

And Then You'll Cross That Big Wide Mountain

[How it might have been]

by

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This is a story of love, courage, and the state of holy matrimony. It is also about the people who dared to move across the mountains and settle the wild land that would one day be our family's home. I am pleased to dedicate this story to my young cousin, Andee Cooper, who shares my curiosity about family history and who is, herself, about to marry the man she loves. Andee, I know it is different now, but is it *really* all that different?

Good Luck to you both: Uncle Rick

And Then You'll Cross That Big Wide Mountain

[How it Might Have Been]

The young man looked over his shoulder, down the valley and across to the winter sun nestled low over the next range of mountains. “Whad’ya ‘spose makes them look so blue in the evenin’?” he asked, half out loud, to himself. He’d asked that same question many times before. “In the fall they’s kinda reddish brown; in the winter, they’s grey. In the spring and summer, when yeu get up close to ‘em, they’s green. But every time yeu back off a couple mile, no matter what time o’ year, they turns blueish. Cain’t figger it out.”

It was early February of 1831 and the trees on the mountains of Wilkes County, North Carolina showed only subtle hints of coming back to life. The little red flying seeds were still just swelling buds on the maples. It would be another six to eight weeks before they would take off and try to propagate. The oaks still had some of the dried leftovers of last year, although there was a greenish tint of new leaf buds on their branches. So the colors up close were, indeed, anything but blue.

The truth be told, right then John T. Howard was not really concerned about the color of the mountains in any season, up close or far off. He was just trying to distract himself from the chore awaiting him another few rods up the lane. The lane was pretty smooth and dry, considering the time of year. There had been a skift of snow that morning, but it had dried off in the crisp winter sunlight. That was good, because it meant that John T’s boots would stay clean after the scrubbing and rubbing with bear grease they had been given not an hour earlier.

His Maw had done her best to get him cleaned up. She had brushed his woolen trousers. His linen shirt was freshly boiled and a bit uncomfortable, buttoned as it was all the way up his neck. His light brown, shoulder-length hair was combed back and tied with black ribbon. She had checked to be sure his galluses were not twisted, and she had re-sewed one of the gallus buttons that had looked like it might pop off at any moment. Even his Paw's rather old felt hat – the only one he had – looked pretty good. Maw had held it over a steaming pot while brushing and shaping it. John T's protests against all the fuss had been to no avail. "John T," she had firmly exclaimed, "Yeu'r gone look yer best fer this 'casion. Clean man's a conf'dent man." He had accepted her orders, as if there was ever much of a choice.

His sisters had agreed that he looked right nice, though they giggled when he stared at himself in the little looking glass over the fireplace mantel. His brother Isaac teased him mercilessly, as he had during the days before. Now he commented on how *dandified* John T looked, until Maw had shut them all up. "Now go on, Son. And don't come home til yeu done it!" she had insisted, as she gently shoved him out the cabin door. They all watched through the glass window panes, added just a couple of years before to replace the greased paper that had been the source of cabin light for the previous decades. "He'll do ok, Maw," said Isaac, the eldest brother. Her husband, smoking his corn cob pipe near the fire, didn't turn around, as though immune to the whole process. But he did observe quietly, "If'n I could do it with lots less goin' fer me, then he sure cain."

John T gazed right and left and down at the rutted, packed reddish dirt lane over which he took step after plodding step. He looked any direction but straight ahead. On the right, he walked along the well-maintained rail fence, enclosing a couple of acres.

The cow, clearly a month or so from dropping this year's calf, grazed on the remnants of last year's grass. The two big horses seemed oblivious to the cow's presence, alternately lowering their heads to graze or raising them up, ears turning to listen carefully to the soft footsteps of the young man on the lane. To the left, the woods was also fenced, but not cleared. That was where the hogs wandered, picking among the damp leaves for remaining acorns or rooting up brush to get at the soft, tender roots. They made a mess of the undergrowth, but they were hogs, after all. "The Jarvis's always have fine hogs," thought John T.

