

The Other Side of the Mountain

Synopsis:

When Evelyn Thacker, a recent college graduate, arrives back at her family home in Mud Creek, she finds that nothing much has changed. The Thacker house is still without indoor plumbing, her sister, Faye, is still engaged to the man she's been dating for fifteen years, and Evelyn's mother, Jewell, still hates her. Indeed, everything in Mud Creek, a small mountain community in eastern Kentucky (so small "it ain't even a dot on the map") is slow to evolve. The only thing to have changed, it seems, is Evelyn. Her sole purpose in coming home is to inform her mother and sister of her decision to leave Mud Creek forever and settle permanently in the "the big city." But Evelyn doesn't count on two things: Faye's plans for her (plans that include Evelyn's marriage to her soon-to-be paroled ex-boyfriend, Jackson Bennett) and the unexpected arrival of her "city slicker" friend, O'Malley. A clash of cultures ensues, leaving a trail of shattered dreams, shattered secrets and shattered vehicles. Only a missionary priest with a sense of humor and a jug of moonshine have a chance of restoring the peace, reminding us that once you've seen the other side of the mountain, you can never go back.

Setting: The Thacker home in Mud Creek, Kentucky. Present.

Set: The front porch and yard. Unit set.

Cast Size: 7 (four women, three men)

Cast: (in order of appearance)

Jewell Thacker – the sixty-year old matriarch of the Thacker family, Jewell is quite content with life in Mud Creek, which consists of watching soap operas and weeding the garden. Only one thing could possibly upset her: the arrival of her daughter Evelyn...

Faye Thacker – Jewell's forty-year old daughter and the mainstay of the family, Faye wants nothing more than her sister Evelyn's permanent return to Mud Creek. She misses her something awful – and *someone* has to help her take care of Mommy...

Evelyn Thacker – the youngest of the Thacker clan, twenty-six-year old Evelyn has always wanted something more than life in Mud Creek... and won't let anyone stop her from getting it. Except, maybe, her sister Faye...

Vernon Cobb – a forty-something hulk of a mountain man and Faye's long-standing fiancé, Vernon is "a man of few words." But there's no wiser or better friend when you're drunk...

Jackson Bennett – Evelyn's former high school flame whose reputed bad temper is exceeded only by his penchant for chewing Red Man. Jackson plans on marrying Evelyn as soon as possible. And he will. Once he's paroled, that is...

Siobhan O'Malley – an English professor and admitted city slicker, O'Malley arrives in Mud Creek looking for Evelyn and instead encounters a world she never knew existed. A world involving outhouses, moonshine and one ill-tempered nanny goat...

Fr. Timothy Ryan – the priest who runs St. Mary's of the Mountain mission. Fr. Ryan can be quite the cynic when it comes to law and order in Appalachia, but he maintains his faith in God – and in the healing powers of Irish stew...

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: *The front porch of the Thacker home, a shack set in the hills of Eastern Kentucky. A dilapidated swing, on which a few back issues of People Magazine reside, creaks at one end. At the other end, an old, cracked leather couch lines up under a crooked window. In between the swing and the couch, a shabby, screen-torn front door hangs precariously on its hinges. A couple of wooden steps lead down into a dirt yard. It is a late afternoon in May.*

AT RISE: *JEWELL THACKER, the fifty-seven year old matriarch of the family, enters from the house. She is carrying a small, portable television set attached to a long extension cord. She turns it on, sets it on the floor, and adjusts the antennae until she gets what she considers decent reception, then she sits back on the swing to watch it. We hear the stereotypical soap opera theme music and then, over that, the sound of a bus approaching. JEWELL glances toward the road then back to her show. We hear the bus stop and park and the door open. FAYE THACKER, Jewell's thirty-eight year old daughter, enters from the yard. She is carrying a bouquet of flowers.*

FAYE

Are they here yet?

(Beat. JEWELL is glued to the television. FAYE crosses onto the porch.)

Mommy?

JEWELL

You're messin' up my picture.

(FAYE reaches down and turns off the t.v.)

FAYE

Are they here yet?

JEWELL

Do you see anybody sittin' here besides me?

FAYE

Good. I was hopin' I'd beat 'em home.

(JEWELL spies the flowers.)

JEWELL

What're those?

FAYE

Flowers.

JEWELL

No kiddin'. Where'd you get 'em?

FAYE

I picked 'em up in town.

JEWELL

What for?

FAYE

For Evelyn.

