



The Songcatcher: A Novel

Sharyn McCrumb

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Folksinger Lark McCourry is haunted by the memory of a song. As a child she heard it from her relatives in the North Carolina mountains, and she knows that the song has been in her family since 1759, when her ancestor, nine-year-old Malcolm MacQuarry, kidnapped from the Scottish island of Islay, learned it aboard an English ship. The song accompanied young Malcolm when he made his way to Morristown, New Jersey, where he apprenticed with an attorney, became a lawyer himself, and fought in the American Revolution. The song went with Malcolm in 1790, when he left his family and traveled the Wilderness Road to homestead in western North Carolina, where he remarried and raised a second family.

The song, passed down through the generations, carries Malcolm's descendants through the settling of the frontier, the Civil War, the coming of the railroads, and into modern times, providing both solace in the present and a link to the past. Over the years, though, the memory of the old song has dimmed and Lark McCourry's only hope of preserving her family legacy lies in mountain wisewoman Nora Bonesteel, who talks to both the living and the dead.

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