Thinking the name of the family caused him to quicken and then to slow his step. He glanced furtively ahead to the end of the lane. There was a large cabin, with a cookhouse off to the side. The logs of were well-chinked. A column of grey smoke rose invitingly from the wood and mud chimney on the back wall. The puncheons that formed the door and window frames were straight and true. The roof was solid, with every split oak shingle tightly in place. The Jarvis family was not any richer than most folks on the mountain. But they were a bit tidier; a little more concerned about their place looking nice. John T had heard Mrs. Jarvis say to his own Maw, "Hain't nobody so poor they cain't pick up their own place." Maw agreed, and the admonition fitted her own way of doing things, as the children and husband well knew.

Alongside the cookhouse, under the roofed walkway to the main cabin, was a stack of seasoned cordwood, smaller than in the fall, but plenty to see the Jarvises through the few remaining weeks of winter. John T had lent a hand with the stacking back in October, not so much to curry favor as just because it was the sort of thing one did if

passing by the neighbors while they were engaged in routine work. But, of course, there was that other reason.

John T wished he could put the reason for this visit out of his mind, but it kept bulling back in. He was a brave young man. One had to be brave to survive in these mountains. When his Paw was laid up with the grip last fall, John T had driven a wagon-load of tobacco by himself, all the way down to the auction house in Winston-Salem, just as when he and his Paw had done each of the two years before. His fortune was no better than in previous years, getting such a low price that it would hardly buy the oats to get the horse home.

He was not afraid of the woods. He had confronted and killed a bear with a single shot of his musket. Snakes startled him but did not really scare him. The howl of the wolves at night was a sort of song that lulled one to sleep. But this present task had him shaking in his boots.

He wasn't sure, but he could swear that the curtains of the window right of the door had been pulled back a little so someone could look out across the yard to check his progress up the lane. So it had to be done. There was now no turning back. Of course, there would be the humiliation of going home if the task were not done. But more, if someone in the Jarvis cabin had now spotted him, and, if he turned and left, he would never have the courage to come back.

Later, he could not remember that last minute or so as he crossed the clean swept red clay of the yard, stepped up on the stoop, and knocked a bit hesitantly on the puncheon door. Two inches of oak carried clearly even that hesitant knock. John T was not especially short, but he felt diminutive when James Jarvis opened the door and looked

sternly down upon him. Holding his father's hat in both hands, John T tried to look up strongly into the rugged face of Mr. Jarvis; but even his eyes were hesitant as they encountered those of the master of this manor.

Mr. Jarvis, too, it seemed had on his good clothes. His trousers were brushed. His galluses straight, and his remaining hair slicked into place on the back of his head. The line on his forehead between the whitish scalp and the reddish brown face stood out especially sharp as it was illuminated by the afternoon sun shining over John T's shoulder. Even in his woolen stockings, he stood a couple of inches above John T, his head just missing the top of the door jam. Because of the sun, James Jarvis didn't quite notice the shine in John T's eyes or the slight tremble of his hands that he tried to control by holding his Paw's felt hat ever tighter, defeating some of the purpose of the blocking his Maw had so carefully earlier given it.

"Afternoon, Mr. Jarvis, ... Sir," John T mumbled.

"Why 'good afternoon' to yeu, John T. What brings yeu up the hill on this chilly day?"

Caught for the moment without a quick response, John T glanced beyond James Jarvis into the cabin. Elizabeth Jarvis (the elder), lady of the manor, sat on a hickory and rush chair beside the plain board table in the middle of the room.

"Afternoon, Miz. Jarvis," he said, tilting his head to peer around the towering figure in the doorway. "Afternoon, Miss Elizabeth," he said to the trim standing silhouette a bit off to in the corner beside the log fire, flickers intermittently lighting her young, strong face and firm hands, folded in front of her apron.