JEWELL

What the hell does Evelyn need flowers for?

FAYE

She don't need flowers. I just thought it'd be nice, that it'd make her comin' home nice.

(FAYE exits into the house.)

JEWELL

(Calling after her.)

I hope you didn't pay good money for 'em! Not when you can waltz off to the cemetery down the road and get any kind of flower you want for free.

(FAYE enters sans flowers and sits on the couch.)

JEWELL (cont.)

Some of them graves even got pretty plastic 'uns.

FAYE

Mommy!

JEWELL

You done too much for that girl, Faye.

FAYE

It's only flowers.

JEWELL

I ain't just talkin' about the flowers. I'm talkin' about all that money you sent her while she was away to school...

FAYE

Well she cain't very well work and go to school at the same time, can she?

JEWELL

Money we coulda used around here.

FAYE

I ain't sent her that much.

JEWELL

And was she grateful? Did she ever say thank you? Hell no! She ain't even bothered to come home in two years.

FAYE

Why're you doin' this?

JEWELL

Doin' what?

FAYE

Why're you runnin' Evelyn down? You know very well that she ain't been home because she's workin' on her Master's degree, and a girl workin' on her Master's degree cain't be runnin' home every weekend a-visitin' her family. She had to stay to school and study.

JEWELL

What about the holidays? What about Christmas? There ain't no school then.

FAYE

Oh, Mommy...

JEWELL

She's ashamed of us is what she is. She's been off the mountain and seen the big city and now Miss Smarty-Pants College Girl thinks she's too good for us.

FAYE

I don't reckon where Evelyn's goin' to school is exactly what you'd call "the big city".

JEWELL

It's bigger than here.

FAYE

Well shit, Mommy, *everythin's* bigger than here. Mud Creek ain't even a dot on the map, but that don't mean Evelyn's ashamed of it. Or us.

JEWELL

Then why ain't she been home?

FAYE

I don't know and I don't care. The point is she's comin' home now.

JEWELL

And how long do you reckon it'll be before she's leavin' again?

FAYE

She won't be leavin' again.

JEWELL

You wanna bet?

FAYE

Evelyn's done with school now. She's home to stay.

JEWELL

(Shaking her head)
Oh, girl...

FAYE

Why cain't you just be happy for her? She's done somethin' ain't no one in this family ever done before. Hell, Mommy, you and me ain't never even graduated high school...

JEWELL

I know that!

FAYE

Then why cain't you just be proud of her? Why cain't you try, for my sake?

(Beat. JEWELL reaches out and touches her cheek.)

JEWELL

I just don't want my girl disappointed.

FAYE

I won't be. I promise.

(We hear the sound of a truck approaching. FAYE stands up. Both she and JEWELL listen for a moment.)

That's Vernon's truck, ain't it?

JEWELL

Yep.

FAYE

Oh my God.

(She picks up the television and plops it on Jewell's lap.)

Quick, put this in the house.

JEWELL

I will not. I cain't get no reception in the house and it's time for my story.

FAYE

Mommy, please!

(JEWELL doesn't move.)

Ohhh... How does my hair look?

JEWELL

What does it matter? That girl ain't gonna care what your hair looks like.

(She surreptitiously pats her own hair into place. We hear the truck pull up and stop, then the sound of two car doors opening.)

FAYE

Oh, God, there she is. *Evelyn!*

(EVELYN THACKER, *Faye's twenty-five year old sister, enters the yard.*)

EVELYN

Faye!

(*The two sisters run to embrace each other. JEWELL places the television back on the floor and turns it on, pointedly ignoring the melee.*)

FAYE

Oh, I cain't believe you're finally here! Lemme look at you!

(*She pulls back and takes a good look.*)

Well, my goodness! I believe you've gotten taller. And thinner. And look at your clothes!

(EVELYN *does a little spin, laughing.*)

Why, if you don't look just like one of them models from Vogue magazine. You look wonderful!

(VERNON COBB, *Faye's fiancé and the driver of the truck, enters the yard.*)

Don't she look wonderful, Vernon?

(VERNON, *a hulking man of few words, shrugs shyly in response but remains mute. FAYE waves a hand at him dismissively.*)

Oh, why am I askin' him? Vernon ain't ever seen a Vogue magazine in his life.

EVELYN

You're the one who's amazing, Faye. You haven't changed a bit.

