



**STILL HOUSE
POND**

Jan Watson



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois



Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Jan Watson's Web site at www.janwatson.net.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Still House Pond

Copyright © 2010 by Jan Watson. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of woman copyright © by Ricardo Demurez/Trevillion Images. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of house copyright © by Jupiterimages. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © 2005 by Brenda Metzler/Hart Studios. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jessie McGrath

Edited by Lorie Popp

Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney & Associates, at 28540 Altessa Way, Suite 201, Bonita Springs, Florida 34135.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author or the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Watson, Jan.

Still House Pond / Jan Watson.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4143-2386-2 (pbk.)

1. Women—Kentucky—Fiction.
2. Kentucky—History—1865—Fiction.
3. Domestic fiction. I. Title.

PS3623.A8724S75 2010

813'.6—dc22

2010004141

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 11 10

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For David Andrew Watson.
And for the staff, past and present, of the Communities
at Oakwood in Somerset, Kentucky.

Acknowledgments

For my readers: “It is hard to believe long together that anything is ‘worthwhile,’ unless . . . what is infinitely precious to us is precious alike to another mind.” George Eliot

Thank you for buying my books, checking out my books, reading my books, and sharing my books. Thank you for your kind words to me and for your prayers. You are each a cherished gift from the Lord, and I appreciate you.

I loved writing the story of *Still House Pond*. My hope is that you will enjoy reading it.

1

1896

The squeaky screen door slapped shut. Lilly Gray Corbett couldn't wait to start the day. Her skin tingled in late spring's early morning chill. She could practically taste adventure waiting, urgent as an icicle against her tongue.

"Lilly," her mother reminded from behind the screen, "please don't slam the door. You'll wake the baby."

"Oh, bother," Lilly mumbled. Her mother collected babies like other women collected biscuit tins or china tea-cups. "Sorry. I'm going to see the kits."

Mama stepped out the door. "Don't get too close. You don't want to scare the mother."

Lilly rolled her eyes. "I know everything about foxes. Aunt Remy taught me."

"I'm sure she did," Mama said. "Come here a minute."

"What?"

"Lilly . . ."

"It's just that I'm in a hurry," Lilly said as she walked into her mother's outstretched arms and accepted a kiss to the top of her head. "I didn't get to see them all day yesterday."

"I know," Mama said. "It was busy here, wasn't it? I sure do appreciate your help with the new baby."

"He's so little. How long will he be on the oven door?"

"Just a couple more hours. We don't want him shivering to keep warm and burning up what little fat he has." Mama fiddled with the white silk bow that caught Lilly's dark hair in a cascade partway down her back. "He took half his bottle early this morning, so that's good."

"Why doesn't his mother nurse him?" Lilly asked.

"She's trying, but Mrs. Sizemore is puny still. Remember last year when we had to feed that calf from a bucket? Well, this is kind of the same."

"Can I feed him next?"

"Sure, in about an hour."

Lilly shrugged out of her mother's embrace. "I'll be back in time."

"Oh, Lilly," Mama said, "would you take Adie's breakfast to her?"

Lilly let her shoulders fall. She rolled her eyes, though Mama couldn't see. That was probably a good thing. "Okay."

Mama stepped into the kitchen and came back out with a warm plate of food on an invalid tray. "You know the rules."

"Yes, ma'am," Lilly said. "You don't need to tell me every time."

"Don't be sassy. You're not too big for me to turn over my knee."

Like she would, Lilly thought as she walked down the steps carefully balancing the biscuits at the edge of the plate. If Mama ever spanked her, she didn't remember. Even her brother, Jack, didn't get more than a pat on the fanny, and he surely needed it.

It was out of her way to the one-room cabin where Adie stayed. She hoped the door was closed so she didn't have to take the food back to the house. She didn't exactly understand what was wrong with Adie, but it had something to do with germs. None of the children were allowed to breathe the same air Adie did. Manda, Mama's hired girl, wasn't allowed to go in there either, although she was nearly grown-up. It sure was hard to figure Mama's thinking. Sometimes Lilly worried when Mama and Aunt Remy went to care for Adie. She wondered if they would get sick.