No invitation to enter was forthcoming.

“Well, Sir, I... er, I ... I sorta wanted to talk with you about sumthin’ ...sumthin’ important, Sir.”

To which James Jarvis responded, “Well, perhaps, if it is of such import, maybe we ought to take a walk. Just wait there ‘til I put my boots on,” whereupon the door closed, leaving John T holding his Paw’s hat on the stoop. After what seemed to John T to be an eternity, Mr. Jarvis exited, his feet now adequately shod, and his work coat over his shoulders. They walked a bit across the yard, returning on the path taken by John T just a few minutes ago.

The silence grew in intensity until at last James Jarvis said: “So, agin, I ask ‘What’s so important to bring yeu up the hill on a winter afternoon?’”

“Sir, I think yeu know that I am gonna turn twenny years this coming December. And so, as I recollect, is yer daughter Liz.... Uh, pardon me, Sir ... Elizabeth.” It was not working out as he had planned and hoped.

“I surmise, John T, that yeu didn’t come all the way up this here hill and drag me out of my warm cabin jist to recite the calendar. Tarnation, Boy! I know my own daughter’s birth month, and I could probably have guessed yers, give or take a month or two. What’s all this birthday business about, anyway?”

“Oh, it hain’t the birthdays, sir. It... it’s jes that... well, it’s jes that, none of us is ... well ... getting younger. And ... well I guess I mean to say that ... well.”

“Spit it out, Boy! Get on with it. I got plantin’ to do this spring.”

“Can I marry your daughter, Sir?” He blurted it out, lest the words would forever congeal on his tongue.

“Ye mean, John T,” quieter now queried James Jarvis, as they stopped at the gate between the yard and the lane, “that ye wish to request the hand of my daughter – Elizabeth, I presume, since my only other daughter is already wed to the Thompson boy – to be taken in holy matrimony?”

“That’s it, Sir. I wish I coulda said it that good.”

“Well, John T, I’s had a tad of practice, having had to make the same request of my own Elizabeth’s Paw, Lord rest his soul, some years ago. Then, too, I also recollect the example of that smooth-talking Thompson boy when he came a slobberin’ up here searching for my permission to take up with Annie. But ye got yer point across.”

“Thank ye sir,” responded John T, wishing for all the world to get an answer before he had to contribute any more to the conversation. His anxiety did not diminish the ensuing silence, finally broken by the older man, after a few minutes reflection.

“Hit’s a big step ye be wantin’ to take, John T.” said James Jarvis, blessedly thinning the thickening silence. “We’s knowed yer family since now nigh on thirty year or so. Ye come from solid stock, John T. Hain’t never been a neighbor needed a hand but what some Howard was there to give it. And ye as good at neighborin’ as the other Howards. We all help one nuther out up in these mountains. Otherwise, we wouldn’t make it. Yep, I know yer family. And I know ye, too, John T. Y’re a good Christian boy.”

John T shuffled his feet, dusting a bit the recently shined boots. He was visibly concerned about the possible implications of the conversation.

“But, ye see, John T. it hain’t just what I think of ye that matters in this marryin’ business.”

At this, John T's heart sank. Was there some obstacle he had not considered? Was there competition for Lizzy's hand – competition she had somehow failed to mention during those precious – few, but precious – moments they had had to talk about what they both would call “jes stuff.”? Silence again. This time John T broke it.

“Is there a problem, Sir? Sumpin I hain't been told?”

“Oh no,” responded the would-be father-in-law. “No special problem. But it's jes that I hain't got the last word in the matter. There's the wimmin folk to consult. Now, I know a man is the lord of his homestead. And nothing important gets done lest he sez it oughta. But, John T, I bin married over thirty year. And I hain't never been busted up side the head with a stob swung by any of my wimmin folk. And that ain't cuz I got so much power in the homestead. No Sir! It is cuz I know how to use the power a man has in his family.

