



LETTERS
BY THE
CREEK

JULIE HART

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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BEST FRIENDS FOREVER



The giant yellow school bus screeched to a halt, letting two giggly little girls off at the end of the dusty dirt road. They still had a long walk ahead of them before reaching their houses at the end of the road, but they didn't mind. When they were together, it didn't matter what they were doing. Whether it was walking home, doing homework, or anything else, they had fun. Especially on days like today, the last day of school. Summer vacation had finally arrived. They had so many plans for the summer, and all of them included each other.

One of those little girls was Jewel Dean Elledge. She lived at the end of that dirt road in a small house nestled at the edge of a creek in a place called Blackburn's Hollow, in North Carolina, named after her mother's side of the family. Surrounding her house were mountains that had been traveled by the famous explorer, Daniel Boone, many years ago. Jewel lived with her mom and dad, two older brothers, and two younger sisters.

Being the middle child was hard sometimes. There was always work to be done. Jewel's family didn't have a lot of money. They had no running water, no inside bathroom, and with five hungry children to be fed, there wasn't always a lot of food. With WWII raging, money was especially scarce.

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Often, Jewel would have to babysit her younger sisters while her mom worked in the garden or cooked for the family. She would also help her mom with household chores. Sometimes she would even help her dad in his garage. She would fetch tools for him or sweep up the messes that he made while he worked on cars that belonged to other people. Jewel had many grown-up responsibilities, but when all her chores were done and her schoolwork was complete, she would spend her free time with her best friend, Claudine.

Claudine lived on the other side of the creek in a much larger home. Her house had an upstairs and a downstairs, a large kitchen, and the greatest thing around that no one else in Blackburn's Hollow had: running water from a fresh spring. She didn't have to go outside and fetch a bucket of water just to have a drink. She didn't have to push and pull a pump like everyone else did. Claudine's family didn't have to store their food outside in the nearby spring in order to keep it from spoiling either. They had the luxury of cold spring water right in their kitchen.

Jewel loved going to Claudine's house. She loved all the luxuries that Claudine had, but most of all, Jewel loved playing with Claudine, and Claudine loved playing with Jewel. They enjoyed all the same things, and they liked doing them together. They loved running barefoot in the fields in front of their houses. They loved splashing in the creek that separated their homes, catching crawdads, fish, and other creatures. On hot summer days, they enjoyed cooling off with a swim in the creek. They also loved climbing the tall mountains behind their houses, pretend-

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ing to be like Daniel Boone when he explored the trails leading to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Jewel and Claudine would always find something to do together, even if it was just walking and talking down the long, dusty road that led to their houses.

As they played, they talked about what they wanted to be when they grew up. They daydreamed about who they would marry and what they would name their children. Yes, this was all just daydreaming, as twelve-year-old girls often do, but one thing was for sure: they knew that no matter what happened when they grew up, they would remain best friends.

Often, they would confirm their friendship by picking a small purplish-blue flower that grew down by the creek. The girls knew these flowers were called forget-me-nots, so sometimes they ended their playdates by handing each other a freshly picked forget-me-not, along with a pinkie promise to remain best friends forever.