

NATURE OF THE BEAST

**EIGHTH NOVEL in the
MOCKINGBIRD HILL Series**

BY

DOROTHY K MORRIS

This is a work of fiction. All persons, places, institutions and events are either the result of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious manner.

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To Cathy and Diane

NOTE TO READERS

We had no sooner completed the publication of *From The Far Places* on August 27, 2015, when this book began to enter my mind. Without a break, in exactly three months, my characters told me this story. I have never had a book come so fast. I wrote The End to the first draft on Nov. 27, 2015, and immediately began rewrites.

As my cover photos show, this book is about contrasts. Here we are again reading about situations and customs of early South Carolina that we missed in our history classes in high school: those names, dates and places that all ran together and we soon forgot. It is altogether different for me now when I read a comprehensive history of South Carolina, from its inception through the Civil War, and learn the nitty gritty of life during those times. Ever changing, ever growing, ever contentious, brave and bold, full of contradictions and contrast, was and is South Carolina.

I take my information mostly from two works. One was written by Walter Edgar, and it is a history of the state. The other was written by William Willis Boddie and it is about only the district of Williamsburg. Williamsburg, the area of my fictional Black River Township, is

the focal point of this book—its beginning and how its people and customs affected and helped to shape the state. The characters bring these stale old facts to life.

Both of the above noted histories tell in detail of the harsh life lived by many of the women in the early colony, and even later on until probably, the TVA brought electricity to the South. I grew up there and I know from personal experience how women, both black and white, in rural communities, worked, bore children and tended their families in the continuing hardships of country life.

Shall we begin another adventure in our Mockingbird Hill Epic?

PROLOGUE

IN THE YEAR Seventeen Hundred and Thirty Five, England was firmly established in the colonies along the Atlantic coast, in well settled towns and area close to these towns. The land away from the coast, called the back country, or frontier, was a different matter altogether. It was Indian land and England, Spain and France fought over it with each other and with native tribes and nations. Spanish and French constantly attempted to encroach on land held by England, or to entice Indians to fight with them to either take land from the English or to settle it before them. This was a crucial time in the South Carolina colony.

On the southern frontier, Georgia was a brand new English colony, begun in 1733, and the original colonists included some of the first Jewish people in the colonies. This was such a contentious action that it was the cause of three officials being called on to resign. Such was the intensity of religious conflict in the colonies. Before the colonists settled in what is now Savannah, only John and Mary Musgrove lived a lonely life there, trading with the Creek Indians. The purpose of this new colony was to hold the Spanish in Florida and prevent them

from moving north into Carolina, which was the frontier, both south and west.

In Carolina there were scattered settlements inland with people from New England, freed indentured people, and criminals who had been sentenced to the colonies and had served their time. There were a few scattered settlements of Scots-Irish, but the land was still wide open and vulnerable. King George II took action. He established many small townships around Charles Town, inland and in the back country. One of these, and the one that would eventually have great influence on the colony, the state and ultimately the country, was Williamsburg Township.

In or about 1735 King George gave the land in one of these townships to some 143 families from England, Ireland, Scotland, several European countries, New England, Pennsylvania and Virginia—quite a divergent group. What brought them together and made them into a whole community was the fact that they all, in one way or another, disagreed with the State Religion and with the Church of Rome. When they had claimed their township, they called it Williamsburg, named for William of Orange. In the interest of fiction I have altered the name to Black River Township.

**BLACK RIVER
TOWNSHIP**

**IN THE
BACK COUNTRY**

1735

ONE

THE LITTLE BUILDING was stifling with summer heat. There was no wind to blow the mosquitoes away and they flew in the open windows by the dozen. The quiet that prevailed in the church as the congregation awaited the new preacher to begin was disturbed by slaps and swishes of fans as his captives attempted to keep the denizens away. However, the preacher was not perturbed. He was in his element as he walked to and fro behind the small podium on which lay his sermon, the one he had laboriously composed last night by candlelight. It would be his first sermon in the small church in Black River Township in the Low-Country of South Carolina Colony. The quiet that he instigated only would serve to make his first words more impressive.

