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Approx. 80K words
Upmarket Women's Fiction /
Family Saga

TIDES OF REMEMBRANCE

by

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PROLOGUE

Steadying herself against the teak railing, Eleanor Hughes stood near the bow of the towering ocean liner as it sliced through the blue-gray waters of the Atlantic, much like the ship she and Richard had sailed aboard on their honeymoon forty years earlier. Remembering, she stared out at the vastness of the ocean swells while gulls shrieked overhead.

Eleanor smiled, softly caressing the arm of her favorite cashmere sweater, which her beloved Richard had given her as the salt-tinged air blew across her silver wisps. Knowing he was watching, she felt his strength wrapped around her, his voice still calling out to her as the swelling tides of emotion began to engulf her.

To Eleanor, meeting Richard must have been ordained by God. His strength and humility first caught her attention as a freshman in college. Eager to become an independent young woman after growing up under the watchful eyes of protective parents, Eleanor's goals and dreams were reasonable: get her degree, travel, and meet someone who would protect, be loyal, and adore her. Richard, a quiet, unassuming basketball recruit from far western Kentucky, was looking for someone who would simply love him for who he was.

Gripping the ship's railing even tighter, Eleanor glanced at her wedding band as she breathed deeply, inhaling the past and replaying their years together like scenes from a film. She remembered their first kiss, their college years, marriage, and their daughter. Kate was a beautiful contradiction, full of joy, rebellion, and sincerity, and Eleanor loved her more than she could ever know.

Over the ship's intercom, the Captain's accented voice announced, "To all of our cruise guests, the weather tonight and the seas ahead remain calm underneath clear skies," briefly interrupting Eleanor's thoughts.

Even though her ship was sailing in calm waters, Eleanor knew the rough seas she and Richard had managed to sail through. She remembered the turmoil of America in the late sixties, while she and Richard remained sheltered within the world they had created at Mount Nebo College.

Although they faced unforeseen tides of separation and disappointments through the years, Eleanor and Richard's love and devotion to one another braved each one. Could she have gone through life facing each of these things by herself? Maybe, she thought, but Richard remained at the heart of the memories she treasured most.

Wiping tears from her hazel green eyes, Eleanor knew that tonight she had come here for one reason. She had made a promise to herself that if Richard were to die before her, she would honor him and their love by doing something that no one else would understand.

Eleanor, now climbing up on the ship's railing, heard a familiar voice.

"Mother?... Don't!" Kate screamed.

CHAPTER 1

In 1968, finding love was never guaranteed in Canaan, Kentucky. Located in James County, it was a farming and livestock community anchored by the town square and surrounded by two filling stations, an IGA, a drive-in theatre, the Farmer's Bank, and a drug store. Old men in overalls whittled on the street corner, and every Saturday, farmers and their families descended upon the quaint, close-knit community in pickup trucks, wood-paneled station wagons, and farm wagons to stock up on goods and groceries for the upcoming week. On the outskirts of town sat Coomer's Feed Mill, Jacob's Slaughterhouse, and the James County Fairgrounds. Eleanor Jean, the only child of Jeremiah and Elizabeth Sinclair, had no choice but to join the weekly convergence, under the watchful eye of her chain-smoking, deeply religious father, who brought his family to the Caney Flat Revival Church every Sunday, where they raised their hands and shouted hallelujahs.

Jeremiah was grizzled, raised livestock and tobacco, and guarded Eleanor's chastity with the fervor of an armed guard watching over Fort Knox. Born to Scottish Protestant parents who migrated from the lowlands of Scotland to Eastern Kentucky in the 1920s to work in the coal mines, Jeremiah was the middle child, with two older brothers and twin sisters. At fifteen, Jeremiah's first job was shoveling coal inside the dark labyrinth of sparsely ventilated chambers, choked with black dust and the scent of sulfur. Knowing his future wasn't mining, he left home and started farming at age eighteen.

Elizabeth, willowy and soft-spoken, knew her place in the family hierarchy, but tried and oftentimes failed to be a voice of reason when her husband interpreted their daughter's interest in attending a school dance or one day leaving Canaan as a sinful, worldly temptation. Elizabeth's upbringing was prim, proper, and socially a giant step above Jeremiah's. She met him at a Canaan picnic social. Elizabeth knew it wasn't "love at first sight," but from her point of view, it was Jeremiah's firm, protective personality that caught her attention. Rough around the edges, he was handsome enough, but

his ingrained Scottish work ethic and seeming loyalty gave her confidence that she would be provided for and not be a casualty of neglect.

As an only child growing up, Eleanor filled the role of a boy in her father's eyes and a young lady in Elizabeth's, resulting in Eleanor's ability to perform and face almost any task placed before her. Her beauty was natural, and her strength was uncommon, built from years of farm chores, baling wet hay, and cutting and hanging tobacco. Now a senior at James County High, Eleanor was a straight-A student, vibrant, spirited, and not afraid to challenge any boy who thought she was inferior. Sentenced to a life of labor by her father, she woke up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to feed the livestock, clean the stables, and then rushed to clean up and remove the stench of the barn in time for school. Prohibited from any after-school activities or dating, Eleanor knew Jeremiah would vehemently deny any possibility of her attending the senior prom or being nominated for homecoming queen, reinforcing her decision to move away from the farm after graduation.

Dear Journal, Eleanor would write. *My father's love for me is unquestioned, but his controlling presence, now that I'm eighteen, has reached a point where I want to escape and turn this page in the chapter of my life.*

Eleanor, enamored with books that would emotionally take her beyond Canaan, Kentucky, dreamed of traveling to exotic locations, finding love, a career, and maybe one day a family. Eleanor was fascinated by *Ship of Fools*, Katherine Anne Porter's novel about a group of disparate characters sailing from Mexico to Europe aboard a German passenger ship. Eleanor fantasized about the day that she, too, could book passage on an ocean liner and sail to faraway lands.

Some would say Eleanor Sinclair was a tomboy until the heads of all the male parishioners and their teenage sons needed neck readjustments after she entered church wearing her Sunday best. If she dared return one of their gazes, one of Jeremiah's tattooed forearms and well-defined biceps would double in size, signaling that Eleanor had better stare straight ahead at the large cross behind the wood-carved pulpit. *Dear God*, Eleanor would silently pray, *Please lead me to a better land of promise.*