook on top of stove.

Fried Bread with Gravy

Take cold corn bread, slice into thin slices and fry brown in hot fat. When bread is finished, place on bowl. Make gravy from neck, sack & cook in fat left from bread. Pour gravy ~~on~~ over fried bread and serve.

Potato Cakes

Take Cold mashed potatoes, beat
2 eggs well and mix with potatoes
and a small amount of flour.
Roll into cakes and fry brown
in hot fat.

Canned Greens

Pick greens, wash in several waters and drain a few minutes. Place in boiling water and cook untill tender. Drain and place in jars. Seal slightly & cook in jars in a steam cooker or in a canner with water over the jar tops. Boil hard for 4 hours, remove ~~and~~ from canner and seal tightly.

Canned Pumpkin

Remove rind from pumpkin and cut into small pieces. Cook until tender, remove from water and drain overnight. Then place in jar and cook in canner as in cold packing and cook 4 hrs. Remove from canner and seal tightly.

Black Berry Jelly

Wash berries thoroughly.
Then Cook untill tender adding
as small amount of water
as possible to start cooking.
Strain juice from pulp. Then
add one half juice & one half
sugar. Boil untill it will jell
when poured on a saucer.
Pour in jilly jars. It is not
necessary to seal, just cover.

Canned Beans

Get fresh string beans. Remove strings and wash. Break bean between every bean. Place in quart jars with 1 teaspoon salt to each jar, fill with cold water, seal slightly & cold pack. Cook in canner 4 hours, boiling hard with water always over top of jars. Remove from canner & seal tightly.

Sauer Kraut

Cut cabbage firmly and evenly into small pieces.

Place loosely in jar, put 1 teaspoon salt to a quart of cabbage, fill with hot water, slightly seal & let stand to sour.

Pot Roast

Take a piece of fresh beef weighing about 5 or 6 lbs. Must not be too fat. Wash and put into a pot with barely sufficient water to cover it. Place over a slow fire, stew one hr., add 2 teaspoons salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper. Stew slowly until tender, adding a little onion if liked. Do not replenish with water at the last, let it mostly boil away. When tender through remove from pot & pour gravy in a bowl. Put 3 tablespoons butter in bottom of pot, dredge piece of meat with flour and return it to pot to brown, turning often to prevent burning. Take gravy from meat, skim off fat, pour over meat, add 2 tablespoons flour mixed with a little water, let boil 10 or 15 minutes & pour into gravy dish.

Pickled Chickens

Boil four chickens till tender enough for meat to fall from bones. Place in a stone jar and pour over it 3 pints of cold, good cider vinegar and a pint and half of water in which chickens were boiled. Add spices if preferred. This will be ready for use in 2 days.

Fudge Candy

- 3 Cups sugar
- 1 Cup of rich milk or cream
- 4 or 5 tablespoons Cocoa
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Mix sugar and cocoa well, add milk and stir untill well mixed. add butter and boil untill when dropped in cold water it will form hard ball. Remove from stove, add vanilla and beat untill creamy, pour on buttered dish, let cool and cut in squares.

Crumb Cake Recipe

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped nuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup seedless raisins
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cracker meal
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon Baking Powder

Separate eggs, beat yolks, add sugar, beat until creamy. Add & stir in cracker meal, baking powder, nuts and raisins. Carefully fold in stiffly beaten egg whites.

Serve with sweetened whipped cream.

Cold Biscuit Pudding

Crumble up cold biscuits and pour $\frac{1}{2}$ cup boiling water over them. Cover & let stand 5 minutes. Add $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sweet milk, 3 egg yolks and 1 cup sugar. Stir into biscuits & water. Place in oven and let stand until milk & egg yolks are cooked.

Glaze if desired.

Beat egg whites stiffly and sweeten, spread over pudding and bake brown.

Old Time Candied Sweet Potatoes

Peel and wash 4 medium sized sweet potatoes. Slice either length or cross ways. Cook in skillet where is lard size of egg and water to cook them tender. When tender add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar, place on back of stove and cook slow untill a syrup is formed.

Jam Cake

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup milk {buttermilk}
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon soda
- 1 " " baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ " " salt
- 1 egg
- Slaw to make medium stiff dough
- 1 cup jam.

Mix thoroughly - shortening, sugar, milk and egg well beaten.

Sift dry ingredients and add to mixture. add jam.

Bake in moderate slow oven for 2 hours.

Dried Pies

use either canned or dried apples.
If Canned apples are used, cook
untill thick. If dried apples are
used, cook tender, sweeten fruit
and lb coal.

Make dough as for biscuits.
Roll out thinly, place apples $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$
inch on dough. Fold dough over
making crust on both sides & fry
in hot fat untill even brown.

Old-Fashioned Nut Bread

1 cup sugar

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup fat

3 eggs

2 cups flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

6 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon Vanilla

1 cup chopped nut meats

Cream fat & sugar together until fluffy.
Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Sift flour, baking powder & salt together. Add flour & milk alternately to egg mixture. Add vanilla & nuts. Pour into greased loaf pans. Bake 45 minutes in moderate oven.

