

Lightning Bug was published in 1987. It is a story of lost love and the search for a rekindling of that love by main character Latha Bourne. Donald Harington wrote this novel as a tribute to his childhood home.

Plot:

Beginning

The novel starts with a depiction of the mood and setting through rich description involving all the senses. The narrator Dawny, a boy of 5 or 6, expresses how in love he is with Latha Bourne, the postmaster and storyteller. Dawny, Sonora, and Latha are sitting on the porch when a couple of boys show off for Sonora by “fighting.” Then Latha tells Dawny some stories and they end up going to sleep together.

Middling

ONE: Morning

Latha wakes and starts her chores before the entire city wakes at 5 :30. She comes across many animals and she has superstitions for all of them. If you see a redbird, make a wish. If it flies upward the wish will come true. If an all-white cat is sitting on the road, it means good luck. Latha goes through many superstitions; each one tells her something different that is going to happen on that day. Later Latha goes to her store and Jesse comes to her store before he goes to hire people to pick his tomatoes. Latha has her way with him. The mail comes to Latha at around 10:00 and she sorts it for Stay More and other towns as well. She ends up getting two pieces of mail, one from her sister saying that she wants Sonora to come to Little Rock because they don't like the influence Stay More has on her and the other piece of mail says, that Latha's post office is to be closed down. Then Every Dill comes to her store to buy a box of nails in order to put up his posters that say that he is a preacher.

Sub 1: Recently

Lartha likes to go fishing, but she can't go during the summer because she has no excuse to go. In the fall, she says that she is picking berries, but instead she goes fishing and in the summer, there are no berries. However, Latha decides to go on a Sunday when “all God-fearing people are in church.” Lartha says that only young boys and an occasional grown man go fishing so if a grown man were to stop here, she would be the first woman he would have ever seen here. She then presented a “hypothetical situation” in which a man asks her why she isn't married and she lies and tells him that nobody asked her, she changes her name and lies about where she lives. They talk and make love and finally before they depart, Dolph Rivett, (the man), asked if he could visit her in Demijohn where she said that she lived.

TWO: Noon



Dolph Rivett finally finds Latha, but when he does Sonora is with her. Latha lies and tells him that her name is Sarah, Sonora is her daughter named Lucy, and that she is married to Luther Chism who works at the canning factory. Luther then comes to the store and does not seem mad at Latha when he finds out that she sent Dolph Rivett to him on purpose, instead he offers to help her get rid of him if she needs or wants to get rid of him. Every Dill then comes by and he talks with Latha and she tells him that she knew it was him who robbed the bank when she was a teller and him who threatened to kill her if she didn't cooperate.

Sub Two: Twenty and Eighteen Years Ago

When Every and Latha were young, they fell in love and agreed to marry each other when they came of age, but Latha's mother did not want her to marry Every, she wanted her to marry an Ingledew boy. Raymond Ingledew proposed and Latha accepted. Then Raymond and Every enlist in the Army and Raymond is found to be missing while Every comes back to town. Every then tells the men who come to clear him out of town a story about Raymond. He says that he tried to free him from the trap the Germans set and then the Germans sprung the trap and he couldn't remember what happened after that. Every woke up in a hospital unaware of what happened to Raymond. Every comes back to town and the Ingledews try to shoot him and they tell him that if he ever comes back they will shoot him. Two years pass and Latha has forgotten about Every and then he shows up still wanting to marry her. Then Every has his way with her. Then when Latha goes to work a man comes in with a pistol and slides Latha a note saying that if she doesn't empty the safe in two minutes she is a dead girl, Latha believes this man is Every.

THREE: Afternoon.

Every and Latha are talking when Dolph Rivett comes up to her yard. Latha then asks Every to pose as her husband, but Dolph Rivett already knew that he was a preacher and was only here for one day so far. Then Every and Dolph proceed to fight each other for who gets to marry Latha. However, Every found out that Dolph left his wife and kids for Latha and that they did it. Latha and Dolph do it again and in the midst of it all Dawny comes by asking for a soda. Soon after Tearle Ingledew comes by Latha's house and Every Dill also comes back and they talk. Soon after Every starts to ask questions about Sonora and he says that he believes that Sonora is his and Latha's child because Mandy's husband Vaughn is sterile.

Sub Three: Seventeen Years Ago

Latha is staying in Mandy and Vaughn's house and she is very pregnant. Mandy keeps complaining that Latha is a whore and she doesn't want anybody to know that her sister is pregnant, but secretly Mandy is jealous because she wants a baby. She gives birth and names the baby Sonora while Mandy wanted to name the baby Fannie Mae. Then Mandy takes Latha to an insane asylum because Latha doesn't want to speak to her or Vaughn or Sonora when they are around. Latha says that they want to take Sonora for their own.

