

In the early 1900s, Arkoal, Arkansas is a coal-mining community with little else to keep the people busy. But Kenny, Davy, and Ned somehow find plenty to keep themselves occupied and in harm's way.

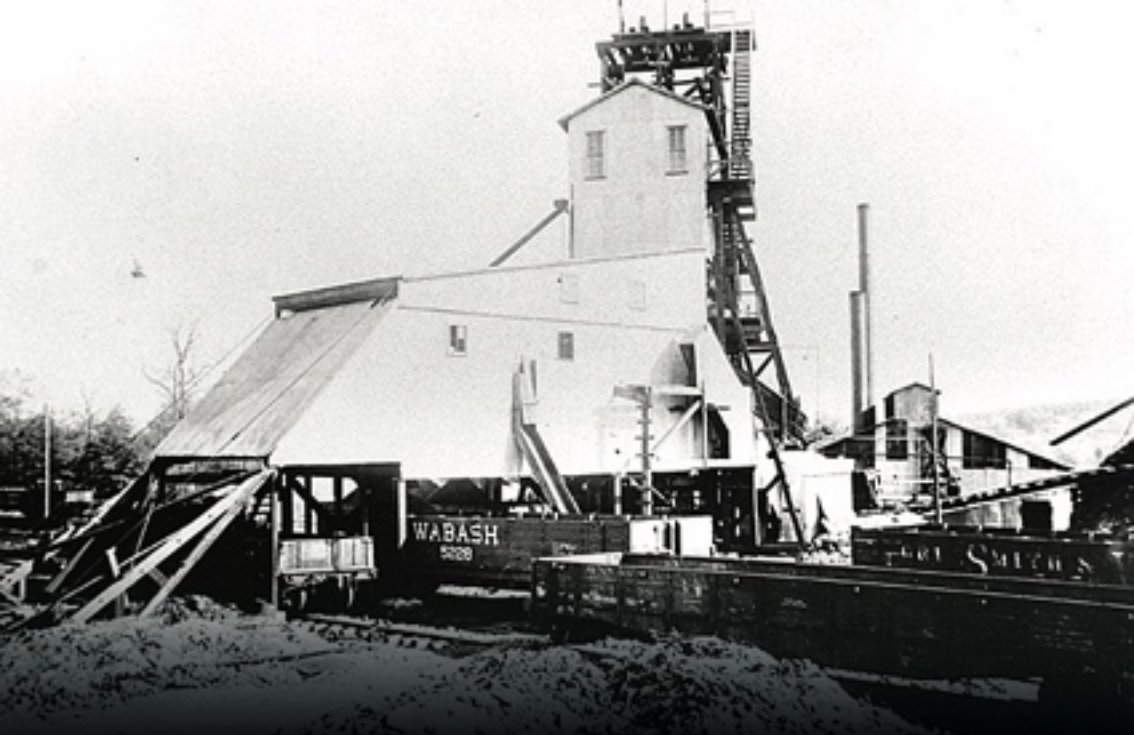
In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

By Jack James

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13289.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



In the Shadow of Sugarloaf

a novel by
Jack James



Copyright © 2024 Jack James

Print ISBN: 978-1-958891-69-8

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-648-4

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.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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.

2024

First Edition

CHAPTER 1

Sunday

Spring 1913

The banging of skillets and dishes roused Kenneth O'Connor from a deep sleep where he was dreaming that he was running behind old Sissy, his favorite coon dog. The kitchen shared a paper-thin wall just behind the fourteen-year-old boy's bed. The smell of cured ham and homemade biscuits alerted his senses that it was breakfast and the beginning of another day.

Kenny's long legs rolled out of bed and his bare feet landed on the cool linoleum. As he got dressed, he could hear his father, Jess O'Connor, talking to a visitor, old Lester Varnell. Both men worked for the Piney Creek Coal Company but in different capacities. Lester was a watchman for the coal tipples and Kenny's dad, Jess, was a miner in the deep and dangerous coal mines.

Walking through the kitchen, Kenny spoke to Mr. Varnell and his father, put an arm on his momma's shoulder and gently kissed her on her moist forehead. He grabbed the metal pail of scraps for the hogs, a red-rimmed enamel pan and an empty bucket and made his way from the back porch. Hanging the bucket on the cut branch of the old cedar post, one of four posts that held up the porch roof of the old five room house where they lived, Kenny made his way toward the barnyard.

Three hogs stood near the trough, patiently waiting for their morning morsels to tie them over until later. Dad had always told him to never name an animal that would end up on the kitchen stove, but it was still hard to avoid a relationship with the farm animals when you see their unique personalities.