Sarah and Finian Bradshaw, two of the Bradshaw children aged somewhat in the middle of the Bradshaw brood, sat in the family pew with their mother, Deborah, their father, Angus, sisters Allifair and Hannah, and brothers, Fergus, James and Ian. Baby Carl, the newest addition to the family sat on his mother's lap. Sarah and Finian amused themselves by looking for and finding interesting and suggestive passages in the Old Testament, reading them silently and then

attempting to hold in their giggles, knowing that if one giggle escaped, they would both face the razor strop as soon as they returned home. They did this under the watchful eye of their father, who thought with no small amount of pride that his youngsters were devotedly reading their Bibles. Deborah, not wishing her youngsters to get into trouble for not listening attentively to the preacher, tried to use her body and Baby Carl to shield them from any glance that might have given them away. Allifair prayed that Baby Carl would become restless and begin to fret. It would allow her to take him from his mother and go outside where the air was at least fresh, and where she would not have to smell the aromas of a church full of hot, sweaty bodies. Instead the boy was going to sleep.

“My name is Elijah Crane,” began the preacher in his accent thick from the old world. “This is my first time to minister unto you, but not my first time in a church. I first shepherded a flock in Ireland and was called by our leader there to come here to minister unto you.”

Elijah Crane, tall and thin, his thick dark hair falling over his brow in an unruly mop, slightly stooped from reading at night by candlelight, his hands locked behind his back, walked back and forth again. He stopped and faced the congregation, his hands coming forward to grip the lapels of his knee length black coat as he

thought of his next words. The parishioners waited in anticipation.

"Hellfire!" he shouted, causing Sarah and Finian to slam shut their Bible, Allifair to jump in her seat and Baby Carl to cry in fright. "Hellfire is what awaits those who ignore God's Word."

"Evil! Sin! Blasphemy, Profanity, Adultery, Fornication, Polygamy, Incest, Profaning the Lord's Name, Swearing, Whiskey drinking! Wagering! Dancing to fiddle music!" He dropped his voice as he closed this outburst. "And last, women not submitting to the wisdom of their husbands."

His congregation was now more worried about their own salvation than they were about the mosquitoes.

"These are things that we fight against. These are the things the Devil brings to tempt us. I have been told that some of these things are going on right here in this place, and I am here to teach you the right way to live! Or Hellfire is where you will end."

Little Carl had not ceased crying and Allifair took him from his mother and began to get up from her place to take him outside, as she was the only one who could sooth and console him.

"No, little lady!" cried Preacher Crane. "You sit back down. My message is for women and men and children. Let the boy cry for he, too, needs to learn to listen to God's Word. God

loves little children. 'Let them come unto me', He said."

Allifair sat and gave the boy her little finger to suck. This usually put him back to sleep.

Elijah Crane began his walk again, holding his lapels, his beard touching his chest. Everyone was ready now for him to begin again.

"Yes, we know that our Almighty God has already chosen who will be called, but we do not know who will be called or who will not be. And we don't know if He will change his mind. Can you think that God would take unto Himself a sinful gambler, a whiskey drinker, a man who dances with women or a woman who is impure and disobedient?"

He paused again.

"Your fathers fought wars with the Devil England as their hated church tried to keep you from worshiping God the right way. They took your lands. They took your stock. They took your dignity. They took your men in battle after battle until they drove you away to this place. Many of you have come here from troubled times in Ireland and before that, from Scotland, France, Germany or right here in the colonies. Some of our congregation settled in the North. Some settled up country." His voice softened as he said, "And others of us went into that Anglican stronghold of England—Charles Town—a veritable den of iniquity."

The last word he had spat out with utter contempt. Again he began to pace as he gathered his energy and thoughts, barely glancing at his notes. He stopped and faced the congregation.

“Those poor people have already been tainted by the evils allowed by the English church. Their women go about with too much of their bodies on display to tempt men to evil thoughts and ways. They immodestly paint their faces to attract attention. They all, men and women, listen to music, dance and drink whiskey. They attend horse racing where they place wagers, taking food from the mouths of their children. These are all ungodly acts.”

Preacher Crane paused and then he jabbed his right index finger to his congregation, punctuating his words while he whispered, “And I have been told that there is a place of iniquity close to us. I have been told that some of our own young men are silently rowing boats across the river at evening time. I have been told that they go to a place on the river where they drink whisky, play card games and dance to fiddle music.”

Fergus tried his best not to laugh and Allifair pinched his thigh to prevent it. He gently elbowed her to let her know he was in control.

Elijah Crane resumed his pacing, his head low still, and his hands still gripping his lapels. He stopped in front of his little podium and

gripped it, giving a brief glance at his notes. He reiterated his message.

