

Molly and Eva



*Left to right... unknown woman, Eva, and Molly.
By 1910, when Eva was born, two other children had died.*

Molly told Eva family stories.

One winter night, sitting before the fireplace, her voice mixing with the whisper of the wind and rain, Molly told about the Tweeds.

“They lived in a castle in Scotland. It was cold and wet.”

Eva asked, “Who were they?”

“They were our relatives. They were lords and ladies.”

“Are they dead?”

“Yes. They are dead.”

“What did they do in Scotland?”

“The men fought a lot. They fought each another and they fought the English. Before that they fought the Romans, who built a wall to keep them out.” She smiled, her face flickering red in the firelight. “And you know what?”

“What?”

“They wore dresses.”

Eva giggled. “Like girls wear?”

“Yes, but different. They called them kilts.”

“Did they wear bloomers?”

“I don’t think so.”

Eva made a face. “They must have gotten cold. Why did they fight so much?”

“They fought whenever anybody tried to tell them what to do. They hated that.”

“I think the lords must have been bad. What did the ladies do?”

“They had the babies.”

“What did they do after that?”

Molly thought for a moment. “I don’t know sweetie. I suppose they just died.”

One summer evening, after eating homemade peach ice cream that Molly had mixed and B.K. had churned, and everybody was sitting on blankets in the front yard and looking up at the stars, Eva leaned back against her mother’s bosom, and said, “Tell me a story.”

Molly said, “No, baby, I’m tired. Lie still.”

“Please.”

Molly sighed and adjusted her position. “All right. It seems that there was once a Parris who got himself hung.”

Eva wiggled. “With a rope around his neck?”

“Yes mam.”

“Why?”

“He was a pirate. They hung him on Parris Island, where they hung all the pirates back then.”

“Was it named after us, this island?”

Her father’s voice answered from the dark, “Maybe.”

Eva leaned back and looked up up at her mother's pale face. "Was he a bad man?"

Molly buried her nose in the tart smell of her daughter's hair and laughed. "Why no, sweetie, not according to the story your grandmother told. He was what they called a privateer. That means he was like a soldier fighting in a war. He was just unlucky."

"That's too bad."

"Yes, isn't it."

One spring day, Molly and Eva were weeding the little garden behind the house. Molly used a hoe, methodically chopping up and down. Eva walked behind, tugging at the plants her mother had loosened. It was already hot and both mother and daughter were sweating. Molly, who was usually pregnant, was pregnant again.

She stopped, leaned against the hoe and said, "Damn. If I was a Parris man, I think I'd switch sides about now."

Eva looked up at her mother's swollen body.

"That's what they did back in the Civil War. When things got tough the men switched sides. For instance like right now, during planting time, the men that didn't want to work might join one side or the other. Then when they were ready to work they'd just leave and come home."

Eva wiped her hands on her dress, leaving red clay streaks, like dried blood. "When it was time to pick what was planted?"

"Sure, then."

"What did the women do?"

"They just did."