“Morning ladies,” Kenny said greeting the pigs, “It’s a beautiful Sunday morning! Mary Lou! Don’t be a pig and eat before Opal and Kay get a bite or two!” Kenny named the pigs after his last three schoolteachers. It was only fitting, he said to himself.

Kenny opened the latch to the chicken pen and tossed cracked corn and meal across the barren yard. He walked into the hen house and began to gather the fresh eggs from the nests.

“Morning Bessie,” he greeted a hen, sitting on the nest, “you need to heat it up if we are going to see your four babies any time soon!”

“And I’ve got nine eggs gathered from twelve hens,” he spoke to the hens that busily pecked the scattered corn, “so some of you gals are gonna meet some dumplings if you don’t get to work!”

Bessie cackled as if responding to Kenny’s joshing. Her response sounded just like one of the old fat gals at church social. Bessie looked like them too, with their behinds overflowing the chairs and constant chatter. Nellie, their milk cow, heard the commotion and decided to check things out for herself.

Kenny left the chicken pen door open as he left, followed closely by a fowl parade into the yard. The chickens kept the yards free of ticks, bugs of all kinds. If Kenny needed worms for fishing, he had to dig somewhere else. It seems that all of the worms were aware that O’Connor yards were dangerous territory.

Nature calls and Kenny turned the worn wood button on the outhouse door and stepped into the dark weathered wood structure, blinking his eyes, trying to adjust them to the darkness. As he unbuttoned his overalls, Kenny carefully glanced at the opening for wasps, scorpions or even a small snake. After his best friend got stung by a scorpion on his nether regions one time, every boy in the town of Arkoal was on high alert!

Once the business was taken care of, Kenny took the eggs to the washstand on the porch and carried the waiting bucket to the well. He placed the bucket

on the rock ledge around the open well and began lowering the long cylinder bucket hanging by a rope fed through a cast iron pulley into the deep hole. Kenny could feel that the bucket was full and began to pull it back to the surface so he could release it into the kitchen pail. He secured the well rope; he took a dipper from a nail on the well post and took a long drink. Arkoal had the sweetest water around the county. Dad said it was good water because it was purified through the flooded underground mines deep below the property.

Amanda “Mandy” O’Connor yelled through the old screen door from the kitchen, “Kenneth William O’Connor! Make a move or we will be late for services!” Kenny poured a dipperful of water over his bright red hair and freckled face. He pulled off his shirt over his head, using it to dry off some before he made it to the house.

Kenny set the eggs on the work stand in the kitchen and set the water on the porcelain sink before his mother began swiping at him with a kitchen rag. Mom thought that men without shirts were brazen naked and always tried to teach Kenny and his father to avoid that sin. Mom had already changed into her Sunday dress. She had three cotton dresses to her name: a forest green one for going to town, a dark gray one for Sunday services and a flower print for working around the house. Each hung on a wire hanger that hung on a nail driven into her bedroom wall

Kenny hurriedly combed his unruly hair as best he could, put on his good white shirt and trousers that once belonged to his deceased Uncle M.L. Mom was waiting on the front porch by the time Kenny hopped through the living room, trying to pull his laced shoe on his foot.

“Get to steppin’, son! We don’t want to be late!”

No, we don’t, thought Kenny as they walked down the dirt street that leads through Arkoal. There were two reasons to be on time today. He had to be there to speak to Emma Rosso, the dark-complexioned, raven-hair, blue-eyed fellow eighth grader and future Mrs. Kenny O’Connor.

Secondly, Ned Barnes was going to be at church today!



On Saturday, the Reverend Hawthorne was walking down the very center of the Arkoal road with his Bible tucked beneath one arm and swinging a stick in the other. The Reverend was once a traveling preacher but, while passing through the area, he forgot to keep passing. He found that the old First Baptist Church was without a minister and the townsfolk needed a shepherd. No one remembered asking to be herded but come Sunday, there he was in his finest black robe, welcoming worshippers as if he had been there for years. More and more people began returning to church, even Mr. Harger, the owner of the Piney Creek Mining Company himself. The reverend's wife, Miss Margaret, was one of the first returning members who caught the eye and affection of the pastor. With her playing on the worn-out piano, the two made quite a team

Reverend Hawthorne was leaving a dust trail and as he walked, he was loudly whistling "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." The Reverend was keeping a proud and steady stride until he saw Ned Barnes.