“Now my sainted wife do genrly what I say. But that's cuz I genrly figger out what she wants to do and then I sez to do it just afore she duz it anyhow. See what I mean? I won't say that this marryin' business hain't come up for discussion amongst us. We even had a purty good idee that you'd come a'callin' this afternoon. But we hain't really discussed the, how oughta I say it, the *reality* of it til now. Hain't nobody said “yay” or “nay” or “what if” or nothin' like that. Sorta had to wait on you to take that first step. Well, now you done took it. So I tell you what I think we should do. We should jes beard the monster; go back to the cabin; and sit down at the table with the wimmin and discuss it as best we can. What think yeu of that?”

“If that’s what you think best, Sir,” responded John T timorously, losing hope that the issue could somehow be resolved in a less complicated fashion just between the men folk.

“Well,” commented James Jarvis, “there’s sumpin else, jes fer the two of us, I oughta get offn my chest first – or I mean to say ‘yeu oughta get offn yer chest first.’ I hain’t much at talking ‘bout feelin’s and such, but I gotta ask, John T: How you *feel* about my little Lizzy?”

“Oh, Mr. Jarvis, Sir. My tongue gets all sticky when I even think ‘bout her. I cain’t look her in the eye without getting’ a squirly feeling all over. And when I hain’t with her, it’s like my heart is all by itself in a sorta cave poundin’ away all lonesome insida my chest. If I’m achoppin’ wood, I forgit what I’m doin’ and get all dreamy about her.”

“Them’s the normal young man things, John T,” said James Jarvis. “But they’s more important things than that. She ‘hain’t allus gonna be purty. Life out here is turrble hard on the wimmin folks. They does the babyin’; they runs the house; they raises most of the vittles. I hain’t never knowed a woman out here what got a chanct to set for a whole hour, even on the Sabbath. And it be easy for the menfolk to get all wrapped up in they own work to forgit to let the wimmin know we respect ‘em. John T, we men cain’t allus cotton to the difference tween *yearnin’*, which we does with our guts and nuts – if you’ll ‘scuse me for bein’ blunt -- and *respect*, which we does with our hearts and heads. Will you promise not jes to yearn after her but to respect my Lizzy – forever?”

“Sir, may the Lord strike me daid on the spot if I ever do anythin’ disrespectful toward yer daughter. I cain’t promise any better life than what she’s had or than you and

Miz. Jarvis has provided. But however hard it might git, I promise yeu, Sir, that I will always respect Miss Elizabeth – yessir! Til the day I dies. As fer the yearnin’ Sir, it’s awful powerful strong, but it hain’t my big reason for askin’ fer her hand. No, Sir. It’s cuz I wants to spend my life with her. I wants to work side by side with her to raise our chillern. I wants to share my dreams with her and hers with me, Sir.”

“That’s fine and hit’s enough, John T. Now we gots to face the music.” With that, James Jarvis turned and walked deliberately back to the cabin, John T following half a step behind.

“Ladies,” announced James as in a single motion he opened he door and removed his coat to the peg on the wall. “Ladies, I think we all best sit down ‘round the table.

“I prefer to stand over here by the fire, if yeu don’t mind Paw,” said the young Elizabeth.

“Fine by me,” responded the master of the cabin, seating himself on a bench along one side of the table, and indicating the other side for John T, thus positioning the latter so that young Elizabeth was a bit off to his side and slightly behind him.

“Hang up your coat ‘n hat, John T.”

Mrs. Jarvis continued to occupy the one hickory and rush chair in the room, with some unattended sewing in her lap.

“Well,” said James, again breaking the silence that followed the eternity that it took for John T’s hanging of coat and hat, removal of his boots, crossing the room, circling round the table, and scooting out and then sitting on the bench, facing James Jarvis.

“Well, I think we have sumthin’ to discuss as a family. The long and short of it is that John T here has asked for Lizzy’s hand in marriage.”

