

Mercy's Rain: An Appalachian Novel

Cindy K. Sproles

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Sproles movingly dramatizes the conflicts between good and evil that challenge the characters' faith in God and each other.

Set in the mountains of eastern Tennessee, Cindy K. Sproles movingly depicts simple country folk whose belief in God sustains them. Vividly portrayed characters inhabit a landscape of pristine beauty and quotidian hardship in *Mercy's Rain: An Appalachian Novel*.

Nineteen-year-old Mercy Roller's story unfolds from 1897 to 1898, a significant year in her life. The only child of an unholy pastor and his submissive wife, Mercy remembers precious few comforting childhood moments. An afternoon baptism by the river goes wrong and forces her to leave the only home she's ever known. Wandering the mountains on horseback, she encounters a handsome preacher named Samuel. Hunger forces her to accept his offer of food, despite her distrust of all men of religious persuasion. Told from Mercy's perspective, the plot reverts back frequently to her traumatic early experiences.

The characters come to life with well-placed detail. Mercy and Samuel arrive at the carefully tended acreage of Terrence Johnson, who lost an arm in a sawmill accident but "appeared to be working enough for two able-bodied men." Isabella, his diminutive and pregnant wife, wins Mercy's devotion with a mere pat on the cheek. "I can't remember the last time I was ever touched with such gentleness," she tells herself.

Sproles convincingly explores Mercy's psychological wounds as her story progresses. Her outlook takes a positive turn when Samuel suggests a symbolic burial of the infant girl brutally taken from Mercy and killed at birth. She names the baby Angel Grace and thinks, "This was nice. It gave me some peace, but it also served to fuel the fire of hate for the Pastor."

Sproles successfully explains the Pastor's schizophrenia by depicting his mother's own mental instability. The characters' Appalachian dialect lends authenticity without detracting from reader comprehension. Flashbacks to Mercy's childhood occur so often that orientation to past or present is sometimes unclear.

This finely drawn story of Appalachian country people deserves a wide readership.

MARGARET CULLISON (Spring 2015)

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