



“THE POWER OF MOONLIGHT”

by Debbie Kuhn

Bobby Lee Blackburn got killed exactly three weeks before he was to marry his childhood sweetheart at the New Hope Baptist Church. He died just the way he feared he would—deep underground, alone in the dark, his body entombed forever.

Priscilla Stevens had decided to worship Bobby Lee when they were seven years old. On the day she fell in love, he’d been chasing her around Old Man Griffey’s fish pond and she’d tripped and fallen in. Bobby Lee had grabbed hold of her long, strawberry-blonde ponytail and had yanked her out of the water before she could drown.

That boy would always be her hero, even after he broke her heart.

The first time he left her was when they were twelve. His daddy found a better job over in Virginia, and he and his parents moved away from Harlan County. Priscilla had cried herself to sleep every night for two weeks, keeping her Granny Maeve awake.

About a month after Bobby Lee had gone away, the old lady woke Priscilla late one night and told her they'd be taking a walk up the winding mountain trail behind their farmhouse. The two of them sneaked down the back staircase and left without waking Priscilla's mother.

The full October moon revealed the goldenrod in bloom, and the air smelled crisp and clean and dry. Granny Maeve's knees cracked and popped a little during the climb, but otherwise no sound could be heard except for a light wind rustling through the trees. Nestled in the narrow valley below, the coal town of Russell Fork had fallen silent, with only a few lights left twinkling to give away its presence.

They kept going until they reached a rocky plateau, barren except for a lone sycamore tree. Granny Maeve found a large flat stone to sit on and motioned for Priscilla to join her.

"This spot will do. We can see the Blood Moon and it can see us."

Priscilla wondered why it was called a Blood Moon when it wasn't even red, but she stayed quiet and watched as her grandma fished around in the pockets of her gray wool sweater. The old woman pulled out a small vial of what she called her "sacred" oil, and then a photograph. The picture had been taken at Priscilla's birthday party in January. Her mother, Dorie, had snapped a photo of Priscilla and Bobby Lee sitting next to each other at the kitchen table. Priscilla was leaning forward, getting ready to blow out the candles on her chocolate cake.

"An only child and an only child," Granny Maeve muttered. She smeared a dab of oil onto the picture and handed it to Priscilla. "You want your friend to come home again, don't

you?”

Pris stared at her grandmother, and nodded.

“Well, you can use the power of moonlight just like your granny can. Most folks around here don’t believe in such things, and them that do don’t think it’s right to use the gift, so you best keep quiet about what we’re up to--don’t you even tell your mama.”

“I promise I won’t, Granny.”

“All right, then. For this spell to work, the moonlight’s power has to be mixed with the truth, girl, and the truth is in your tears. You have to cry for Bobby Lee if you want him back--show your love and your need for him--and let your tears fall like rain on that picture so he knows how you feel.”

Pris held the photograph up close to her face. Moonlight reflected off the shiny oiled surface. Bobby Lee’s perfect dark eyes smiled up at her. She missed him so much her body ached with the pain.

The tears came easy.

Granny Maeve patted her gently on the back as she sobbed. “That’s good, my darlin’ . Now talk to him, out loud, and tell him what you want.”

Pris took a deep, shaky breath, tasting the saltiness of her own tears. She gazed up at the moon’s brilliant face.

“Bobby Lee, come back to me. Come back to me, please.”

She repeated the phrases several times until her grandma told her she could stop. Wispy gray clouds had drifted across the moon.

“There now, child. It’s done.”

Granny Maeve spoke the truth. Bobby Lee and his parents moved back to Russell Fork

right before Christmas, giving Priscilla the best present she had ever received.

During their sophomore year in high school, Bobby Lee fell for Kara Chambers. Priscilla wasn't surprised--Kara was half-Korean and seemed exotic compared to all the other girls they knew. Her family had made a lot of money during the coal boom of '74. Now they owned the flower shop in town and they also ran a catering business out of their grocery store.

Everybody talked about how perfect Kara and Bobby Lee were for each other and what a striking couple they made with their dark good looks. It wounded Priscilla to see them together, but she felt certain that one day Bobby Lee would realize Kara wasn't right for him and that his best friend was also his true soul mate.

Even though Granny Maeve could have shown her how to speed up such an epiphany, Priscilla didn't want to win Bobby Lee's heart by using magic. No, his love for her had to be real or it would never last.

It was better to remain hopeful and suffer the wait.

In the meantime, Priscilla learned all she could from her grandmother about the power of moonlight. She dated a few boys who bored her and a few who didn't. She talked to Bobby Lee whenever he made time for her. She never complained about the times he wouldn't.

And when Kara dumped Bobby Lee right before graduation, Priscilla was there to pick up all the fragile little pieces of his heart. In June--on the summer solstice--she took him for a drive up to the top of Black Mountain, the highest peak in Kentucky. Priscilla made love to Bobby Lee on a rough blanket under the Rose Moon. He was her first.

She opened his eyes. He opened his heart.

Pris felt the power of their love and knew it was real.

“Bobby Lee, will you marry me?”

Read the entire story in the Apex Publications anthology Harlan County Horrors, which is scheduled to be released October 1, 2009. This book is now available for pre-order - check Deb's recent news page for details and ordering info.

