



*Skip
Rock
Shallows*

JAN WATSON

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Praise for Jan Watson

“This is a settle-in-and-savor type of a read. . . . With rich texture and detail and unforgettable characters that lodge themselves in your heart, Jan transports us to a world without modern convenience, where we live with the people of the land. Danger, tragedy, faith, romance—it’s all here in spades.”

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“Watson’s success lies in her ability to create characters that are enjoyable, endearing, and timeless . . .”

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CHRISTIAN BOOK PREVIEWS ON *TROUBLESOME CREEK*

“Jan Watson has a true gift for weaving in details that make the mountains of Kentucky almost like another character in the story.”

TITLETRAKK.COM ON *TORRENT FALLS*

“*Torrent Falls* is a great story demonstrating the reward of remaining faithful to God and His laws.”

CHRISTIAN BOOK PREVIEWS

“Watson brings forth intimate characters with a strong sense of family, obligation, and faith and evokes sensitive and realistic issues. Readers will enjoy the latest journey set in the mountains of Kentucky.”

ROMANTIC TIMES MAGAZINE ON *SWEETWATER RUN*

“Packed with characters full of feminine strength, *Still House Pond* paints a picture of nineteenth-century rural life, while offering a hint of romance and a dash of suspense.”

BOOKLIST

“[In *Still House Pond*] Watson brings together lovable and unforgettable characters, a small-town feel, and suspense that gently grips the heart.”

ROMANTIC TIMES MAGAZINE

“*Still House Pond* spins a charming tale. There were moments where I could not wait to turn the page and discover where the story went next.”

CHRISTIAN BOOK PREVIEWS

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Skip Rock Shallows

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*To the memory of my coal-mining papaw, Alec Pelfrey,
and to the memory of my sweet granny, Julia Brown
Pelfrey. How I wish I could share this book with you.*

Acknowledgments

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I have the greatest respect for the men and women who mine the coal that provides comfort and ease for millions of others. Please forgive any mistakes I may have made in my attempt to realistically portray the mysterious, awe-inspiring world of the coal miner.

And as always, thank you to my family and to my friends, who are as close as family. I love and appreciate each one of you.

*I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth
with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought
up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.*

JONAH 2:6

CHAPTER I

1908

Stanley James knew there'd been an accident before the blast of the whistle shattered the stillness of the morning. He felt the slightest tremor against the soles of his feet when he bent to lace his high-top work boots. His arm jerked and the rawhide string snapped. Coffee sloshed from his cup and ran across the table like a tiny river overflowing its bank. It dripped onto the knee of his just-ironed coveralls. Stanley swore.

"There's no call for that purple language in my kitchen," Myrtie said in that disapproving way she had. She mopped the spill with a bleach rag before he had a chance to move out of the way.

“Wake the gal,” Stanley said.

“It’s early yet, Stanley, and she was up late last night.”

It would be right pleasant, Stanley thought, if just once Myrtie would do what he asked instead of throwing a wall of words up against him.

Myrtie’s eyes grew round as the first warning shrieked. She covered her ears as if it came from right next door and not a mile up the road.

“I’ll go get her,” she said, folding the rag on the tabletop. Pausing at the door, she looked back. “Will you have time to eat your breakfast?”

Stanley was at the cupboard getting down a box of carbide. “Wrap up some biscuits and fix a thermos. We’ll carry it with us.”

Myrtie hesitated.

“Wake the gal first, Myrtie. Tell her to shake a leg.”

“Stanley, you’ve got no call to remark on her limbs.”

“It’s a saying!” Stanley shouted over the alert. “It means hurry up.”

“Don’t be telling me what to do, Stanley James. I’ll go as fast as I want to.”

It didn’t much matter, Stanley thought. What good would a slip of a gal be against an explosion or a cave-in?



Lilly Gray Corbett was awake. She liked to get up early and climb partway up the mountain to attend to her devotionals

under a stand of regal pines. The trees looked down over the valley, where wood-sided shotgun houses jostled each other for elbow room. She leaned against the rough bark of one of the trees, enjoying the fresh green scent of its needles, searching in her Bible for a verse in Isaiah, the one about being called.

When she heard the far-off whistle, her mouth went dry. It was one thing to study about accidents and mangled bodies, quite another to actually attend to one. Carefully, she retraced her steps toward home.