The tiny cabin looked forlorn sitting way back under the pines. The door was closed tight. Goody! Lilly set the plate on a table by the door, then knocked. Adie knew what she was supposed to do. She wouldn't come out until Lilly was gone.

Lilly hopped down the stepping stone and hurried toward

the barnyard. She had plenty of time before the baby needed his bottle, time to check on the foxes and spring some traps. Good thing her mother had not caught on to the trap-springing part. Lilly didn't think she would approve. She would say it was too dangerous.

Unlatching the door to the shed beside the barn, Lilly retrieved a piece of toweling and the walking stick she kept there along with various other things like dented pie tins, wooden boxes, and a couple of wire animal pens Daddy John had made for her projects. The boxes and pens were empty for the moment.

The shed sat on a dry-stacked rock foundation. The mother fox had discovered a hole in the underpinning at the back of the small building and chose to deliver her kits under there. They were almost a week old now. Aunt Remy said the mother would be moving them soon. Lilly would have to remind Daddy not to replace the rocks in case the mother fox wanted to use the hole again.

Lilly spread the towel on the ground and straightened the corners. Satisfied, she removed an egg from her pocket before she lay down on the towel. Squinting against the gloom, she looked underneath the shed. The kits slept huddled together in a bundle of reddish fluff. She could make out two pointed noses and one long tail. She wished she could hold them. Wonder where the mother was? A flash of red at the corner of her eye gave the answer to that.

With slow and easy movements, she stood and folded her towel. She'd have to leave the egg in the grass rather than

putting it in the hole as she had intended. The mother fox might abandon her babies if she felt threatened. That would be too sad. Lilly's tongue formed the series of soft clicks Aunt Remy had taught her to use around animals. It sent a soothing message.

Down at the creek she looked for turtles and tadpoles. The water was swift and muddy this morning, so she didn't have any luck. It would clear up soon. Right now it still carried silt and other debris from the bad storm on Sunday. The water sang a pretty song though and kept her company as she tromped upstream to search for snares. It was hard to believe Daddy John had once trapped animals and even harder to imagine her mother had helped him. Now someone else left traps along the creek on their property. She'd send him packing if she ever found out who it was.

There! A short chain partially covered by dead leaves was staked to the ground—deadly steel teeth lay in wait for some hapless creature searching for a cool drink of water. Scouting around, she found a stout stick and poked it into the mouth. The trap's vicious jaws snapped like a wild thing and set her heart to thumping. She wanted in the worst way to take the sprung trap and fling it down a sinkhole, but Daddy John said it was stealing to take someone else's property no matter what your reasoning. She heaved a big stone at it instead, relishing the scraping crunch of rock against metal. She wouldn't tell Daddy about that. Nobody needed to know every single thing she did.

Shading her eyes, she checked the rise in the sun. It looked

like she'd been gone right at an hour. She'd better hurry if she wanted to feed the baby.

Yesterday was the first time she'd seen a baby so new it still had cheesy, sticky stuff all over it. Mama called that *vernix*. Lilly got to help with the bath. The baby was long and skinny with a pointed head, but it seemed his mother liked him anyway.

When he was clean and oiled, Mama put a belly binder on him before wrapping him snug as a bug in a warmed receiving blanket. Mrs. Sizemore was all weak smiles when Mama handed him over, despite the fact she had been screaming just a short time before. Lilly had heard all the commotion from the porch, where she was entertaining her brother and sisters. Usually Mama went to other people's houses to catch babies, but Mrs. Sizemore had something called complications. She had been living in the sickroom in the back of the house for days. Mama told Aunt Remy it was touch and go. Lilly wasn't worried though. Her mama could make anything better. And what she couldn't fix, Aunt Remy could.