Household
Hints
from the
Pack Horse
Librarians



Household Hints

- 1- Waxed paper is best for lining the bottom of pans in cake baking to prevent sticking. Bake bread wrappers for this purpose.
- 2- Jam or marmalade makes a delicious filling for layer cake. Top & sides may be iced.
- 3- When boiling a ham, leave it in the water in which it has been boiling until it is quite cold. This makes it juicy and tender.
- 4- A teaspoon of vinegar beaten into boiled icing or frosting when flavoring is added will keep it from being brittle when cut.
- 5- Onion juice should be added after a mixture is cooked rather than cooked with mixture, if best flavor is desired.

6- a pinch of salt to very sour fruit while cooking will greatly reduce the quantity of sugar required to sweeten them.

7- When making a steamed pudding put a piece of well greased paper over the top before tying on the cloth.

This will prevent the cloth from becoming greasy and therefore it is easier to wash.

Around the House

- 1- Cracked bedspreads can be washed but they should carefully be spread out on a clean sheet to dry - do not hang on line.
- 2- Porch rockers will not "walk" if a strip of felt is glued to the bottom of each rocker!
- 3- A tablespoon of Kerosene in the water for washing windows cuts grease easily and leaves glass clear and bright.



List of Books in Cussy Mary Carter's Bag

- *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe
- *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens
- *The Young Child's ABC*
- *Popular Mechanics*
- *Women's Home Companion*
- *A Plea for Old Cap Collier* by Irvin S. Cobb
- *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck
- Dick Tracy series by Chester Gold
- *Little Orphan Annie* by Harold Gray
- *Honey in the Horn* by Harold L. Davis
- *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse* by Beatrix Potter
- *The Painted Veil* by W. Somerset Maugham
- *Peter and Wendy* by J. M. Barrie
- *White Fang* by Jack London
- *Farmers' Almanac*
- *Forest & Stream*
- *National Geographic*
- *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck
- *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*

If You Like The Book *Woman of Troublesome Creek*, Try...

One Good Mama Bone by Bren McClain

HOW MUCH DID THE AUTHOR LOVE IT:

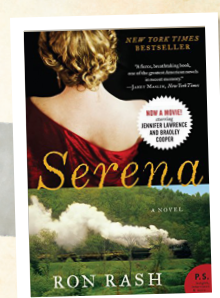
"If you can make me ugly-cry and love a cow like that and then have me walk that book up the mountain to my 85-year-old neighbors who did the same and who also took sleeping shifts that night so they could both finish it by morning, I'll buy and read your grocery list."



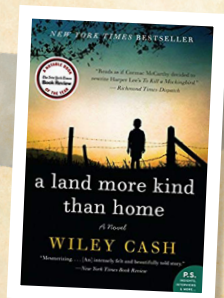
The Queen's Gambit
by Walter Tevis



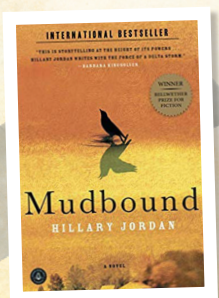
If the Creek Don't Rise
by Leah Weiss



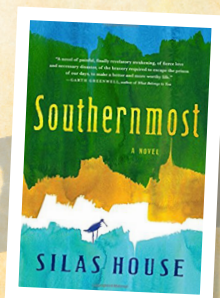
Serena
by Ron Rash



A Land More Kind than Home
by Wiley Cash



Mudbound
by Hillary Jordan



Southernmost
by Silas House

*If You Were a Book Woman,
What Books Would You Bring
to People?*

“Emotionally resonant and unforgettable, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is A LUSH LOVE LETTER TO THE REDEPTIVE POWER OF BOOKS.”

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—Ron Rash,

New York Times bestselling author of *One Foot in Eden* and *Serena*

“A hauntingly atmospheric love letter to the first mobile library in Kentucky and the fierce, brave Pack Horse librarians who wove their way from shack to shack dispensing literacy and hope... AN UNPUTDOWNABLE WORK THAT HOLDS REAL CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE.”

—Sara Gruen, author of *Water for Elephants*

“A timeless and significant tale about poverty, intolerance, and how BOOKS CAN BRING HOPE AND LIGHT TO EVEN THE DARKEST POCKET OF HISTORY.”

—Karen Abbott,

New York Times bestselling author of *Liar Temptress Soldier Spy*

The folks of Troublesome Creek have to scrap for everything—everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt’s Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome’s got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter. Cussy’s not only a book woman, however; she’s also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else. Not everyone is keen on Cussy’s family or the government’s new book program, and along her treacherous route, Cussy faces doubters at every turn. If Cussy wants to bring the joy of books to the complex and hardscrabble Kentuckians, she’s going to have to confront dangers and prejudice as old as the Appalachias, and suspicion as deep as the holler.