John T's own hands were folded before him on the table. Now he looked down at them. They seemed as big as peck baskets. He wanted desperately to turn and look over his left shoulder at Lizzy, but he could not take his eyes from his hands. The heat he felt surely came from the fireplace, but John T would have sworn it came from Lizzy's eyes burning into his back.

"Oh he has, has he?" snorted Mrs. Jarvis, looking sternly and firmly at some distant object, well beyond the cabin walls. "Well, might we hear it from him?"

"Mr. Jarvis has said right, M'am. I'm asking for yer permission for Liz... – pardon me, M'am – Miss Elizabeth and me to get married." Whew! He had now said it twice – and once in front of Lizzy herself.

"Well," continued Mrs. Jarvis to no one in particular other than the distant object on which her seemingly distracted stare was fixed. "Well, has he ast Lizzy?" Silence. "Well, has he?"

"Oh, Maw, he's right here. Yeu can talk to him hisself. And, well, sort of he did ask me. That is, he hain't got down on his knees and begged or nuthin' like that. But two or three times after church, we'd stepped off together a little ways, and he'd start to mumble sumthin' that sounded like it might become *sumthin'* and it never got anywheres. So last Sunday, I stopped him and told him, I said 'John T Howard, if'n yeu're 'bout to launch into some big discushin 'bout sumthin' -- I mean really *sumthin'* -- than mebbe yeu oughta take it up with my Paw. I mean, Maw, yeu know how John T is when it comes to talkin'. In plain fact, he hain't much when it comes to talking. Well, here he is. An' he done done it, an'"

At which point Mrs. Jarvis interrupted with, “Well the same certainly cain’t be said ‘bout yeu. Now give the boy a chanct, fer evermore, Lizzy.”

During her nervous monologue, Lizzy had begun to pace about the cabin, now postioning herself beside her mother and in clear view of John T.

Thickening silence again. “John T,” whispered James Jarvis, “hain’t yeu got something to ask Lizzy?”

“Miss Elizabeth, M’am, I... I...” mumbled John T, again looking down at his hands.

“Oh, for land’s sake John T. Howard, out with it!” ordered the object of his affection.

“Lizzy, will yeu marry me?”

To this question, John T had assumed there were but two alternative answers, both of single syllable. Her response was indeed a single syllable, but it was neither of the alternatives on John T’s list.

“Why?” responded Lizzy. After a second or two – a silence blessedly brief by the standards of that particular day -- she elaborated: “Why should I marry yeu, John T. Howard?”

Surprising even himself, John T rose somewhat awkwardly but deliberately and stepped behind the bench and turning, looking above Mrs. Howard and directly into Lizzy’s eyes. “Cuz, Miss Elizabeth Jarvis” he began boldly “I think yeu are one of the finest specimens of young womanhood in the State of North Caroliny. Cuz I want yeu to give me chillern. Cuz I think yeu could help build a new home for us and our family.

Cuz I want you with all my body and soul. And bee-cuz, Miss Elizabeth Jarvis, I respect you completely and promise always to do so.”

John T had just set a personal record for non-stop talking. Both parents turned, a tad dumbfounded, to look at their daughter. “Well, Mr. John T. Howard,” said Lizzy, but a bit slower and far less belligerent than before. “Let me tell you sumthin’. I think you are one of the finest specimens of manhood in the State of North Caroliny, even if you hain’t much at speechifyin’. And I want to have chillern with you. And I want to help you build a new home for us and our family. And, I – I guess this is the right word – I *love* you -- and I respect you, too. So there!”

“Does that mean ‘yes’, Miss Elizabeth,” asked John T, his eyes shining and his heart pounding like never before.

“Of course it means ‘YES’, Mr. Smarty Pants Howard,” said Lizzy with a grin that lit the entire cabin, as Mrs. Jarvis reached up with her own hand to cover the hand that Lizzy had unconsciously laid on her mother’s shoulder, although Lizzy showed no sign of needing external support.