Last summer Lilly had found a beautiful orange and black butterfly lying by the side of the road. His wings didn't flutter when she blew on them, but when she knelt for a closer look, his antennae twitched. She carried him home carefully cupped in her palm. Mama soaked a piece of cotton gauze in sugar water and set it in the window. She perched the butterfly on top. Lilly sat on the window seat reading a book about insects and their habitats while she waited. In a couple of hours the monarch was spreading his wings, looking ever so happy. Lilly set him free in the flower garden beside the porch.

Swishing the tall grasses and weeds with her walking stick, she warned snakes of her approach. Daddy John had carved the stick for her eleventh birthday last November. It was white sycamore and just her size. A dry rattle from near a rotted stump gave a warning back to her. She took the long way around and called, "Sorry, Mr. Snake. Sorry to disturb your morning." She scripted the air with her stick as if writing the new word she'd just learned. "*Avouch*," she said. "I *avouch* I won't bother you again today."

When she got back to the house, she stared at her dress in dismay. Stickrights covered the hem and smattered the ankles of her dark hose. "Mama," she yelled.

Instead of her mother, her sister Mazy popped out the door, closely followed by her spitting image, Molly. "Mama's feedin' the baby."

"We helping," Molly chimed in. The twins were three, and they talked up a storm. Lilly could decipher their chatter better than anyone.

"Bother," Lilly said, pushing around her sisters and heading through the door to her mother. "You said I could feed him."

"Sorry. He was hungry. Want to finish?"

Lilly flounced toward the room she shared with her sisters. "No! Everything's ruined now." She closed the door, but she didn't slam it like she wanted to. Mrs. Sizemore might be resting. She plopped down on the side of her bed and looked out the window. Jack was sitting alone in the tree swing, flailing his short legs to no avail. Maybe she'd go give him a push.

Mama nudged the door open with her elbow. “You want to burp him?”

“Look,” Lilly said as tears flowed. “Just look at my dress tail.”

“Didn’t I warn you about wearing your church clothes for every day?” Mama asked.

Lilly tucked her chin. “Yes, ma’am, but I couldn’t resist.”

“Take it off and I’ll pick sticker weeds while you burp Jumbo here.”

Lilly laughed as she pulled her dress over her head. “He’s too skinny to be a Jumbo.”

Mama put the baby in Lilly’s arms with his head on Lilly’s shoulder. She made a patting motion on the baby’s back.

Lilly patted. “Is this too hard?”

A funny sound came from the baby. His rounded chin bounced on Lilly’s shoulder.

Mazy and Molly giggled. “Brrrurp,” they said in unison.

“Sounds just right.” Mama bent over the skirt of the weed-covered dress. “Forevermore, Lilly, where did you go, anyway?”

Uh-oh, Mama was getting curious. “Why is Jack outside all by his lonesome?” she asked.

“Jack?” Mama swiveled toward the window. She raised the sash. “Son, what are you doing out there?”

Jack flung himself around and around, twisting the swing’s ropes ever tighter. The ropes released, twirling Jack like a tornado.

“He’s going to fall off and crack like an egg,” Lilly said.

“Like Hunky Dunky?” Mazy asked.

“Yes,” Lilly said, “just like Humpty Dumpty.”

“I need to remind your daddy to lengthen the ropes,” Mama said. “That swing’s too high for Jack.”

“The swing’s not too high.” Lilly thumped the baby’s back. “Jack’s too short.”

“Don’t be telling him that. For a four-year-old he’s got a big attitude.” Mama shook the dress out the open window. “There, good as new. Stick out your feet.”

Mama pulled at least a million stickers from Lilly’s hose.

“Why do you imagine God made sticktights?” Lilly asked.

“Probably to remind girls of places they have no business being. You’d best pull your hose off and wash your feet and legs. You’ll itch to death if these nettles scraped your skin.”

“Bath?” Mazy jumped up and down, her silky blonde hair flying. “We go swimming?”

Jack climbed over the windowsill and tumbled headfirst to the floor. “I’m drunk.”