“We all know that God has already chosen many to be with Him in everlasting life. These will assuredly avoid that hellfire. You might ask, ‘then what does it matter what we do if God has already decided on our fates?’ But it does matter for God in his wisdom has sent down His grace so that others may be selected as well. Perhaps He gave more to some than He gave to others. That means that those with less must try harder than all others to be righteous and pure. Just because some have already been chosen does not mean that others will not be called. He has offered Grace to all and universal salvation from damnation. But it has to be earned and this salvation will not be earned by living in sinful ways. We must all guard against losing our faith and thereby falling from grace. God knows the intentions of all of us. He knows our deeds, both good and evil. Our good deeds He will reward and our sins He will punish with His judgement.”

These last words Elijah Crane said while looking directly at Allifair, as though he were speaking directly to her. Then he shifted his eyes to glare at her brother, Fergus, and two other young boys who sat in their family pew in front of the Bradshaws. Allifair quickly lowered her gaze to the sleeping Carl, knowing that Preacher Crane had just told her that either

he knew or he suspected the actions of the boys and her very own brother.

“And now I will close my sermon, not that I do not have more to say, but because of the heat in these close quarters and because Mistress Bradshaw has prepared a lovely dinner for me. As you all know I am being quartered this week at the home of the Bradshaws. I thank them for their gracious hospitality. Next week I believe I will be quartered with the Logan family. And I will be going to another family each week until my home is completed. I thank all of you in advance for my keep. I wish to remind you all that you are one of the first new townships in South Carolina colony to have a permanent minister selected by the Assembly. It is a blessing, indeed, as other townships must do with preachers who may come only a few times a year.

“One thing more that is important. As you all know, we put the teaching of our children high on the list of our obligations. They have to have education. In the old country we have always put great importance on that. We would like to start a school for our children in Black River Township, but I have learned that our schoolmaster would have to be certified by the Bishop of London. That means it would be an Anglican school. A Church of England school. We cannot allow that. Therefore I bid each household to attend to the schooling of your children. We will have no one grow up here

without literacy and the knowledge to do basic arithmetic and calculations.

“I want all of you to go to your homes and reflect on what I have told you today. You must contain and control your young people. You must prevent them from crossing the river and going to that place of iniquity. And if any of you adults are also going, I will find out and you will be censored in front of the congregation. Now let us bow our heads in prayer to our Almighty and to our Savior.”

Allifair bowed her head and trembled, for she knew that Fergus had crossed the river with his friends to dance to fiddle music. Any one of them, or any one of their fathers or friends could tattle. This would bring trouble to Fergus, to her parents and also to her. Fergus was more than just her brother. He was her best friend and her only confidant. They both chafed under the strict lifestyle of the Calvinist Scottish church and it was only recently that Fergus had dared to disobey and to take the risk. To have Fergus censored in church would be a family disgrace, for then both his mother and father would face the same. Allifair knew that Fergus would go again. He dearly loved to dance when Tyson played his fiddle at Archie Maclin’s Trading Post across the river.

TWO

DEBORAH BRADSHAW, Hannah and Sarah had been up at dawn that Sunday morning to prepare dinner for the preacher. When they came home from church they only had to reheat the greens, which they had boiled earlier with a slab of salt pork. Sarah put the rice on to boil, Hannah fried the chicken and Deborah baked biscuits. It was a meal that came from the bounty of their garden and the chicken yard. There was fried chicken aplenty, Hannah having slaughtered five pullets that very morning. She threw the flopping birds into the chicken barrel until they were quiet, then dipped them in scalding water, plucked them and then held them over a fire to singe the tiny feathers. While her mother and Sarah worked in the kitchen, and Allifair cared for Carl, Hannah sat by the open fireplace tending the huge spider where chicken sizzled in two inches of boiling hog fat until crispy, and the pot where the greens and salt pork grew soggy.

Angus, as head of the Bradshaw family, sat at the head of the table, with Preacher Crane sitting at the opposite end. Fergus, Finian, James, and Ian sat between them, two on a side. Allifair, Hannah and Sarah helped serve the

food and then sat in the kitchen with Baby Carl and Deborah, who already had another child growing in her belly. The dinner began with a very long blessing said by Preacher Crane. He thanked the Lord for his host and hostess, the food, the congregation, for sending him to the township to minister unto the sinners and godly alike, for enabling him to stop evil in its tracks. He gave thanks for the health of the Bradshaw children, and when he said that, he raised his head and looked at Fergus. He saw that the young man's head was also raised and that he looked across the room to Allifair, who was sitting in the kitchen within view. Allifair also looked directly at her brother. All three quickly lowered their eyes as Preacher Crane concluded the blessing. What Preacher Crane had not observed was Fergus irreverently making faces at Allifair during the blessing, and her attempts not to giggle. If he had, things may have turned out differently and they may have avoided a tragedy.