Ned was a twelve-year-old misfit. His father had taken to drinking after helping Theodore Roosevelt take San Juan Hill years earlier and his glory days nothing but a memory in the mine shafts and coal dust of South Sebastian County. Ned's mother tried to pick up the pieces by taking in laundry and mending clothes, bartering for supplies from other women of the area. Young Ned had been raised "free range" for the most part.

Ned was enjoying a hand-rolled Velvet tobacco cigarette as he sat, backed into the roots and base of an old elm by one of the town's several abandoned buildings. Reverend Hawthorne walked right up to Ned and looked down at the dirty young boy.

In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

In his best preacher voice, he “Ned, you are a mess! You are too young to be smokin’ tobacco and searching for something to get yourself in trouble! You’re running the streets and alleyways, itchin’ to get in something you shouldn’t. Why don’t you come to services at the church in the morning?”

“Oh, I can’t go there” Ned said, looking up into the judging eyes of the preacher.

“And why not, I wonder?” replied the puzzled preacher.

“My momma said that you all cuss in there.”

“Well, now I’ve heard every...that is not a truth at all, Ned Barnes!”

“That’s what my momma told me.”

The preacher, who had stepped back a step or two, wiped his brow with the cuff of his sleeve and finally said, “I’ll tell you what. What is your favorite pie, son?”

“Cherry, preacher,” answered Ned.

“I’ll tell you what, you come to morning church tomorrow and if you so much as hear me cuss just once, I’ll have Mrs. Hawthorne make you a cherry pie!

Ned stood up slowly and suspiciously, giving him the evil eye, nodded and said, “All for me? I’ll take you up on that preacher!”



The church was filling up as Kenny and his mother walked across the new grass that was covering the front lawn of the schoolhouse/church. Reverend Hawthorne and his Bible greeting them at the front steps.

“Mandy O’Connor! How glad I am to see you and Mr. Kenny this morning” said the pastor, “and I hoped I’d see Jess with you this morning too!”

“Well, I would like that too,” answered Mrs. O’Connor, “but you know Jess.”

“Yeah!” Kenny added, “he says that God ain’t in no building but outdoors in His creation and that no boring preacher is gonna get him closer to the pearly gates.” Kenny’s startled mother gave him a hard look that told him he’d hear about his remark later. The reverend chuckled as Mrs. O’Connor excused themselves and led Kenny into the church while pinching a good piece of hide from the back of his arm.

Kenny and his mother slipped into the very last row of homemade benches that had been worn smooth by year of the squirming britches of schoolboys and congregations. The last row was Kenny’s choice seats as you could lean back against the wall until his mother made him sit up straight and listen to the sermon. There was also a screenless open window that offered a little comfort of a breeze on the hot summer mornings.

They were too late to speak to Emma, but she’d walk by on her way out later.

And there, sitting alone on the very front bench was Ned Barnes.

After a welcome to the congregation, reading a list of the sick and suffering, Reverend Hawthorne led a rousing prayer. Kenny smiled when he thought that the preacher much think that the good Lord was hard of hearing since he yelled to him so loudly.

The first hymn was “Bringing in the Sheaves,” a favorite of Mrs. Hawthorne because she didn’t need music. There weren’t enough song books, so they sang old favorites, the ones the people knew the words to anyway. Kenny’s mind wasn’t on bringing sheaves anywhere. On the second row on the left side sat Emma Rosso, wearing a little hat with a bright blue ribbon that wrapped around the headpiece and flowed down the back along with her black hair; hair so black it appeared to have blue highlighted strands. An elbow to the ribs drew his attention back to the preaching until he felt a tug on the back of his shirt.

In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

At first Kenny ignored the pulling on his shirt until finally he turned slightly to find his best friend and sidekick, Davy Nelson standing outside the church and out of Kenny's mother's view. Davy skipped school and church frequently, especially when the fishing was good in the Jamesfork Creek that ran just east of town. Davy was trying to whisper and mouth the words, something about how their teacher had evidently wallowed in a bush filled with poison ivy and was trying to get Doc Abram to open the office and find him some relief. Miss Cusick had been to his mother's house looking for a cure for poison ivy too!

Kenny's attention was drawn back to the service. Reverend Hawthorne was calling on all the saints to purge the devil from the lives of area drunkards and the slovenly ways of local ne'er-do-wells. He was stomping his feet, pacing all along the front, slamming his hand on the podium and top of the piano.

"The Father told us in the Word that He would never leave us or forsake us, even in the tiny speck of Arkoal in all His creation. The coal dust may cover our houses. It may fill our lungs. But our saved souls are whiter than snow and He wants our praise!"

Then the Reverend stomped the floor for attention and shouted, "FOR IT'S BY GOD WE SHALL LIVE AND BY GOD WE SHALL DIE!"