James Jarvis thought he detected a trace of a tear on his daughter’s shining cheek.

“The talkin’ hain’t done,” he said.

“No it hain’t,” agreed Mrs. Jarvis. “Please sit down beside John T, Lizzy, and let’s talk a spell longer.”

This time, there was no objection from Lizzy. John T regained his seat, taking his hands from the table and nervously kneading them in his lap. Lizzy slid gracefully from the end of the bench to where their hips lightly touched. John T’s heart jumped as he felt Lizzy’s hand envelop his own and squeeze ever so gently. She did not let go, even when

his hand trembled in hers. He thought he might detect a slight tremor in her hand as well. And, oh, she felt so warm sitting right next to him. But both young people now gave full attention to Mrs. Jarvis.

“Dear ones, this is a fine and noble thing you settin’ out to do,” said Mrs. Jarvis. “But it hain’t the *marryin’* that worries my man and myself. It’s the *movin’*. We know what you plan to do. No sooner’n the marryin’s done and yeu’ll hitch up the horses to a wagon. And then yeu’ll cross that big wide mountain to the west and never come back. Yeu talk of babies and a family.”

At this point there was a slight catch in Mrs. Jarvis’ otherwise strong voice. “But me’n James Jarvis both know that we hain’t never gonna see or get to hold them thar babies – never so long as we live.

“Mor’n half the young people born on this here mountain has moved on west. John T, yeu and Lizzy have too many dreams and too much ambition to jes sit here, awaitin’ for the old folks to die so yeu can live jes like them ‘n no better fer nuther generation. No, yeu hain’t made of soft stuff. Yeu both got too much git up and go to stay poor by stayin’ here. Hain’t nobody ever got ahead stayin’ here. Why even if yeu managed to clear a few extra acres fer crops to sell, hain’t no way to make money with ‘em. Time’s yeu gets them down to the market, all them fancy plantationers done sold so cheap on accounta their nigger slaves thar ain’t no way free white farmers kin get much mor’n nuff to eat.

“Oh, it’s purty here. And, when the winter’s hain’t too rough, we gits by fine. The injuns been gone for years. And thar’s still some game in the woods, when we hain’t got ‘nuf meat of our own smoked up. The cabin logs are chinked tight, and the winders fit

good, so the wind 'n rain don't come in. I done scrubbed the floor puncheons 'nuf that there hain't no more splinters.

“But hit's all they is. And hit's all they's ever gonna be.” Glancing briefly at he husband, she continued: “Land knows, Mr. Jarvis has been a good pervider. We hain't never wanted for nuthin' we really needed. But young folk wants more than jes what's *needed*. And that means movin' on.

“Now it hain't like we don't know nuthin' 'bout movin on. Why, for land sakes, James's own Paw and Maw moved here from up the valley in Virginny when he was just a tad. Same as my Grandpaw and Grandmaw, did from Pennsylvanie. And afore them was the move across a whole ocean from that turrible land in the north'a Ireland. And, so's we're told, even afore our kinfolk come from Ireland, theys' own kin had moved thar from sum'ers else, Scotland I think. Naw, we knowed about movin' on long afore the idee came into the heads of yeu two younguns. Lizzy yeu hain't said nuthin' to yer Paw ner me, but I'll betcha yeu done talked about it with John T here, even if he didn't proper ask yeu to marry him.”

“Maw, we got our dreams. But they hain't jes *dumb* dreams. We know of lottsa folks what's done it, and the word is theys dreams that can come true, if'n a body hain't askeerd and if'n they works hard. And Maw, and yeu too, Paw – yeu knows that me and John T hain't askeerd of nothin' reasonable, and we both kin work real hard, if'n we knows what it is that we're workin' fer.”

