SAMPLE CHAPTER CONT'D

So that the girl would serve her incubus faithfully, the spirit would blot out her conscience and give her strange powers. As the girl slid ever deeper into her captor's cave of evil, otherworldly forces would occupy her mind and body, and she would start to do things that were otherwise completely out of her nature. Without even being aware of what was happening, she would grow stronger by the hour, by the day, by the *week,* until, at last, she herself would be as frightening as her demon overlord.

So, no one had to tell me there were strange things done in the dark hills of east Tennessee, mysteries that defy explanation, when I first moved there. I found out soon enough. I heard all kinds of stories, myths told by firelight and lantern only by the locals, folklore the old timers passed on, and never with a smile.

How many legends of murderous moonshiners and crazed, incestuous hillbillies did I hear in those first weeks after my family moved to little Village Green? Tales of backcountry clans so poor and grimy, so uneducated and incestuous that they lived like cavemen. They went to the bathroom in the woods or used privies, made their own lye soap, slaughtered their own hogs and boiled the heads, and still married their own sisters and cousins. According to our friends and neighbors, only a fool would deliberately hike up into the hills and risk coming across one of those bumpkin's rough hewn cabins, or worse, one of their stills. "If you're walking in the woods and accidentally surprise one of

those hayseeds," one man told me, "he'll shoot you dead and carve you up to feed to the hogs, without so much as asking your name. Those hicks'll murder you if they even *think* you're the law or a revenuer."

Now, with this serving as the only background information I had about the mountain people of the deep south, you can imagine how nervous I was when my father, for reasons my brother and I were never to know for sure, left his job in New Jersey and moved our family to Village Green, a small hamlet of split level homes west of Knoxville, Tennessee.

By coincidence or design, a friend of Dad's, Richard Samanski, also left his job that summer and moved his family to Village Green. It was odd enough, I thought, that I had never heard Dad mention Richard Samanski once in all the years we had lived in New Jersey, yet here we were in a little jerkwater community in east Tennessee- completely out of our element -and a guy Dad had apparently known for years but never spoken of moves his family at the same time, to the same state, the same town, and, weirdest of all, the same neighborhood. Weirder still, the Samanskis wound up living in a house that was literally behind ours, separated only by a narrow strip of woods. I mean, what were the odds of two houses, one behind the other, being on the market at exactly the same time so that two families coming from the same town fifteen hundred miles away could move in behind each other?

I realize now that it was Kiana's doing.