

Fourth of July

*They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*

PSALM 145:5

The hot afternoon sun blistered the tan earth. Under the shade of tall, lodgepole pines, a row of sweaty horses and mules stood tied to the rope corral. They switched their tails and stomped their feet, trying to fend off the buzzing horseflies. The crew unsaddled the mules while the guests dug their lunch sacks out of their saddlebags. Amarillo, my copper-colored saddle horse, leaned into my fingers as I scratched his neck. “In a few minutes we’re going to turn you loose, and you’ll get to go roll in the dirt.” I loosened the cinch, slipped the saddle off, and lugged it over to the stack of saddles. As I turned, I nearly tripped over Jeff, a 10-year-old guest. With twinkling green eyes he asked, “Do we have fireworks to celebrate the Fourth of July?”

“No, we can’t set them off in the wilderness because of the fire danger.”

His smile faded, and he lowered his eyes. I ruffled his sandy-brown hair. “You wouldn’t want to start a forest fire, would you?”

Jeff shrugged his shoulders and answered in a monotone, “I suppose not.”

My heart sank as I walked over to the kitchen. Not a breeze stirred as I stood next to the wood cookstove and flipped pork chops on the griddle. Sweat rolled down my back as my mind drifted back to my childhood.

The Fourth of July had been one of my favorite holidays. I grimaced. Jeff lived in the city, and he was used to big celebrations on Independence Day. *God, I feel awful. I didn't plan anything special for the guests. But what can I do now?*

All through dinner Jeff picked at his food. After eating, we built a campfire and roasted marshmallows. Jeff participated but mostly he stared at the coals.

The sun slipped lower in the sky, and a breeze rustled the leaves on the cottonwood trees. Billowy clouds lined the horizon. Shafts of golden rays streamed across the sky. The wind blew a strand of hair in my face. I tucked it behind my ear. The clouds marched across the sky like ranks of soldiers. Ribbons of pink light glowed from the bottom of the clouds, while the tops of them turned inky blue. An iridescent orange radiated across the sky followed by vibrant red.

Suddenly the clouds snuffed out the sun and everything became dark. One finger of lightning streaked across the sky. I glanced over at Jeff. With his eyes wide, he peered upward. The heavens rumbled. A gust of cold wind blasted through camp. Our kitchen tarp snapped and ballooned. The guylines pulled taut. A bolt of lightning zigzagged overhead. Another streamed across and then split into several shafts. *Crack!* Thunder clapped. A network of lightning bolts danced across the sky. They crisscrossed like a spider web, followed by ear-splitting peals of thunder. For the next half hour the sky exploded. I'd never seen a lightning show like it. Thunder rolled and clapped. Even the boulder I sat on shook. Before one streak of lightning ended, several more lit up the sky. Thunder boomed continuously. God was putting on His own laser light show.

As quickly as it started, the clouds marched away, leaving behind a crystalline-blue sky. I grinned at Jeff.

His green eyes twinkled as he watched the clouds fade away. He looked at me.

I nodded. "I think that was God saying, 'Happy Fourth of July, Jeff!'"

*Lord, the wonders of Your hands never cease to amaze me.
Thank You. Amen.*