While the men silently ate, their mouths too full to speak a word, the women brought fresh biscuits, refilled cups and glasses, took away empty plates and then Deborah served her famous peach cobbler with clotted cream. After the last bite of cobbler had disappeared, the young boys had gone about their afternoon chores, and Angus and the preacher had vanished to the front yard with their chewing tobacco, Deborah and her daughters sat at the

table to eat what remained of the dinner. The girls were ever so happy to see that their mother had made another cobbler and had kept it hidden in the kitchen, along with a whole platter of fried chicken, until the men had left.

Bradshaw and Crane stopped at the edge of the small yard, inside the fence. Bradshaw was the first to break the male silence.

"Good sermon, Preacher Crane."

"Thank you, Brother Bradshaw. And that was a good dinner."

"You think many of our young people are crossing the river?" asked Bradshaw.

"I have heard tell that a few are doing it on a regular basis. Might be all the fathers and mothers ought to caution their young 'uns. All fathers and mothers," advised Crane, with a hard stare at Bradshaw.

"Thank you, Preacher Crane. I'll give my own boys a good talking to, not that they are going. I keep a close watch on mine, don't you know."

"I am sure you do, but regular warnings don't hurt any."

Another silence came between them and Preacher Crane commenced to fidget a mite. He sent a spurt of tobacco juice a few yards away, resettled the wad in his mouth and scraped the dirt with his shoe.

"Have a thing that I want to put to you, Brother Bradshaw."

"Speak, Preacher Crane."

"You all know I came here from Ireland just after my wife passed on. I came here leaving three youngsters in Ireland in the care of my sister. She has six of her own. I told her I would send for my children as soon as I get settled in a house. Looks like that will be in a month or so. I wrote to her already that she can send the children on with the next ship that comes with more of us from there to here. She said she knows a few families and they will bring the children."

"That's good to hear, Preacher. It will be good to have your children back with you."

"Well, my wife died in childbirth and the little girl is nigh onto a year old now. I will need a new wife very soon so I can have someone to be there to take care of me and my children and the house."

"That's a fact, Preacher Crane. You have any lady in mind?"

"I do, Brother Bradshaw. I would be honored if you would allow me to speak with your daughter, Allifair. I have seen her with your boy, Carl, and she is good with him. I think she would be good with my little ones. The two older boys are four and six. They will need a good woman. Do I have your permission?"

"Why, I would be honored, Preacher Crane," replied Bradshaw, seeing his position in the

community immediately rising. "I would be honored and you can speak to her any time you wish...just let me tell her mother so she can speak with Allifair."

"Thank you, Brother Bradshaw. You give me the nod when it is clear for me to speak to her. Perhaps you might tell me where she came by that name—Allifair? It is rather flowery for one of our congregation."

"It is and I hesitated to allow it, but it was the name of my wife's mother and Allifair was our first daughter. My wife had a difficult time and I allowed her to choose the infant's name. It helped to ease her mind. Will that name be improper for a minister's wife? We did try to do better with the other names."

"With your explanation, I believe that I can live with it. It came from your good heart."

Brother Bradshaw breathed a sigh of relief. He had since regretted giving his permission for the name, fearing that it may cause a problem when it was time to give Allifair away to a staunch member of their congregation. When the other baby girls came he insisted on proper names from the Bible. Then not one man in their congregation could fault him.

Preacher Crane yawned and announced, "Now I think I will have a short rest. After that lovely dinner and this being off my mind, I think I shall sleep for an hour or two. I'll be fresh for sermon tonight."

While Elijah napped, Angus found his wife sitting in her rocker on the back porch behind the kitchen. She had her bonnet off. He seldom saw her with her bonnet off and he noted that her hair was graying. Angus also noted that she was thin even though over six months pregnant. He saw that she was dozing and hesitated to bother her. He sat quietly on the step and waited for her to awaken.

She was already nearing thirty years old. She married at fifteen years of age, giving birth to eight living children, plus two miscarriages and two stillbirths. She had been a busy woman. After the first children came so close together, she had become weaker, causing the loss of the last four before Carl. Sometimes Angus felt a wave of sympathy for her and wondered at the burden of tasks that she carried, but readily overcame that by thinking that each child meant more help for her in the house and for him on the farm. Besides, the Church encouraged them to have as many children as they could and to buy as many slaves as they could afford. For each added child and each purchased slave, the householder received fifty additional acres to his original allotted land in the township.