Ned jumped to his feet, pointed at the preacher and shouted, "AND BY GOD, YOU OWE ME A CHERRY PIE!"

CHAPTER 2

After his wife and son had left for church, Jess poured Lester another cup of coffee from the metal coffee pot that sat on the wood stove. As he sat down on one of the three ladder-back chairs, he straightened the cotton tablecloth and stared at his coffee in silence for a moment. Both men began to speak at once, but Lester began speaking.

“Jess, you have got to be careful who you say what to! It’s getting restless in the big office and that restless is coming down to old man Eddington. Old Freda Hogan is keeping the coals hot with the Socialists offices in Huntington and she’s got the ear of national papers and politicians. If we ain’t careful, what happens in our little corner of the world will be all over the world!”

“But that’s just it!” Jess answered back, “this is OUR little corner of the world—our whole world! Most of the people around here were born and raised in this little corner and tried to scratch enough dirt to make a living and feed our families. But the graveyards are fillin’ up with men who can’t find any work except trying not to die deep in the ground in Sugarloaf coal! Lester, you know how many men have died just this year? Three. Three Lester! And it’s only late March!”

Jess unfolded a copy of the *Huntington Hummer* newspaper. “Just listen to this article in the Huntington paper about trouble in West Virginia. Have you read it?” Lester nodded that he hadn’t.

Jess begins, “Bloodshed at Prince. Tensions have been high for some time in the small mining town of Prince, in Fayette County, West Virginia. Pro-Union miners have been working toward unionizing for some months, meeting strong resistance from the owners of the Nuttleburg-Kaymore Mines. Miners are asking for more pay per ton and basic human rights, pushed by the UMWA, and supported by Mayor Luke Ridgefield. The director of the mine, Thomas Nuttleburg, and his agents have been allegedly forcing miners to

sign contracts, guaranteeing that they will not unionize or else. Dozens of miners have been forced out, using non-union workers brought in from as far as Meadow Bridge.

On Saturday, UMWA representatives and supporter, Sheriff Ben Floyd, were handing out a few dollars, sacks of flour, pouches of tobacco and other foodstuffs, trying to help unemployed workers and their families avoid starvation. A local reported to Floyd that mine agents currently were forcibly removing families from mine-owns houses. Sheriff Floyd, mayor Ridgefield and a mob of the miners set out toward the trouble.

Upon arrival, agents fired toward the crowd and a full-scale skirmish ensued. Governor Henry Thompson ordered the National Guard to protect the mine. Three days later order was finally restored. Sheriff Floyd, mayor Ridgefield, three mine agents and twelve miners lay dead. The UMWA office, eleven homes (four company owned) lay in smoking embers.”

Jess stopped reading, and folded the paper, pausing thoughtfully for a moment.

Lester sat uneasily as Jess continued, “Don’t you remember what it’s like down there my friend? You go to work still tired from the day before, walking down into the dark doors of Hell, nothing between you and pitch dark but the carbide lamps on our hats. You chip and shovel and fill your cars until you can’t get the coal and then let the guys come and blast, hoping they don’t bring it all down on you. Crawling in crack so tight that your ribs and shoulder blades are squeezed together. All this and wondering if you will go home today. And when you do get paid, it ain’t enough to put food on the table and you gotta crawl to the company store and put stuff on credit! And you can’t even pay off last month’s charge! A man shouldn’t have to live like this! Just existing! I want more for Kenny and you should want more for you little boy too!”

“Hey! You ain’t the only one who wants better! You think that I don’t my Tim eatin’ coal dust for breakfast, lunch and dinner? Remember Jess, me and you

have been friends, like brothers, since before Moses parted the water! Let's calm down. There's an answer to everyone's satisfaction but it's gonna take cool heads and it ain't gonna be solved here this morning."

Jess's stern look softened to a grin. He wiped his whiskered face with his calloused left hand, and he agreed, "I know buddy, but you know how I get about things, especially when the big guys are stickin' it to the little ones."

"Yeah, me too." Lester pushed his chair out and stood up and lingered for a moment until his legs were sure beneath him. He walked to the door and, with his hand turning the knob, he turned back toward his friend and said, "Well, I guess I'm gonna go cuss mommy out for bringing me into this old world. Be seeing you."

The door creaked closed reminding Jess that he should put some bacon grease on the hinges. He poured what was left of the coffee and muttered to himself, "There's gonna be trouble. Mark my word, there's gonna be trouble."

