

Excerpt #1: From Ruth White's *Belle Prater's Boy*

Uncle Everett, a coal miner, and Aunt Belle, along with their boy, Woodrow, lived way far in the head of a long, isolated holler called Crooked Ridge, near the town of Coal Station, Virginia, where the Appalachians are steep and rugged. In those days the roads were narrow and rocky, barely passable in bad weather. They had an old Ford, and that morning it was parked on the slope with the key in the ignition like always. Their nearest neighbors, the Sloans, who lived almost a mile down the road, told the sheriff they hadn't seen or heard a thing out of the ordinary. . . .

Coal Station—"in the heart of the coalfields," as the local radio station, WCSV, proudly proclaimed—was a dingy mountain town built at the convergence of Black River and Slag Creek. It was no more than a wide place in the road between the hills. On the town's outskirts were the work yards, where railroad cars loaded up coal from all over the county and carried it to points east and north. That's how Coal Station got its name.

Coal Station only had two streets, and they followed the lay of the land. There was Main Street, where all the businesses were located, running parallel to Black River. And there was Residence Street, the only place around for miles where you could build a house without going up in a holler or hanging it off the side of a hill. It ran parallel to Slag Creek.

Residence Street was, in fact, the brightest spot in all the county, and among the other nice houses there was the one in which I, Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster, lived with my mother and stepfather, Porter Dotson, editor of the Mountain Echo. Our house was a modern, one-story brick ranch, with white shutters, a front porch, and the only picture window in town. We had a telephone, two radios, a phonograph, a refrigerator, a stand-up freezer, and an electric stove. Next door to us Granny and Grandpa Ball had the same conveniences in one of those big old, white, green-shuttered, two-story houses with a wraparound porch on both floors. They also had a television set where you could sometimes see one real fuzzy channel from Charleston, West Virginia, if the weather was perfect. It was the mountains, according to Grandpa, interfering with reception. Surrounding our two houses was a wide expanse of cool green grass and about fifty apple trees which we called the orchard. What a wonder and a joy to behold in the spring when they all bloomed! There were also azaleas, pink and fuschia. Not to mention the lilac bushes down by the creek, and the wild dogwood. People walking by our houses would sometimes stop there on the road and look and look, like they couldn't believe their dadburned eyes.

And that was the general appearance of my world that spring when Woodrow came to us—everything fresh and bright, pink and white. (pp. 3–7)

Excerpt #2: From Sharon Creech's *Ruby Holler*

Dallas leaned far out of the window, his eyes fixed on a bird flying lazily in the distance. Sun slanted through the clouds above, as if a spotlight were aimed on the bird.

*A silver bird*, Dallas thought. *A magical silver bird*.

The bird turned suddenly, veering south over the small town of Boxtton, toward the faded yellow building and the window from which Dallas leaned. Dallas stretched his arm out. "Here!" he called. "Over here!"

The bird swooped toward him and then rose up over the building, high, high into the air, over the alley and the train tracks and the dried-up creek. Dallas watched it rise on the air currents over one brown hill and then another, until it disappeared.

He tried to follow it in his mind. He imagined it flying on until it spied a narrow green valley, a scooped-out basin with a creek looping and winding its way through the center. He pictured it swooping down from the sky into this basin in the hills, to this place where cool breezes drifted through the trees, and where the creek was so clear that every stone on its bottom was visible.

Maybe that bird had flown home. (pp. 1–2)