Their township charter had included a clause that they should buy slaves at good rates. This their ministers preached and encouraged them

to do from the pulpit, telling them that slavery was approved by the holy book, verified in Genesis Chapter 17, Verses 12 and 13, so there was no sin in the practice. The more land they had, the more slaves they had to work the land, the more indigo and rice the landowners could plant. Those two commodities brought wealth to their growing township.

Angus thought back to when they had first come to the swampland. They had been told in Ireland, by English officials, that they would find a township in South Carolina that would be all theirs. Twenty thousand acres across the river from Charles Town, to be divided up between the householders, each plot to front on the river—this would be theirs. When they docked in Charles Town after their voyage from Ireland, they received from the Colony Assembly some clothing, beds, chests, provisions, tools, pots and other utensils. They boarded boats and rowers took them across the big river. There, on the opposite bank they were deposited with all their baggage.

The land that greeted them was not what they had been led to believe. No Heaven on Earth, rather, they met with never-ending pine barrens, impenetrable swamps and such primitive conditions that many wished to turn around and board the next ship for Ireland. Any township would have to be created by themselves. Again the English had deceived them. Many among their group wondered

when they would learn not to ever trust them again.

There being no roads in this new land they were to settle, only a few Indian trails, the settlers took all their goods that had been dumped on the bank of the river, on their backs through heavy rain storms through the swamp, trek after trek, load after load until their possessions had been dumped again onto their allotted plot of land. There were no houses or shelters and they had to throw up hastily constructed lean-tos or dirt houses, which did not last long in the wet weather. They did find many bears, snakes, panthers; even Indians who came to hunt in their old hunting grounds. These refugees had remained, cleared land, planted crops, birthed children, bought slaves, and put cattle and swine in the swamps to multiply. With thrift and their strong work ethic they had thrived. Shipping their precious commodities down river to Charles Town and selling them there, many households had become wealthy or were on the way to becoming so. Even Angus was considered well enough off, though he would never tell his wife this.

Angus heard his wife stir and he turned around to face her.

"Preacher Crane is napping, too," he said quietly. "Did you rest enough?"

“For now, Angus. I suppose it’s time to start putting out leftovers for supper. You going to evening service with Preacher Crane?”

“Let the girls do it. I have some good news to tell you.”

“What? I could use some good news. This one is kicking like a mule today. Has my back in some pain.”

“Preacher Crane—he asked me for Allifair—to marry—to be his wife. Isn’t that good news? I want you to call her now and tell her. I told him we would let her know so she won’t be shocked. I doubt if she ever thought she would be lucky enough to get a real preacher.”

Angus’ excitement met with Deborah’s silence. She spoke after a pause.

“Is it a done thing? I mean, did you say you’d give Allifair to him?”

“Why, yes, I did. He’s expecting to speak with her real soon, so you need to call her now.”

“No way I can change your mind?”

“Why would you want to do that?” he asked. “Allifair is past old enough to marry. I allowed her to stay here, unmarried, because you needed the help. Hannah and Sarah are old enough to take her place. It’s time for her to marry. She’d be better off with to a preacher with three children for her to care for than for me to have to give her to an old widower with a dozen. Now isn’t that true?”

“Why did he choose Allifair? There are older girls in the congregation who would know more about children. Did you consider Hannah?”

“He asked for Allifair because he saw her taking such good care of Carl. Never fear. We’ll find someone for Hannah.”

“Then you tell her. I won’t.”

“You are her Ma and it is your place to talk to her about marriage and all that. Not mine.”

Deborah knew that Allifair was in no way cut out to be a preacher’s wife, just as her Fergus was not cut out to be a preacher as Angus had wished. Brother and sister were two peas in a pod as were Sarah and Finian. Only Hannah, James and Ian seemed to be close to the church and did not buck its rules. She did not know where the rebelliousness in the four came from, but it was there to be reckoned with. She remained silent, knowing that it would be useless for her to protest. Her husband ruled her and he ruled her children. He was a good man and he was absolutely correct in that three children were easier to care for than a dozen, and a younger man was better than an old one. She also knew that Angus was proud that the preacher had asked for Allifair and that Angus’ status in the township would improve, but she knew her daughter. Allifair would not be pleased with this arrangement. She dreaded telling her about Angus’ decision,

but best to get it over with. It was near supper time.