Last night had gone well, though. The baby girl she'd delivered slid into the world without as much as a thank-you. The young mother would have done just as well without Lilly's assistance. If you didn't count the number of births she'd attended with her mentor, Dr. Coldiron, this had been her first delivery—or baby catching, as her mother would say.

Maybe folks were beginning to trust her a little. She'd been here at Skip Rock for two weeks, opening the doctor's office daily, but last night was the first time she'd been called out.

When she reached the end of the one-cow path, Mrs. James met her. "Better hurry, Dr. Corbett. Stanley's in a dither."

Lilly would like to see that—Mr. James in a dither. She'd never seen him break a sweat. He was as deliberate as a plow mule, and he worked just as hard.

Mrs. James ushered her around the side of the house like she was a birthday present. "Lookee here, Stanley. I found her."

Mr. James looked Lilly up and down. “Them skirts ain’t going to work.”

“Stanley James!”

“Get the gal some overhauls,” he said, while fitting pebbles of carbide into a small, round lamp. “We might be going down in the hole.”

Dressed and ready, Lilly hurried to catch up to Mr. James. She nearly had to run to match his long stride. He didn’t want her there, she knew. In his world, women weren’t doctors and they didn’t belong in the mines.

Lilly wasn’t so sure she didn’t agree about the mine part. If her stepfather could see her now, he’d have a heart attack.

The overalls were too long and she kept tripping over the hems. Mrs. James had cinched the waist with a piece of twine, but still they ballooned around her. “I’ll fix them proper when you get back,” she’d said. “Next time we’ll be ready.”

Next time? Lilly swallowed hard. What had she gotten herself into?

It seemed to Lilly that she was predestined to be a doctor. Her mother was a natural healer. Her father and his father had been medical doctors. It was in her blood, if not yet in her bones.

She had earned her degree at the end of May and before you could say *whippersnapper* was on her way to the mountains

to gain some experience. Sadly, the elderly doctor she was to shadow had died just days before she arrived.

It was no wonder Mr. James's face had fallen when he met her at the train station. He'd stared at the paper in his hand and looked again at her. "Says here you're a man."

She set her hatboxes on the platform and stuck out her hand. "I guess you can see I'm not."

Instead of shaking her hand, he waved the piece of paper under her nose. "Larry Corbett? Larry's not a gal's name, and a gal ain't a doctor."

"I'm Lilly, not Larry," she said. "Dr. Lilly Corbett." *Doctor?* Would she ever get used to using that title?

Mr. James held the paper at arm's length, as older folks do. "Humph," he said.

She picked up the two round, beribboned boxes and lifted her chin. "Shall we proceed?"

What could the poor man do? He stuffed the paper in his pocket and reached for the traveling trunk the porter wheeled out. He said not a word on the buggy ride to her lodgings and kept his face straight ahead. But every so often his eyes would slide sideways as if he was taking her in. It was obvious he found her wanting.

Mrs. James, on the other hand, seemed delighted to see her. She fussed over Lilly as if she were a prodigal daughter as she showed her to the one-room tar-paper shack out behind their house. She even helped Lilly unpack, exclaiming over each garment she hung from pegs beside the door.

"If this ain't the prettiest," she said when she unfolded

Lilly's long silk gown and her matching robe. She laid them across the bed. "I ain't never seen the like."

"Thank you," Lilly said. "It was a gift from my aunt Alice. I guess she thought I was going to Boston or New York."

"I never heard of them places," Mrs. James said. "Are they over round Lexington? My sister's been to Lexington."

"They're just cities. Just big places." Lilly moved to one of the two windows on either side of the door. "Does this raise? Do you have a screen?"

Mrs. James's face colored. "No, I don't have such, but I could tack a piece of greased paper over it, if you want it open. It's clean. I washed it myself."

Lilly felt bad that she had embarrassed her benefactor. The Jameses were kind to provide room and board for her in exchange for a smallish stipend. It was all arranged through the medical school and the mining company. Lilly would be here for the summer practicing her trade.

"Goodness, no, this is fine," Lilly said. "I was thinking I might like some fresh air, that's all."

"Best leave the winders down and the door closed. The air here ain't as unsullied as it once was—it gathers in your lungs and sets up like wallpaper paste. But you know, beggars can't be choosers. We're that glad for the work. As Stanley says, it's a clean breath or a day's pay."