Jess walked to the front door and stared at the view from his front porch. He began thinking about the old days when the Arkoal of old wasn't anything more than a few scattered farms and even fewer businesses. The coal mines were in their earliest days and everyone either farmed or worked on someone else's farm, or so it seemed.

The O'Connor farm was once about as far as the eye could see and the big house sat almost in the center of the land. It was part of an old plantation farm that was destroyed during the Civil War. The house was burned, and crops were destroyed. There was a rumor that the well had been salted, ruining it for farm animals and people. The original owner was a Confederate soldier, and he didn't have much of a plantation to come home to. With no income, savings or crops to sell and the taxes due, the property was sold eventually to be on the courthouse steps in Greenwood. For some reason, it didn't happen for almost ten years. No one seemed to be interested in it.

In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

Jess's grandparents were Irish immigrants who were making their way west when they happened to come through Sebastian County. The O'Connor's heard of a property sale and found a flyer where several pieces of land were listed. They looked at a smaller farm in southwestern Sebastian County in the small New Beulah community. It was on the old Sedalia Trail where cattle and horses were driven toward Texas and then back to Kansas and Missouri. They decided to make a bid on it. Mr. O'Connor thought it would be good to check out the site of the larger farm, so they detoured the four miles to see what it looked like. The place was amazing! Small slave houses dotted the property, along with several barns and abundant timber. The James Fork Creek ran through the southern side and the tall Sugarloaf Mountain shadowed it in the evening. Mrs. O'Connor pictured the two of them resting on the front porch of their imaginary home and watching the sun set behind the mountain in the evening.

Mr. O'Connor agreed but this farm was huge, and they had limited funds after coming to America and then traveling halfway across the United States. Being a little dejected, they traveled back to Greenwood where they slept beneath their wagon in the wagon yard and boarded their horses in a nearby stable for two bits apiece.

Mrs. O'Connor visited with other women, like herself who were traveling west, alone or with their families. She watched the other traveler's children play tag and skip ropes. Some of the boys played mumble-peg or carved their names in area trees for posterity.

Mr. O'Connor spent his time talking to old timers who knew the area. Some even knew of the properties that they had looked at and gave them what history they knew about the land and previous owners. He was also told how Indian Territory was just west, behind that mountain. They talked about raids by Indian parties who were paid by Union sympathizers to rid the county of all former Confederates and their families, by force if necessary. The stories were frightening, and he knew that he could never tell his wife about it but the more he listened to them talk, the more he believed that

they were telling highly embellished tall tales. “Surely,” he thought, “it was already 1875. President Grant and the soldiers would have already tamed or removed the savages.” He reckoned that, like the way they had treated old Confederates, they also might not cozy up to red-headed, freckled immigrants as well. Maybe the men wished the immigrants would keep traveling far from the area.

Just like all the other camps near the wagon yard, the woman cooked in iron pots or Dutch ovens. Mrs. O’Connor had made friends with several woman and they all agreed to share their meals before the morning came and they headed west. When the food was eaten, the women gathered their cooking utensils, pots and pans and helped each other clean them up, which wasn’t easy with their limited resources available. Some told of their recipes for the food they had just eaten. It was obvious that some women weren’t asked for their recipes! Then, as the sun began to fall low in the western sky, the women settled their children into the wagons and gathered again for discussions of the places they had left and about their hopes and plans for the future.

Mr. O’Connor turned in early, never mentioning that they were waiting on the auction where, if the price was low enough, they may not have to journey into Indian Territory. Slowly, the men left the campfire and smothered the ashes with what was left of the coffee. The couple whispered while lying in their own wagon about the dawn of the new day would determine whether they stayed in Sebastian County or headed west. Mrs. O’Connor asked her husband what he thought the danger was in traveling across Indian Territory. The women talked amongst themselves also. The only difference in the conversations was that the ladies didn’t talk of any raid or carnage. They believed the native Indians, the Choctaw to me quite civilized. Mr. O’Connor gave a quiet sigh of relief.

The morning light found everyone breaking up camp after a quick breakfast of hoecakes with sorghum molasses and fresh hot coffee. The ladies hugged and checked on the children’s safety and the men traded hearty handshakes

and well wishes. Mr. O'Connor made a quiet trade of some Irish whiskey for a couple of plugs of chewing tobacco.

The lawn of the courthouse wasn't as crowded as the O'Connor's imagined it would be when the gavel was finally slammed on the thin podium at exactly 10:00 o'clock. With the sheriff reading the rules and regulations for the auction, a list of properties, only four, were read. The O'Connor's had managed, through their thriftiness in the old country and traveling in America, to have almost \$500 in gold coins. They would need to be careful when bidding on the small farm so they could purchase equipment for the first year. Hopefully next year will be profitable.