“That's a fact. I won't deny it,” asserted James Jarvis. “So, John T, wheres it at that yeu thinks yeu two can go with all this dreamin'? Kaintuck?”

“ No, Sir. Kaintuck’s ‘bout full up. We wants to head for Indiany. Why, Sir... M’am. They sez that thars land enough in Indiany that ever family has so much they cain’t walk ‘round it in a day. And wundrus soil. Why they sez that in a good summer, yeu gets three cuttin’s o’ hay. And the trees – they’s straight and tall; why they sez yeu can nearly saw ‘em so’s they fall right in line for a cabin. And the water! They sez thar’s clear, sweet water near everplace. And there hain’t no more injuns, leastwise any what’s prone to be dang’rous. They bin gone nigh on twenny year, ever since Tecumsey got killed up in Canada. That was when I was just a tad, but my Paw, he knowed traders what used to be real askeerd o’ Tecumsey and his brother, the crazy injun they calls the *Prophet*. But General Harrison purty well cleared out Indiany way back durin’ the last war with the British. No Sir, M’am. Indiany is where it’s at.

“Ya see, Sir and M’am, we figger we gets a spread started, ‘n iffn it hain’t jes what we wants, we kin allus sell out and move to a better’n. That’s how it’s done. And gummint land goes cheap. Yeu pays jes a quarter the price to start, ‘nen pays the rest as yeu sell off crops.

“‘N sellin’ crops hain’t like it is here. There hain’t no slaves out in Indiany growin’ stuff so cheap that a free white man kain’t make a livin’. No Sir. They tells me that when Indiany come to be a state some years back, they had this important law – a *consty-too-shun* – that said hain’t nobody ever allowed ever to have nigger slaves in Indiany. That means we can grow extra corn ‘n oats ‘n sell ‘em fer good cash money. Then they gets floated down the most wundrus rivers, sometimes clear to Nu Orleans. Why they got steamboats goin’ up and down the Wabash River ‘n the Ohiah, taken crops fer good

prices to towns like St. Looney, in Missouri, if'n they don't go all the way down to New Orleans."

"Humph," interjected James Jarvis. "Last time I heered 'a New Orleans wuz when Kernel Andy Jackson whupped the British back in '15. 'N look what that got him – Presdunt of these whole Yeunited States, that's what. Yeu hain't lookin' to be Presdunt, are yeu, John T," queried Mr. Jarvis with a sly grin. "My guess is yeu'll have yer hands full with jes the two of yeu try'in even to get to Indiany, let lone make sumthin' o' yerselves."

"Well M'am, Sir – it hain't like we'uz goin' just the two of us alone. Naw, they's already half dozen folks ready to load up this summer and head out fer Indiany."

Mrs. Jarvis intervened sharply: "Nuf talk 'bout Indiany fer now, young man. We got other things to look at. One question fer yeu is: Has yeu got yerself a Bible? I knows yeu kin read and do yore sums, but has yeu a Bible?"

"M'am. I sure nuf do." John T's tongue was miraculously more loose than any of them could remember. "I done had it fer since I turned twelve year old. My own Maw saved up and bought it, unbeknownst to me or Paw, from a peddler back then. She said when she give it to me that I'd reached the 'age of 'countability.' I ast her what she meant by 'countability.' And she said it meant two things. First, I had to git baptized, which I done right quick then, next time the preacher come through. And secont it meant that I wasn't a chile any mores and that I was 'sponsible for my own sins. And that if'n I sinned and didn' ask the Lord fer fergivness, that I could go to hell ferever, just like as if I was all growed up. That's the age of 'countability, she said.

“And, Miz Jarvis, I reads from that Bible every night. But mostly, to be honest, I looks at them blank spaces in the middle, twixt the Old and New Testaments. I ‘specially look at the line where it says “Joined in Holy Matrimony” and then a line for two names. Then there’s them other blank spaces fer chillern. M’am, I want so very much to write Miss Elizabeth’s and my names on those lines after it says “Joined in Holy Matrimony.”