FOUR: Evening

Latha, Every, and Sonora are eating supper together and Sonora keeps asking Dill questions. Latha goes out to do her chores, but she worries that Dill will tell Sonora that he is her father and that Latha is her mother. The W.P.A boys come back and are fighting then Sonora shouts that her father, Every Dill, will “lick all you guys put together” if they don’t stop. Every then shows the boys how to “indian-wrastle.” Latha decides that she wants to marry Every Dill.

Sub 4: Fourteen Years Ago

A man comes to see Latha, but they won’t let him in because he is not immediate family. So this man hatches a plan to try to free her from the hospital’s “E ward.” The man climbs up the drainpipe to the roof then takes the screws from the vent and climbs down it into the hospital. He then finds where Latha is and he tells her that he is here to take her home, away from all of these “crazy people.” The man did not leave the rope on the ground so he tried to boost Latha to the attic so she could reach the rope and throw it down to him so that they could escape together. The man took Latha on his back and they made it off the roof and onto the ground. They drove to a nearby town where Latha ended up laughing and feeling better then they ended up in a hotel and the man went to go and find a job. Latha passes out and the man gets very scared. He then tells God that he will give himself to His service if he would make Latha alright and he goes and gets baptized in a tub. Latha then “wakes up” believing that she went and became a prostitute she got out of the hotel room and escaped. The man went back to find out that she was gone and he stayed in that room and prayed that she would come back.

FIVE: Night

Latha agrees to marry Every after he explains to her how he rescued her from the “hospital.” Latha goes to check on Donny, but Rosie beat him up because he would not tell on Latha. Latha wants to disappear with Donny and Sonora, but she can’t leave Stay More. Latha then asks Every about original sin and is there any way to regain their innocence back. Every then goes down to the creek to speak with the Lord to ask him if he should lay with Latha. Every says that the Lord told him “straightway will I show thee thy true vocation.” Every looks for a sign and then Sarah Chism comes up the road and asks him to pray for a revenuer because her husband Luther shot him. Every then fixes Doc Swain’s car which lets him reach Luther’s place in time to make sure the revenuer is fine. Every then asks Doc Swain to issue a marriage license for him and Latha.

Sub 5: Now

Latha is sleeping alone while Every is in the store snoring away. Sonora comes into Latha’s room and calls her “mother.” She says that Hank and her have broken up because she told Hank that Every Dill was her father. Hank replied that the Ingledews are sworn enemys of Every Dill and that he could not love her anymore because she was the daughter of Every Dill. Then Sonora asks if she would marry Every for her. Latha thinks to herself that now she has three reasons not to marry him and one good reason to marry him. Latha dreams that she is sitting under a peach tree and Jesus comes and talks with her about Every. She asks him if Every should have become a preacher and Jesus says no. He wants Every to follow him and believe in him, but he does not have to be a preacher. They talk for a while and Latha asks him why he couldn’t just tell Every that it was fine to sleep with Latha. The Lord says he

already answered her questions and they continue to talk for a little bit. Latha then wakes up and finds Every sleeping. She then goes back to sleep.

Ending

Dawny goes missing so Rosie and Frank start looking for him when they come across Every. They make fun of him for having his "member" displayed and he tries to leave town. Latha goes after him trying to convince him to stay. He does decide to stay and he will be the most apt to find Dawny. The townspeople all look for Dawny in all kinds of places. Dolph Rivett's son Purdy will come to take Dolph away. Mandy and Vaughn will also come to try to take Sonora away, but she refuses to go. Sonora and John Henry (Hank) will get marry, but Every would not be able to conduct the ceremony because he wouldn't have enough preacher left in him. The dog Gumper finds Dawny and very soon everything will disappear in Stay More. All the signs will go, people will leave, and Stay More will turn into a ghost town. The story ends with Latha and Every getting married and with the sound of a door closing.

Characters:

Donald: "Dawny," 5 or 6, narrator, in love with Latha, tousle-haired, spending summer with aunt

Sonora: 17, red hair, niece of Latha, from Little Rock, spending summer with aunt

Latha Bourne: postmistress, about 39, storyteller, feeds about 24 cats

Every Dill – Latha's old lover/ beau who comes back to town as a preacher

Minor Characters:

The Boys:

Oren ("Junior") Duckworth, Jr. and his brother Chester – best-looking

Earl, Burl, and Gerald – triplet sons of Lawlor Coe the blacksmith

John Henry ("Hank") Ingledew – nephew to Raymond Ingledew and lover of Sonora

Other Minor Characters:

Raymond Ingledew – Latha's beau who went missing in the war

JD Pruitt – comes from up north in Newton County

Eddie Churchwell and Dorsey Tharp – from downstate

Tearle Ingledew – the village drunk who proposes to Latha often

Dolph Rivett – a man Latha means while fishing with whom she makes love with while they are together

Elements of the novel:

Losing love and attempting to restore that love

Metaphors: marriage and mating

Promiscuity – “making – love” is a rite of passage that occurs when people are really young and it is a natural thing to do

Reception: