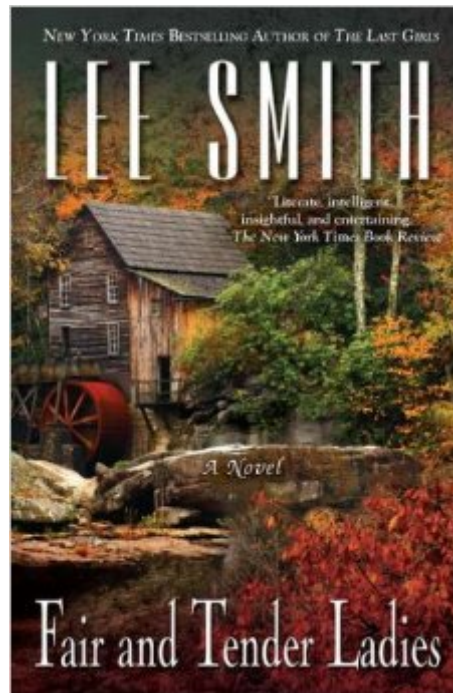


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# Fair And Tender Ladies



## Synopsis

Ivy Rowe, Virginia mountain girl, then wife, mother, and finally "Mawmaw," never strays far from her home-but the letters she writes take her across the country and over the ocean. Writing "to hold onto what's passing," she tells stories that are rich with the life of Appalachia in words that are colloquial, often misspelled, but always beautiful. From childhood, when teachers encouraged her gift for language, to her rebellious teenage years when she swore against motherhood-only to then become a mother-and on through life, Ivy writes with insight, honesty, and a passion for living that is sure to be infectious.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I picked up this title while reading another review on the book "Gap Creek" By Robert Morgan. Which I also enjoyed. Once I read the reviews on this book I couldn't wait to read it. When I began reading Ivy Rowe's letters I could not stop and when I did stop I was still thinking of the things she had written all through the day. I grew so close to her. I laughed and I cried. Her voice & hands will wrap around your heart and stay with you long after you read the last page. This is truly my best read of the year 2000. I borrowed this particular book to read but I plan to buy a personal copy for many more years of pleasure. Thank you Lee Smith for enlightening my life through Ivy Rowe.

I'll read anything by Lee Smith, but this is her best. It's a saga, the chronicling of a child's (as she grows to old age and death) Appalachian life in a cabin 'up a holler.' Rich with loving detail, philosophy, and the indications of the passing of time not only for the protagonist but also for her

community and the country itself, it'll make you laugh and cry and sigh. Read it, if you haven't already!

Fair and Tender Ladies tells the lifelong story of Ivy Rowe, a woman growing up and growing old in Appalachian Virginia. The story is told totally through a long series of letters she writes to family, friends, lovers and acquaintances. Ivy's life is one of abject poverty and hardship. Most of her siblings die young. Her father is disabled through the majority of the book, Her mother is a tormented and exploited soul. Ivy has several chances to escape all this but the pull of place and family keeps her firmly entrenched where she is. This ought to be a thoroughly depressing book--instead it is a truly inspiring book. For, though objectively a person with virtually nothing, Ivy sees herself as uniquely blessed. The life force that carries her into old age is one that sees the glass perpetually as half full--her hardships are, to her eyes, less threatening and frightening than those she sees around her. She is essentially saved several times by people she does not know or whom she has previously rejected. Though she is often exploited she does not allow those experiences to harden her heart. This is not to say Ivy is soft or naive. She merely sees hard times as the burden of life and chooses to write her letters to make sense of it all where she can and merely record it if she can't. I would have thought the letter format would wear after a while. It did not. It in fact created a sense of intimacy that enhanced the reading experience. All in all, this is one of the best books I read in years. I was thoroughly enchanted throughout. I can only rejoice in the large body of work that Lee Smith has for me to work through. If her other efforts are even a fraction as good as this book, I have a lot of great reading ahead of me.

Deft storytelling, timeless truths about women's lives, and an authentic voice that I can vouch for, having spent time with family in that part of the world. Ivy's story helps me to finally understand a lot about my own late mother, who grew up there and would have been only a few years younger than her. Like Smith, when I went to college and read Faulkner, I wondered what South he was talking about, since what I knew was Appalachian Virginia. Finally, this wonderful writer has captured the essence of that other, fascinating "secret" South, which has little to do with the Civil War and is more than just Hatfields and McCoys. I cannot heap enough praise on this book.

This book was a dream to read. The main character, Ivy Rowe, seems just like an old Auntie or neighbor or someone everyone who grew up Southern would have known. She is a cut up. Her life was not an easy one, but she remained fairly optimistic throughout. It was a sweet and very

touching book and it was extremely well written. The way Ms. Smith wrote the dialect was impeccable. It was as if someone were telling you a story in your ear rather than reading pages in a book. I was truly transported to all the mountains and towns she writes about in this book. Now I cannot wait to sink my teeth into some of her other works.

I read this book for my book club and was not overly excited. I would probably never have chosen it on my own, but willing to try it for my group. The more I read the more I slowed down and savored each page and the more I began dreading the last page. It is an amazing book and I will read it again someday. Do not miss this - this is why we read books!

I felt sad when I had finished this book, for there is much wisdom in it. I resisted it for a long while, finding flaws everywhere, but finally had to succumb. The story is told through the letters of one woman from Appalachia, Ivy Rose. She is perhaps wiser and more in tune with the 90s than a woman born in 1900 in the hills should be, but it is a glowing book, alive with the beauty of the Cumberland mountains in western Virginia. It was never the events she describes in her letters that were important - it was the writing of them. The author may be using this as a metaphor for our lives. It is never what happens that is important, but merely the living of it. For so much repeats itself through the generations. It is a wise, wise, book, engrossing and entertaining. Alive to the last page.

Since every review I've read of this book says that women should definitely read it, I have to add that men will enjoy it, too. Being raised in Appalachia, it gave me a better understanding of my own mother, aunts, and grandmother. This is one of the best and most underrated books of the century. When you start it, you'll wonder what you've gotten yourself into. Before you know it, you won't be able to put it down. Please don't pass this wonderful novel up, one of my favorites of all time. Lee Smith is the best Southern writer there is, period.

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