"This sale is for four individually bid properties. You will all mind yourselves and your actions and we'll have a lawful, easy sale. If you get rowdy, the deputy here will arrest you and show you the fine accommodation at the county hoosegow!" added the auctioneer.

The officer corrected him, "Uh, sheriff. I'm the sheriff. Not a deputy. The sheriff of this county."

"Forgive me, my friend!" said the auctioneer.

The first land sale was a dozen acres was a foreclosure, owned by the bank, with a four-room house, barn, chicken pens, blacksmith shed and a good well. It was located just outside Greenwood. The bidding started out at fifty dollars. It didn't take long for a brisk battle between two men began. The farm had reached the final price of \$640! O'Connor's dream of buying land was all but dashed. Then Mr. O'Connor reasoned that the land was ready to be lived on immediately. It was near the county seat and the second largest city in the county.

The second sale was also a property that they didn't check out earlier. It also was a farm that was up due to back taxes. It was in Huntington, a town located about six miles east of Arkoal, but it was only a two-acre plot of land. The house had two bedrooms, a good well, garden spot and promised to

increase in value once Huntington incorporated in the near future. The bidding wasn't as quick as the previous sale. Mr. O'Connor thought it might be because of the distance between the town and the hub of businesses. And, after all, the auctioneer hoped it would increase in value. What if the city didn't incorporate at all? Bidding once again started at fifty dollars. The bids were slow, but someone believed in the hype and bought the property for under \$400.

The next property was the former plantation by Sugarloaf Mountain. The O'Connor's worried about the other properties going so cheaply, they couldn't afford the former plantation. The last place was a nice little farm, and, being far from the county seat, may draw a cheaper final bid than the Huntington farm.

The auctioneer announced, "This next property is in the small area called Arkoal. It has the most acres of any sale here today. There's about thirty-five acres there but you need to keep in mind a few things. First, this land has not been touched in about ten years or more. The previous owner couldn't pay his taxes after the War of Northern Aggression and carpetbaggers thought they could make a quick profit. Well, it didn't work out so well. Maybe they shouldn't have burned the house down during the war or maybe Mr. Lincoln shouldn't have freed the slaves that worked on it? Now, the farmland is grown up with some good-sized trees and brush and briar taking over. There's not a major town nearby where you can buy supplies unless you ride about ten miles for coffee, sugar, horse tack and other supplies. The well may have been salted so you'd have to dig another one if so. It's in the far reaches of the county and just about in Indian Territory. I'm not trying to talk you out of it but those are the reasons it hasn't been sold in over ten years and probably not going to be today."

"Now, let's open bids on this place at fifty dollars as well. Who will open it up with a fifty-dollar bid?" the auctioneer said. Looking across perhaps a dozen, uninterested people who remained in the crowd after the first two properties were the ones that had their interest.

“Come on now! It’s surely worth something to you folks? I can’t go lower on an opening bid that fifty dollars, so someone start us out” he pleaded.

A man from the back of the group raised a finger in the air and said, “Fifty dollars.”

The O’Connor’s shared a glance and, even though no words were used, they knew each other’s thoughts. He raised his hand and made his bid. “Sixty U.S. dollars!” Mr. O’Connor bid. Suddenly, he got to thinking of all the negative things the auctioneer had just shared. Could they really make that a home?

The auctioneer stopped the auction. “Pete! Now dadgumit! You know good and well that you ain’t even got fifty dollars to your name and you ain’t got no business at your age alone on some far off, no good, piece of land! Now, you hush up or I’ll have the marshal here take you to the jailhouse!”

“Uh, sheriff. I’m the sheriff. Not a marshal or a deputy. The sheriff of this county.” said the more slightly perturbed officer.

“Accept my apologies, sheriff!” the auctioneer asked.

He continued, “Ok, would anyone, besides Pete, like to bid? Son, you raised Pete’s bid of fifty to sixty dollar, am I correct?”

“Uh, yes sir.” O’Connor stammered.

“Well, I’m tossing out Pete’s felonious bid so would you like to bid fifty?” the clerk asked.

The O’Connor’s looked into each other’s eyes. She squeezed his arm and nodded yes. “Fifty dollars.” O’Connor bid.

“That’s fine. You are adults of age and know what you are looking at, I assume?”

“Y-yes sir, we do.” They both replied with a stammer.

The auctioneer went on, "I have fifty, do I hear sixty? Sixty dollars?" There was no noise as he all but begged someone to bid.

"Sixty dollars." The crowd turned to see who the bidder was. It wasn't Pete so the auctioneer continued.

"How about seventy-five now? Seventy-five dollars, anybody?" He looked in the eyes of the young O'Connor's and with a look to each other again, Mr. O'Connor loudly bid, "\$100!"

The crowd let out a gasp as the clerk once again asked, and then begged, for a bid of \$110. "No one? No one interested in thirty-five acres? Okay, going once! Twice? All in and all done? Sold to the red-haired gentleman for \$100!"

The people clapped for the couple and their purchase. No one clapped louder than the county assessor who now finally had this farm off their records.

Mr. O'Connor walked into the courthouse where he signed the sale ticket and then the ownership deed. He paid the \$100 and kissed his wife, right there in the county clerk's office in front of everyone.

"We aren't immigrants now, honey!" Mr. O'Connor said to his wife, "we own property in the United States! We are Americans!"

CHAPTER 3

The church broke up in uproarious laughter. Some took to their feet, gasping with hands over their mouths, outraged at Ned's outburst and behavior.

Ned turned and ran down the center aisle, dodging the hands of deacons and parishioners who wanted a piece of his hide for his behavior. Ned made it into the vestibule, where both expensive coat jackets and ragged sweaters hung on wooden pegs. He turned the doorknob and jumped clear of the little wooden porch and three steps to the good warm dirt. Ned wanted all the distance he could get between himself and the church. "I shoulda listened to mamma," he thought. Kenny's beagle, Sissy, ran just behind him with ears flopping and tongue lolling to one side. lo

It took Reverend Hawthorne several minutes to get the crowd under control, getting men seated and the ladies turned sideways on their benches, whispering gossip about Ned's upbringing and what they would do if they had a minute with him in their sheds. Reverend Hawthorne had wife take to the piano and play loudly so the music might soothe the uprising of the moment. She panicked and began playing "Ragtime Gal." Reverend Hawthorne cleared his throat loudly and shot her a quick, disapproving look. When the music stopped, he asked the crowd to bow their heads in prayer, after which the congregation would be dismissed. He prayed all the way to the back door where, when the prayer ended, he had the collection basket in one hand and shook hands with the other.

Some people gathered in small groups to discuss what to do about Ned. Some gathered to talk about how they hoped their small gardens would do well this season. Kenny waited at the foot of the porch, hoping to get a word with Emma. It seemed like forever before Emma appeared in the open church doors with her parents who talked at length to the preacher. Finally, Emma walked down the steps, holding the wooden rail and past Jess.

“Emma, you...you sure smell pretty!” Kenny stammered. Emma turned and gave Jess a small smile.

“How sweet of you to say so! Thank you, Jess,” she replied. “

Still visibly shaken from Ned’s outburst, the Reverend Hawthorne broke away from his visit from the Benedetti’s and, with a discouraging look, took Emma by the shoulder and pushed her gently away from Kenny.

“Come along Emma,” Mrs. Rosso said, “we’ve got work to do before the pastor arrives for supper.”

Emma turned her head lightly toward Kenny and smiled. Kenny got a funny feeling down to the toes of his shoes, and his face got so red that it almost hid his freckles.

His buddy Davy playfully socked him in the breadbasket, partially bending him double and bringing him from the trance he had on Emma.

“You sure smell pretty, David mocked his friend. “She’s out of your league my friend. Not out of mine, mind ya, but definitely out of yours!” Davy chided Kenny. Kenny returned a sock to Davy’s stomach.

Amanda O’Connor thanked the reverend for a good service, shyly smiling with a twinkle in her eye,

teasing the man for the events that had just taken place. She saw Kenny and Davy just as her son had sunk knuckles into Davy’s midsection.

“Kenneth William O’Connor!” she spoke sternly. “In front of the church on a Sunday morning, in your good clothes, and you about to get into a rolling tumble? I need a good switch...”

Both boys stood straight at the sound of her voice and, talking over each other, began explaining that it was all in fun and how Davy was teasing Kenny about Emma.

“I see more than you think I do!” Amanda said, matter of factly.

In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

“I see Kenneth staring at the Rosso’s more than he’s looking at the preachin’. And I also see you standing outside that window during the entire service too! Wouldn’t hurt you to dust off those britches and come inside once and a while, David.”

Davy was uneasily twisting his cap, walking beside the two and trying to come up with something to say.

Amanda looked toward Davy, smiled and said, “David, I guess you will be coming over for supper since you are almost halfway there?” Davy was hoping for the invitation, but he blushed anyway.