Mrs. James took a snow-white rag from her apron pocket and wiped the windowsill. "You can push it up after dark if you want. Seems like the night dew settles the dust. I'll have Stanley see if the company store carries ary winder screens."

Opening the door, she shook the rag out over the stone stoop. “We’re saving up, though. I got a money jar hid behind the grease can.” A wistful note crept into her voice. “Soon’s as we get a bit together, we’re fixing to buy a place over to Stoney. They ain’t any mines besmirching the mountains there.”

Coming out of the memory, Lilly stopped for a second and rolled up her pant legs. She would take scissors to them herself when she got back.

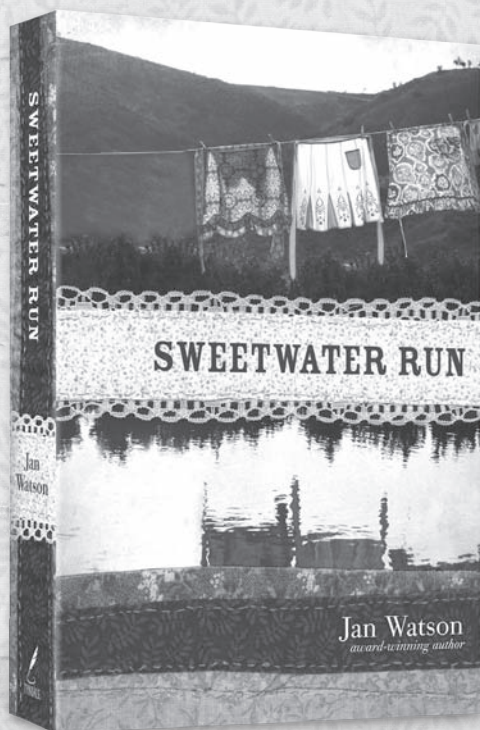
About the Author

A FORMER REGISTERED NURSE, award-winning author Jan Watson lives in Lexington, Kentucky, near her three sons and daughter-in-law. Jan's first novel, *Troublesome Creek*, was the 2004 winner of the Jerry B. Jenkins Christian Writers Guild Operation First Novel contest. *Troublesome Creek* is followed by *Willow Springs*, *Torrent Falls*, *Sweetwater Run*, and *Still House Pond*.

Besides writing historical fiction, Jan keeps busy entertaining her Jack Russell terrier, Maggie.

Please visit Jan's website at www.janwatson.net. You can contact her through e-mail at author@janwatson.net.

When Cara Whitt's husband is arrested
for stealing his own mule, the only man
who can help them is the town attorney . . .
who has his eye on the Whitt family land.



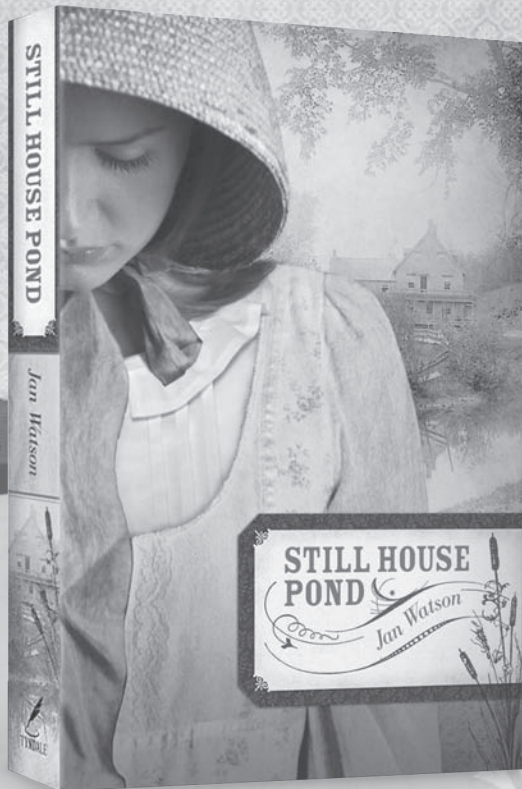
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“Watson’s success lies in her ability to create characters that are enjoyable, endearing, and timeless . . .”

—*Romantic Times* magazine



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