Mrs. Jarvis was no longer looking through the wall. She was looking at the unattended sewing in her lap. “James,” she whispered, “I think it is time you led us in a word of prayer.”

The four of them arose silently, lining up before the fireplace with joined hands. And James Jarvis began his blessing of the young couple:

“Our Father in Heaven. We thank Thee for the many blessin’s Thou hast given us on this earth. An’ we thank Thee for the promise of everlastin’ life offered to us by Thy crucified son. We thank Thee fer our daily bread. We thank Thee fer these purty mountains and the spring to come. We ask that our stock stay healthy; that our crops take good root, just as we ourselves have in this Thy blessed land.

“But, Dear Lord, those are the things of our reg’lar life. And we know that Thou wilt take good care of them folks as takes good care of theyselves. No, Lord, this fine afternoon, we ask a special blessin’. We ask Thy blessin’ upon this young couple that they may choose the way Thou hast laid out fer them. We ask that Thou help them to be fruitful and to multiply, as it says in Thy Good Book. And most of all, we ask that they never forget that Thou art the Creator of all we have and the Giver of all good things. Bless their love for one nuther. And hep them ever to walk in Thy glorious way. We ask all this in the name of our precious, living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Aymen.”

“Aymen” whispered the other three.

John T Howard and Elizabeth Jarvis are my 3rd great grandparents. They were married on March 8, 1831 in a simple Methodist ceremony presided over by a circuit-riding preacher and probably attended by over fifty neighbors and friends, in front of a log church in the mountains of western North Carolina. Later that summer they set out across the Blue Ridge in the company of three other young couples, among whom were four children, aged three months to three years. After several weeks walking through Virginia and Kentucky over by then well-worn but still wilderness trails they arrived at the mighty Ohio River, over which they were ferried to their promised land of Indiana.

Their dream came true.

The young couple established a pioneer farm first in Rush County, Indiana, where three daughters were born on the Rush County farm: Marinda in 1833, Mary Jane in 1837, and Louisa in 1840. Shortly after Louisa's birth, the National Road [later to be US 40] came right by the Howard place. So they sold that farm for a handsome price and moved on north and west to Howard County, to homestead once again, this near the growing little town of Kokomo. [I do not yet know if there is any family connection between John T Howard and the namesake of Howard County.] There they settled for good, producing two sons and one more daughter. In 1850, John T bought an additional piece of 80 acres from the General Land Office. They cleared the new land and built a fine frame house, moving at last out of the log cabin.

It is safe to assume that John T read from his Bible to his family every evening until he died, probably of pneumonia, at age 58 in 1869. There was never any hint that he failed to respect his Lizzy right up to the day of his death. Elizabeth died peacefully in her sleep in September, 1891 – just three months shy of her 80th birthday.

Louisa, the third daughter and my 2nd great grandmother would marry John Roe. Together they produced eight children, one of whom was Hester Jane, born in 1866. In 1883, when she was just 17 years old, Hester Jane Roe would marry Abraham Lincoln Kelley, son of neighbors just across the county line in Green Township, Grant County. Their second child was my grandmother Bertha Florence Kelley [Hofferbert].

Bertha's great grandmother, Lizzy Jarvis Howard, had herself borne six children. She had assisted in the birth and raising of over a score of grandchildren, and for nearly two years enjoyed immensely holding her little great granddaughter, watching her take her first steps, and listening to her first words – still tinged a bit by the dialect of the North Carolina mountain. The joy Lizzy got from this progeny was always tempered, however, by a note of sadness, for, indeed, neither of her parents or those of John T ever got to hold the babies born to this brave pioneer couple. To the day she died, Lizzy carried in her heart the memory of her mother's sad prediction. But, she would console herself silently: They had "moved on."

The family never stopped moving on, each branch and each generation crossing in turn its own version of the big wide mountain.