

PROLOGUE

December 1908
Southern Kentucky

My name is Nannie Womack, and I am ten years old and born in rural Russell County, Kentucky, in the year 1898. I was like most young country girls who did farm chores, feeding the chickens and hauling water. I attended a small, red-painted schoolhouse called Mount Olive, not far from where I lived. My home was a white-painted board building one mile from the school. On that cold December day, I enjoyed walking home with my schoolgirl chums. We girls played hopscotch along the way.

My pappy once said evil comes to us like a low-crawlin' fog. You can't see into the fog, but evil is still there. That day I left school there wasn't fog, but wickedness had a better disguise. As I glanced up, the sky had slate gray pointed clouds moving toward our homes.

Without warning, the air turned icy cold as if it were going to snow. That is when I heard a voice whisper my name. It came from a dense wood along the dirt road to my home. I stopped, looked in the direction of the voice, and saw a large dark figure creeping through the woods. My girlfriends stopped too and stared. We didn't know whether to run or stay. The figure stepped out of the gloomy woods, and with some relief I recognized him as one of my relatives, Elmer Hill.

Once again, Elmer called my name, and he asked where I was heading. I told him home. Elmer wore a dirt-caked set of bib overalls, a checkered-stained shirt, and a dark suit coat. His shoes stunk of cow manure and his face had a bushy beard. His dark curly hair hung over his left eye and on his head was a stained fedora. He said he knew a shortcut to my house if I would follow him. Reluctantly, I stepped into the woods behind Elmer, and then I looked over my shoulder to see my friends, but they had disappeared down the road. He said not a word but just turned his head ever so often and grinned as the woods got darker.

A short distance later he stopped, turned, grabbed my neck, and started ripping off my clothes. His eyes were like a cat focusing on its prey. A fixed stare with no emotion or consciousness of what he was doing. I screamed as my coat and dress flew to the ground and his left hand clawed at my underwear. He pushed me toward the leafy ground while still holding my neck. Elmer then unbuckled his bib overalls and laid on me pressing his naked skin to mine. That is when I saw him grab a large broken tree limb and swing it toward my head. Total darkness came to me, and I knew I was dead. Yet my spirit remained as a reminder of what he did to me that day.