

I am the Resurrection

I used to think that if you unfolded all the wrinkles on my grandma's face, they'd spell out all the stories she'd lived. My brothers and I used to visit her, driving through rolling hills textured like broccoli. Grandma lived in a paint-faded house on the side of a hill. It was the only memory left of an old mining town; she'd been there ever since she'd run off with Grandpa. Before that, she'd lived in the small town of Maxie's Valley, and her best friend in the world was Minnie Crawford.

"One of those naturally sparrow-boned girls, pale as daylight," Grandma told us. "And every October the sunrise was timed so that—from her bedroom window—you could see her pa walking back around the edge of the woods for breakfast. But that October when we were fifteen, Minnie passed every blue morning hour down in the woods with Jacob Pritchard, a boy with raindrop eyes and red-brushed cheeks scarred across with burns. He'd been hurt in the same fire that killed his old man, a fire lit off by the men of Maxie's Valley after they'd found Communist papers hidden inside the Pritchard house one night.

"It was a Sunday morning when they found Minnie and Pritchard out in the woods; the men of Maxie's Valley waited until Sunday died with midnight before they strung up the Pritchard boy in an old oak tree, not wanting to stain the Sabbath day with blood. And so it was late that Monday night when Minnie and I slipped out the wood frames of our bedroom windows, Minnie making certain that her sister in the bed beside her was asleep.

"I followed her pale feet into the woods and watched as she cut Jacob down. He looked unearthly hanging there, the skin above his collar nothing but a swelling bruise. Minnie sliced the rope fibers, and his heft fell down onto the ground. We shoveled into the earth, burying him in a shallow grave, and I watched as the black dirt stained Minnie's parchment-paper skin. She collapsed onto the ground, gasping over the grave screaming, 'I am the resurrection and the life, ye who believeth in me, though he shall die, yet *he shall live!*'

"The next day, the first man disappeared. They found him two days later, strung up in an old oak tree. By then two more men were missing from Maxie's Valley. Day by day,

each of the men that had killed Jacob Pritchard fell quiet in the night only to be found with a noose around their neck, toes turning. While she was stitching up a shirt for her son, Mrs. Singleton felt eyes on the side of her neck. She looked to the window and saw a scarred over face just beyond the glass, looking in. She fell to the floor, and when she stood, there was no one there. Her husband was the next man to go. In the town, they said it was the shade of Jacob Pritchard back to walk the unquiet earth. Minnie's mother begged her husband to go, to drive to the city where the spirit of Jacob Pritchard would not steal his life and breath. When the next Sunday came, Minnie's father was the only murderer left in Maxie's valley. All the other men were dead.

"That day the sun dawned bloody red. The way Minnie told it in the town, she woke to see her sister in the bed beside her, sitting up, her face painted scarlet with the roselight. Minnie's sister looked out that window and saw a figure stalking around the edge of the woods. With trembling breath she turned to Minnie and whispered, 'That man ain't my pa.'"

I remember the look in my grandmother's eyes as she said this, the daylight flooding in until the grey of her eyes seemed to swallow up the sea.

"That figure never reached the house," she said. "They found Minnie's father that night, a rope around his neck, and a bible at his feet. His own bloody tongue marked out the book of revelations, and the black stain of blood marked his lips."

"And do you believe it?" I remember asking. "Do you really believe that a ghost killed all those men?"

The lines around my grandmother's face folded like paper as she smiled. Then something sad trailed off around her eyelids.

"No," she said finally. "I think it was Minnie Crawford."