

Daniel Wilkes feels all used up. He is not prepared to discover a dark secret. A father's letter, a crumbling journal and a century of fear lead him to a man-made evil buried under the dark hills of Kentucky.

Satan's Breath

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4553.html?s=pdf>

Satan's Breath

Bill J. Looney

Copyright © 2010 Bill Looney

ISBN 978-1-60910-113-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2010

Prologue

Excerpts from the journal of William Washington Chambers, engineer for the Blue Bell Mining company.

May 23, 1915 I have been here in Kentucky for about a month and already we are planning on mining large seams of coal discovered about 250 feet below the surface. I will be the lead engineer on a couple of the mines being proposed. I am enjoying my new surroundings. The bed is not very comfortable but I am often so tired that I sleep well. Mrs. Grant is very kind to me and her meals are very good. I think I have put on some weight.

September 14, 1917 We received a telegram today from company headquarters. A chemist named Franz Williams will be traveling to Pike County with a delivery requiring storage. He asked if one of the mines could be altered to accommodate about 25 wooden boxes, each 4 ft by 2 ft by 2 ft. He specified that they must be stored over 200 feet beneath the surface.

I am curious why the company would want to store materials at such a depth. It's probably some new chemical for processing and cleaning the coal. The chemist will be here on the 30th. We are to have transport available at the tracks for immediate unloading. I will start tomorrow designing a storage

BILL LOONEY

room off the main shaft under the old Indian trail. We can dig it rather quickly but at that depth we will need to be careful not to weaken the current shaft.

September 30th, 1917 The company chemist did not arrive until late. With darkness upon us, he asked if we could wait until tomorrow afternoon to unload. Mr. Williams asked if the storage room was prepared as requested. He seems to be an impatient man. He is father's age and has a strange European accent.

Oddly, he had four armed men to guard the delivery. I asked about the contents of the boxes but he put me off. He seemed quite nervous and unsteady. I offered him a room at the boarding house but he said he would stay on the train. The men continue to bring out very good quality coal. Indian Ridge is going to be a very successful operation and a boost in my career.

October 21, 1917 On this day I have committed acts that will test the Almighty's forgiving nature. How can I hope to see heaven's glory with so much blood on my hands? Men lie dead and buried tonight by my orders. Good men with families, hopes and dreams. Tonight's events will not ever be told except in these pages.

March 8, 1918 Today I received my acceptance to the faculty at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. I am pleased to leave Pike County, as the memories of last year are too strong for me to face. Jackson and Tom are sad to see me go and I will miss their friendship. Blue

SATAN'S BREATH

Bell Mining was kind to me but I can no longer remain in these hills knowing what is hidden from view. The boys will contact me if anything occurs that might result in opening the ridge mine. I pray that God will watch over this land and give us the power to keep its secrets.

Chapter One

Daniel Wilkes woke up wanting his favorite drink, Alka-Seltzer. He always felt better after a cold, lemon-lime flavored glass of relief. The company had once made a cherry seltzer, which had been Dan's favorite. He'd called the manufacturer after it had been discontinued and asked what had happened to cause such a medical disaster. Customer demand was insufficient, it seemed. That day Dan's world became a little less pleasurable. Nevertheless, the fact that Alka-Seltzer was his drink of choice spoke volumes about his life.

Dan had grown up in the coal fields of eastern Kentucky just like his mother and father before him, and his grandmothers and grandfathers before them, his great-grandparents before *them*, and so on. The family history traced back to before the Revolutionary War. His mother had said the War for Independence had been America's greatest conflict. She had disliked the British as long as she'd lived.

Dan always found that funny but he missed his mom very much and would gladly go to war with the United Kingdom to bring her back. He'd always been able to talk with her about anything. They hadn't always agreed but he'd respected her opinion. She'd been gone over four years. His father had died ten years before that of mine-related lung disease. With the exception of his best friend's wife, Dan had been unable to confide in anyone since his mother had passed.

As if following in her footsteps, Dan had become a teacher. Both had been educated at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond. He'd played football for the Colonels and

BILL LOONEY

graduated in 1982 with a BA in history. Later he'd earned an MA in history and had wound up at the Shelby Valley High School. Teaching had been fun once but the times and the weight of years had changed all that. Dan had felt uninspired for quite some time. As he approached his fiftieth birthday, he felt used up.

His personal life was also a mess. His wife Connie had lost a boy in childbirth early in their marriage. She'd never really regained her spirit after that. They had never tried to have another child. In fact, the two hadn't made love for more than ten years yet neither seemed to care. Nowadays Connie rarely left the house. Dan cared deeply for her but they were no longer good for each other. He'd thought about leaving but wondered where he would go.

Dan got into his gray Chevy Blazer and drove to the post office. It was Saturday morning and bitterly cold, the usual February misery for Virgie, Kentucky. As he turned into the parking lot, he hoped he wouldn't have to wait long. Otherwise he'd have to crank up the motor just to heat the cab now and then. He turned the ignition so he could listen to music. One of his favorite songs was playing, *Do You Feel the Same Way Too* by Becky Hobbs.

As he waited, a surprising number of people packed into the post office. The tiny structure was wedged between other equally small structures, looking for all the world like a child lost in a crowd. Dan searched every group of new arrivals for James "Jimbo" Fugate. Although the men had known each other since childhood, they hadn't seen or spoken to each other in at least six months. Events, jobs, families and different interests had simply eroded the friendship.