FAYE

You ain't lookin' close enough, girl. I got me a mess of crow's feet and a truckload of gray hair. Mommy, just look at Evelyn. Don't she look wonderful? Mommy...?

(JEWELL ignores her, keeping her eyes glued to the television. Beat.)

EVELYN

I see Mommy hasn't changed a bit, either.

(She approaches JEWELL.)

Hey, Mommy.

(JEWELL ignores her. EVELYN steps between JEWELL and the television.)

I said "Hey", Mommy.

JEWELL

You're in the way. I cain't see my show.

(EVELYN turns and looks at the television, then turns back to JEWELL.)

EVELYN

You know you can't get reception here without a satellite dish. I bet you don't even know what you're watching.

JEWELL

For your information, Little Miss Knows-It-All, I'm awatchin' my favorite story "Hope For Tomorrow". Just because we ain't got fancy, expensive cable television reception don't mean we cain't...

(EVELYN turns off the t.v.)

Hey! What the hell are you doin'?

EVELYN

I'm trying to talk to you.

(JEWELL picks up a magazine and starts flipping through it. Beat.)

Stop ignoring me.

JEWELL

(Pretending to read)

I ain't ignorin' you.

EVELYN

Then look at me, please.

(JEWELL *reluctantly looks up.*)

JEWELL

I'm a-lookin'.

EVELYN

Okay, let's try this again. Hello, Mommy.

JEWELL

Where'd you get them clothes?

(EVELYN *sighs in defeat. She crosses to the couch and sits. FAYE joins her there. VERNON sits on the steps.*)

I hope you ain't spent all the money your sister sent you for college on buyin' yourself a fashionable wardrobe.

EVELYN

No, I didn't...

JEWELL

Because your sister works too hard for you to throw her money away like that. Drivin' that bus up and down this mountain everyday, totin' those ungrateful brats back and forth to school... No, ma'am, you better not've wasted her hard-earned money on clothes.

EVELYN

I didn't....

JEWELL

That was money we coulda used around here, y'know. I hope you know that. I hope you appreciate what we give up so you could trot yourself around in these fancy new duds...

EVELYN

I didn't use Faye's money to buy any goddamn clothes! I didn't buy them at all. They were a gift. So stop worrying. Your cigarette money is safe from me.

JEWELL

A gift from who?

EVELYN

A friend.

JEWELL

What kinda friend?

EVELYN

Oh, shit...

JEWELL

Well, now, Faye, I reckon your little sister just mighta got herself a rich boyfriend she ain't told us about yet. One who's buyin' her clothes. And you know what they say about women who let men buy 'em their clothes.

FAYE

Mommy, I'm sure Evelyn ain't...

EVELYN

(Interrupting)

That's right, Mommy, you guessed it. I'm sleeping with a millionaire. I'm sleeping with a millionaire so I can have a great wardrobe and make you all green with envy when I come home. I mean, he *offered* to pay me in cash for sleeping with him, but I said, "hell no", I'd much rather have a brand new pair of Levis, because a new pair of Levis would *really* piss my mama off! I should have known you'd figure it out. I should have known I couldn't pull the wool over your eyes.

(Beat.)

JEWELL

I'm goin' to the toilet.

(She exits around the side of the house, taking the magazine with her.)

EVELYN

Round one to Mommy. The winner and still champion. I'm sorry, Faye. I promised myself I wouldn't do that. It's just that she's... she's...

FAYE

She's Mommy.

EVELYN

Yeah. And she wonders why I stayed away for two years.

FAYE

Don't be like that, Evelyn. Mommy don't mean no harm, that's just her way of sayin' "welcome home".

EVELYN

Jesus, it's a good thing she's not on the Mud Creek Welcome Wagon. No one would move here.

FAYE

Nobody moves here anyway. They just move away.

EVELYN

Yeah, well, speaking of which...

FAYE

(Interrupting)
What's a "welcome wagon"?

EVELYN

Oh... nothing. A city thing. Listen, Faye...

FAYE

(Interrupting again)
You ain't got yourself a new boyfriend, have you, Evelyn?

EVELYN

What?

FAYE

Them jeans. Did a boy buy 'em for you?

EVELYN

No.

(She starts to laugh.)

No, I don't have a new boyfriend.

FAYE

Because Jackson Bennett is gettin' paroled next week and I know he's real anxious to see you.

EVELYN

Jackson Bennett? My god, I haven't seen him in... it must be over six years now.

FAYE

That's because he's been in the federal penitentiary up in Ohio.