Davy and Kenny were finishing up their second helpings of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, snap beans, and milk gravy. Kenny’s father, Jess, had brought Mandy’s chair from her sewing table for Davy to use at the table. The chair sat lower than the ladder-back chairs that the others used, making him look even more like a child with his head and his shoulders barely being seen over the table. The main topic of conversation had been about Ned’s outburst and about the cherry pie. Laughter rounded the table several times, even from Mandy as she tried not to enjoy it. She said, more than once, “It’s not Christian to laugh at the Reverend and the church.”

“It’s a school too, mamma,” Kenny reminded her. “Maybe you can just enjoy the story just thinking it’s a school.”

“Ain’t nothing funny about school.” Davy added.

Jess asked the boys to help clear the table for Mandy and take care of the animals in the back. The boys pushed back their chairs and began to gather plates until they were cautioned by Mandy.

“Be very careful with those dishes, boys! Those were wedding gifts from my grandparent's years and years ago. In fact, I’ve known those dishes longer

than I've known you both and your father, Kenny! They won a new set at the World's Fair at St. Louis, Missouri back in '04. They brought me this old set for my hope chest and my future husband."

"Uh, what's a hope chest," Davy questioned.

Jess replied quickly, "Davy, it's when a woman hopes she finds a husband. Sometimes it's a hopeless chest."

The boys responded quickly with laughter, looking for Mandy to be laughing too, but she was too busy giving Jess the old stink eye.

"I'll remind you, Jesse O'Connor, that I had plenty of suitors before I met you! I had hope and plenty of it before I met you at that county jubilee in Greenwood," said Mandy as she wagged a finger at her husband with the other hand on her apron covered hip.

Jess winked at the boys. He grabs Mandy's outstretched arm, swings her around, and pulls her into his lap. "Boys, I had to walk around that fair no less than five times to finally get her to 'accidentally' notice me!"

"I saw you every time too, Jesse O'Connor! Trying to show off his muscles by ringing that bell. Throwing horseshoes, and he was horrible at it! And then, there he was, standing there by the carousel with a baby rag doll! Grinning like a possum every time I went around!"

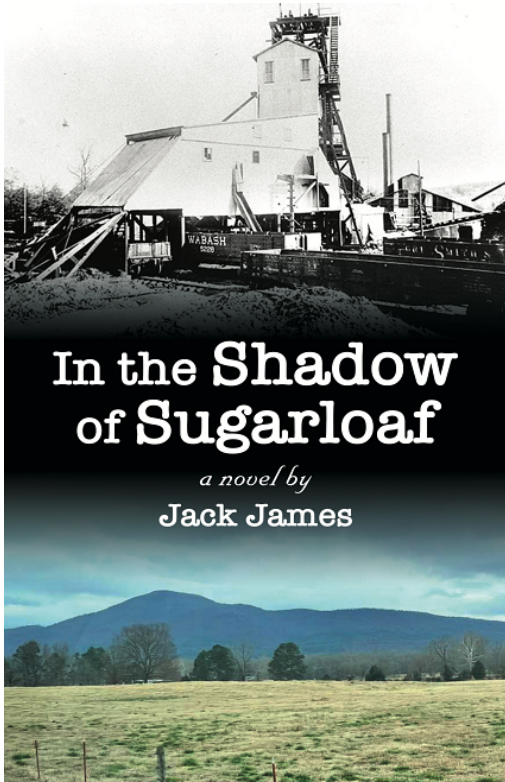
"It was love at fifth sight!" said Jess.

It was then Kenny noticed old Sissy was at the front screen door. In her mouth was a red-stained shirt. Kenny nudged Davy and asked his mom if it would be okay with her if they went out. Thinking it would save her a dish disaster, she was more than happy to comply with their request.

Davy and Kenny headed toward the screen door and began calling Sissy, who decided it was time to play. The beagle began to streak across the yard with a shirt clenched tightly in her jowls, running circles and darting from their grasp. Kenny and Davy devised a plan: stop chasing.



Jack James is nearly a life-long resident of Sebastian County, Arkansas. He earned a BSE in Secondary Education, majoring in Social Studies. He taught at St. Joseph Catholic High School in Conway, Arkansas, and at Lavaca Middle School in Lavaca, Arkansas. Jack was the editor and reporter for *The Sentry*, a small hometown paper, and is currently the curator at the Military Road Museum, active in the local Chamber of Commerce and Senior Center, and in his church.



In the early 1900s, Arkoal, Arkansas is a coal-mining community with little else to keep the people busy. But Kenny, Davy, and Ned somehow find plenty to keep themselves occupied and in harm's way.

In The Shadow of Sugarloaf

By Jack James

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13289.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**