SATAN'S BREATH

He wondered why Jimbo had called. Dan was not looking forward to the meeting. Jimbo was seven years younger and had followed his dad's career path into the mines. When he'd been discharged from the Army, he'd married Betty Marshall. She worked at the National Bank in Pikeville. She was a pretty woman and sometimes that blinded people to her great mind.

The combination of beauty and brains had drawn Dan to her strongly. His mood worsened as he recalled the times they had enjoyed at the Pikeville Holiday Inn. Her beautiful gray eyes and raven hair had attracted him more strongly than anyone else his entire life. Although she was ten years his junior, their mutual attraction was strong. Dan often thought she was crazy to want an old man like him.

The feverish affair had lasted a couple of years. Then Betty had begun to worry that her kids would find out. Her children were her life, and they would be so disappointed if they knew their mom had been unfaithful to their dad. She told Dan they couldn't be together as often. "Give me some time," she said.

He hadn't made love to her in months. Five months. More, in fact. Could they have a future together? He hoped so. He'd spoken with her on the phone a couple of weeks ago but neither had mentioned a possible romantic rendezvous. Dan needed her but wouldn't pressure her. She meant too much.

Jimbo had never suspected but Betty was sure he'd also been unfaithful. She was such a beauty Dan couldn't imagine anyone stepping out on her. Then again, Jimbo had never been that bright. But for him, those details didn't matter. It all boiled down to one simple fact: Dan had fallen in love with Betty. Without her in his life, the world seemed more dead than alive.

BILL LOONEY

At quarter after ten, Jimbo's Dodge pulled into the parking lot. *Late as usual*, Dan thought. After parking the bright red truck beside Dan's Chevy, Jimbo jumped out and climbed into the passenger's seat. "Hey, Dan," he said. "Cold, ain't it?"

"Hello, partner. How you doing these days?"

"Good. Just getting older and more like Daddy every day."

"I know. Every time I look in the mirror, I see my old man. You going to watch the Kentucky game?"

"Hell, yes. Alabama's tough this year and the Cats need this win. I might even see my girls on TV. Wouldn't that be a story to tell?"

Dan thought about Jimbo's college-age daughters, Joy and Janice. He wondered if they could forgive him for the affair with their mother. Hopefully they would never know. There was an uncomfortable pause as Jimbo stared out the icy side window. The graying skies threatened snow. Jimbo pushed his hands deep into his coat pockets.

"What's up?" Dan asked. "You seemed anxious when we spoke yesterday. Is something wrong?"

"Dan, do you know the Bald Mountain Coal Company over toward Shelbiana? Well, I heard they were looking to dig near the old Indian Ridge property." Jimbo's smile looked warn and his eyes searched for something.

"Well, we could sure use the jobs."

Jimbo's smile disappeared. "Did your father ever mention anything to you about the old mines in that area?"

"Not that I recall. I know a mine was sealed off there years ago."

SATAN'S BREATH

Jimbo sat back. He pulled in a deep breath as if burdened with words that had to be released before their weight pulled him under.

“My father left me a letter to open at his death. He made me swear more than once I would follow its directions. He said many lives depended on it. I thought old Ben was crazy but I promised my mother I would do as the letter asked.”

Dan knew Ben had died about six months ago. It had hit Jimbo pretty hard. He took another huge breath as if to gain the strength he needed to continue.

“Dan, that letter says if anyone ever digs near Indian Ridge I must get in touch with you. The letter mentions your daddy as well. It says the Wilkes and Fugate families must contact someone about the attempt to mine on the ridge.”

“Contact who?”

“Dr. Gordon Chambers of Blacksburg, Virginia. Daddy said it was very important. He says your daddy knew and probably told you the story.”

“What story? Dad never mentioned anything to me about Indian Ridge his whole life. Whatever Ben was talking about probably means nothing today.”

“Listen, Dan. The letter insists we move quickly. My father never kidded around and this has really troubled me. I’m not supposed to tell anyone except you. It also says I must pass a letter to a relative so that when I’m gone, the same instructions will be followed.”

“Look, I can appreciate your situation but I know nothing. My father left me no letter and never mentioned anything about Indian Ridge or people in Virginia.”

BILL LOONEY

“I need your help. I don’t know how to do these things or where to begin. Did your father leave anything that might hold a letter? Could he have shared a secret with someone else?”

Dan thought back but it had been so long. He could barely remember anything about that time. His dad had suffered so much everyone had been glad to see him pass. Mom had kept the house. When she had died, Dan had sold the house and just about everything in it. Mom had insisted that someone in the family keep her grandfather’s antique rocking chair. She’d had it reupholstered not long before she’d died. Was there anything else?

“I’ll go home and check the attic,” he said. “I did store Dad’s and Mom’s papers but I don’t remember a letter.”

“Please call me tonight and let me know what you find. We need to move on this, and soon. Please check, will ya?”

“Okay, I will.”

Jimbo nodded and jogged back to his vehicle. As the truck pulled away, Dan wondered what all this could mean. Jimbo was never that serious about anything. He looked out the windows and wished with all his heart that he had an Alka-Seltzer.

Daniel Wilkes feels all used up. He is not prepared to discover a dark secret. A father's letter, a crumbling journal and a century of fear lead him to a man-made evil buried under the dark hills of Kentucky.

Satan's Breath

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4553.html?s=pdf>