“John William Pelfrey,” Mama said in her sternest voice, “do you want me to wash your mouth out with soap?”

“Soap?” Molly said. “Blow bubbles?”

Mama laid Lilly’s pretty dress across the bed, shut the window, uprighted Jack, and took Jumbo from Lilly. “Forevermore,” she said.

It was like a party at the supper table. Manda had cooked Lilly’s favorite chicken and dumplings. Plus, Reverend Jasper and his wife and family had stopped by, as well as three of

the Sheltons. Mama insisted they all stay for the meal. Daddy brought in chairs from the porch. That made fifteen, but the little kids didn't need chairs. They could sit on laps and eat off other people's plates. She probably shouldn't count Aunt Remy either because she kept leaving the table to check on Mrs. Sizemore and Jumbo.

The last time Aunt Remy jumped up, Manda covered her plate with a tea towel. Mama would have reprimanded Lilly if she had left the table without being excused, but nobody ever fussed at Aunt Remy. Besides, she was an adult even if she was child-size. Lilly would be glad when she was a grown-up and could do as she pleased.

After supper, all the kids played Mother, may I? in the front yard while the adults settled on the porch to talk. Jay Shelton got to be mother because he was company, and company came first. He drew broom straws with Kate Jasper and won. Lilly could tell Kate was miffed, but she was always upset over something. Lilly thought it was because Kate was the baby of the family.

It would have been more fun if Manda played with them, but she was sharing a bench with Gurney Jasper. Funny, Manda had nearly scooted over the side of the bench. Maybe she didn't like Gurney being so close. So it was Lilly, Kate, Jay and his little brother, Wilton, and Jack who were playing, and Molly and Mazy who were getting in the way. That's why she needed Manda.

"Take two giant steps," Jay called. "Take five baby steps." Finally he sang, "Take ten scissor steps." Lilly's favorite.

“Mother, may I?” she sang back.

“Yes, you may,” Jay said.

Lilly maneuvered a quick cross-step but got tangled up with Mazy.

Kate, who was Lilly’s age and her best friend, easily passed everyone else.

“Go back,” Jay demanded. “You forgot to say ‘Mother, may I?’”

Kate stomped back to where they’d started while Lilly happily crossed the finish line. Now she got to be mother and call out the orders. She did her call outs all in baby steps so the little ones would have a chance. “Yay for Jack,” she yelled when he was first. He had a big grin on his face.

Over Jack’s head, she saw Aunt Remy open the door and motion for Mama. She hurried into the house followed closely by Brother Jasper, who thumbed through the pages of his big black Bible as he went. Mrs. Jasper knelt beside her chair and folded her hands in prayer.

Manda came out in the yard to get Jack and the twins. “It’s time to wash your feet for bed,” she told them in her I-mean-business voice.

Lilly went to sit on the porch steps with Kate, Jay, and Wilton.

“What’s wrong?” Kate whispered.

Lilly thought she knew, but she didn’t answer. She didn’t want to talk about it.

About the Author

A RETIRED REGISTERED nurse of twenty-five years, Jan Watson specialized in the care of newborns and their mothers. She attends Tates Creek Christian Church and lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Jan has three grown sons and a daughter-in-law.

Still House Pond follows *Sweetwater Run* and the Troublesome Creek series, which includes *Troublesome Creek*, *Willow Springs*, and *Torrent Falls*. Her awards include the 2004 Christian Writers Guild Operation First Novel contest and second place in the 2006 Inspirational Readers Choice Contest sponsored by the Faith, Hope, and Love Chapter of the RWA. *Troublesome Creek* was also a nominee for the Kentucky Literary Awards in 2006. *Willow Springs* was selected for *Library Journal's* Best Genre Fiction category in 2007.

Jan's hobbies are reading, antiquing, and taking long walks with her Jack Russell terrier, Maggie.

Jan invites you to visit her Web site at www.janwatson.net. You can contact her through e-mail at author@janwatson.net.