

Mountain Dreams

By Kathy Wilcox



She grew up deep in the Rocky Mountains of northwestern Montana. Tall mountain peaks were usually covered in snow late into the summer. Pine, spruce, cedar, and aspen trees covered the mountain sides. Cold rivers and creeks ran down to the valley bottoms. There was no town that she claimed to be from, just near the Yaak. In a place that some would call wild and untamed, she was at home.

During the daytime, she worked outside to keep her homestead going. In the spring, there was clean up from the winter. She tilled a small patch of

ground and planted potatoes, squash, tomatoes, and beans. Fallen branches from the many trees were gathered, broken up, and stacked to be used for kindling and firewood. The fences for the cow and bull were fixed and broken rails and posts were replaced. She anxiously awaited the birth of a new calf. The milk from the cow was enough for her to drink fresh and make some cheese and butter. The cabin in which she lived was cleaned inside and out. If she was feeling extra ambitious, she would rearrange the few possessions she had: a table and chair, bed, a handful of well read books, and a couple boxes of craft supplies. Spring did not last long before it turned into summer. As the days became longer, she would tend her garden. There was a small creek next to her cabin from where she hauled water to the vegetables. She would spend time in the woods gathering plantain, dandelion, and wild herbs for fresh salads and to dry. In the early mornings, she would go fishing. The trout that were caught provided a delicious lunch. If the timing was right, she would catch enough to can the healthy meat. The milk cow and bull also pulled a sled that could haul logs and supplies that she gathered. The logs were made into rails, posts, supplies for her cabin, and, of course, firewood. The firewood was cut, chopped, and stacked next to the cabin. The wood was not only used to heat the small cabin in the winter but also to heat the stove for cooking. When

the days started to shorten and the grass began to turn tan, fall had arrived. She took the weaned calf to a nearby farm to sell for a little change. This money allowed her to buy salt, pepper, sugar, some canning lids, a pair or two of pants, and a bolt of fabric. If there was enough money left over, she would also buy a used novel. Fall was also the time for canning the vegetables from her garden. Along with the garden produce, she loved to gather wild raspberries, gooseberries, huckleberries, and wild onions. She cut the tall meadow grass and gather it into shocks for the cow and bull to eat during the winter. Once the fall weather turned cool and the mornings were frosty, she would go hunting for deer or elk and grouse. She would dry some meat into jerky and can much of the remainder in jars for preserving. All too soon, winter came with a soft blanket of snow. The woods were quiet and she felt insulated from the rest of the world. Each day, she would feed the cow and bull. She would chop a hole through the ice of the creek to bring them water and provide water for herself. An armload of firewood would be brought inside to warm the cabin. The bolt of fabric that had been purchased earlier in the year was laid out on the table. She would measure and cut pieces that would be sewn together for shirts. The left over scraps were saved for rags or made into hair ties and linens. She enjoyed going for quiet walks. She was happy to be alone. Sometimes she wished for someone to share her life with but she knew that it would have to be someone who was self sufficient also. In the evenings, she would sit next to the warm stove and read her novels. The cabin was only ten by twenty feet but the stories took her to places unseen.

She lived on her homestead for the remainder of her life. Many people did not understand her. She lived alone but was not lonely. She had hard times but felt that she lived an easy going life. She didn't own much but the world was hers.