

Chapter 5



DOWN COUNTRY ROADS

Psalm 67: 7

“The earth has yielded its fruit; God, our God has blessed us”

Love Letters

There are times when our paths wind through dark valleys where sunlight seems but a distant memory. It is at these moments of darkness that our faith in God is stretched to unimaginable limits.

Mary and Grant Pascall, a newly married lovesick couple had been startled out of heavenly bliss by the ugly side of a country at war. Her husband was now a soldier, fighting a battle on foreign soil for his country. However, it was Mary's firm belief that the Great Shepherd held them both in the palms of His hands, which assured her that Grant would return safely home once again. Mary also knew that her Heavenly Father was only a prayer away, which strengthened her faith during the low moments she would experience. It was in this spirit of trust that Mary moved forward with love in her heart and inner peace restored to her soul.

Since there was not a week that passed without letters being exchanged between the two lovebirds, the mailman knew with certainty that he would be stopping at the mailbox out in front of Mary's house. The content and frequency of these letters would serve to dim the loneliness and narrow the distance for the two young people.

Down Winding Roads

The motor of the 1935 Plymouth car purred steadily as it carried Mary, two dogs, her mother, step father, and Grandmother, (called Mama) farther and farther away from the city to start their new lives in the country. It was due to a \$10,000 insurance policy on Grandmother Moore's son, who had been killed in war, that the family was able to purchase a 40 acre farm located close to a river. The family

members were excited at the prospect of being self sufficient from what they grew on their very own farm. They had spent many hours planning vegetable and flower gardens as well as deciding on the necessary livestock needed to assure a bountiful harvest to feed the entire family. Mary who was known to be an enormous animal lover, perked up at the thoughts of the array of pets that would be hers for the spoiling.

Glancing out the rear window of the car, Mary noticed the familiar noises and buildings of the city were gone, replaced by only faint silhouettes in the distance. As she sat thoughtfully recalling the happenings of her short time on earth, she was amazed at the numerous changes that were brought about by all the exciting and sometimes tragic twists and turns in her life. While waiting for her beloved soldier to return from war, she would be going back to the life of a country girl once again. Strange, she thought, how life seemed to go in circles and still present totally different views.

Lost deep in her own thoughts, busily painting a mental picture of her future, a large bump in the road jarred her into the present surroundings. The landscape had suddenly changed into a pastoral country setting that presented a totally new face. Large stately oak trees with wild grapevines cascading up and down their textured trunks offered a graceful gesture of welcome as their delicate leaves stirred the morning air in a way that refreshed the soul. The fragrance of yellow honeysuckle growing over the barbed wire fence added an intoxicating perfume that drew Mary's soul back to the peaceful life of the country once again.

Although it had been 17 years since being a country girl, Mary had a feeling down deep inside that this move would offer another exciting page in her young life. Given Mary's uncanny ability to make the best of every circumstance life presented, there was no doubt in her active mind this adventure would be recorded as another exciting chapter in her precious memory bank.

The Arrival Home

As the 1935 Plymouth leaned toward the ditch making its way around the final curve in the road, all eyes were suddenly fixed on a small white ranch style house that was soon to be called home. The small dwelling appeared to be smiling and motioning to the little group, anxiously anticipating the tenderness of their touch as they painted every board of its frame with loving kindness. The air was filled

with the promise of hope that overflows the heart from the joy and beauty of the new life it brings.

At the far corner of the yard, the delicate blooms of purple lilacs were preparing to permeate the air with their rich, explosive perfume. Oh, how Mary loved to open her window inviting the fresh, gentle breezes of spring to saturate every inch of her bedroom with their sweetness.

Every member of the family stood with squinted eyes, peering across the 40 acres of land that now belonged to them, envisioning Mother Earth bursting forth in a dramatic blanket of wild flowers; a beauty yet unseen.

The busy hum of honey bees called their attention to an orchard filled with fruit trees whose branches were thickly draped with feathery pastel blossoms. This magnificent haze of delicate pink and white blooms brought the promise of a truly bountiful harvest. The crispy red apples would provide not only spicy golden brown pies, but sauce to accompany their succulent pork roast dinners. They almost felt a need to wipe their chins in anticipation of the juice that would ooze from the large yellow and white peaches with each and every delicious bite. The blushing red cherries that were soon to fill their baskets would make the best cobblers this side of the Missouri River. The harvest from this beautiful orchard would not only provide fresh fruit for the season, but also fill numerous glass canning jars to tantalize the taste buds when the snow was flying.

A rectangular shaped patch of brown earth, soon to be their garden invited them to change into old jeans, dawn their old straw hats, and start digging in the dirt with their rusty old hoes. The horse that had pulled their buggy as a way of getting around the city would now be hooked to a plow.

The feel of the newly turned soil would soon be filtering through their fingers like bread flour through a sifter. The seeds they had purchased in the city would shortly be poking their heads up through the rich black dirt toward the shimmering rays of sunlight. Yes, that little basement that ran the full length of the house had shelves that would rapidly be crowded with an array of colorful canned goods.

Of course, no vegetable garden would be complete without rows of beautiful red, yellow and orange dahlias that would be placed in fruit jars to brighten every

room of the house. Pink sweet pea vines were already trailing along the sides of the garden and on the banks of the road. With great excitement, Mary also spotted a carpet of lavender violets growing under a canopy of budding trees. What fun it was to search for the ones that had a velvet splash of dark burgundy petals and add them to a spring bouquet that seemed to herald the arrival of a new season.

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it,” was a scripture that came to Mary's mind as the group made their way toward the little white house. It was getting toward evening which meant it was time to wind down for a much needed rest. What a lovely day this had been for everyone! That evening, Mary looked toward the heavens softly murmuring a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings that God had showered down on all of them. When her sleepy eyes closed, she could hear the “peepers” down by the pond adding their final serenade as an appropriate ending to a perfect day.

A New Day

The gentle patter of rain dancing on the window panes caused Mary to open her eyes at the break of day. The first blush of light was just starting to chase the lingering shadows across her bedroom wall which announced the first full day of her life as a country girl. Mary listened to the singing of the birds ignoring the gentle spring shower as they continued to build their nests in the tall trees surrounding the house. As she lay quietly for a few moments, her mind started processing the financial needs she would be facing as a newly married lady. Quickly, she realized the \$50 that Grant received from the US Army would only serve as part of what she would need in order to function. This time for thought motivated Mary to get up and immediately explore the possibilities for work around the community. Consequently, in her usual style of facing challenges, she obtained a job earning \$20 per week at the local country station pumping gas. Although she was aware that a large hunk of time would be taken out of each day, there would be enough daylight left when she finished for completing her share of work on the farm.

Animals For The Spoiling

Although Mary busily pumped gas for added income, she approached her evening

farm chores with eagerness and great enthusiasm. After all, it was the time when she was allowed to freely spoil all the animals around the farm. In Mary's mind, they were all God's creatures and were worthy of her undivided attention. She never met an animal she didn't love. Or did she?

Later when trying to recall an animal she didn't think worthy of becoming a pet, her face became animated when exclaiming, "A snake was never welcome as one of my pets. I would not get close enough to let them become friendly because I thought they were from the devil. All they ever saw of me were the tracks I left behind as my feet carried my screeching body rapidly away."

As Mary started the evening ritual, her two dogs and numerous cats never left her side. They recognized the love that radiated from their master's being and stayed within range to receive as many strokes as Mary's hands would deliver. While her parents milked the cows, Mary fed the cats in an unusual manner. The cats would sit in a row behind the cows eagerly awaiting their feeding ritual. Mary would squeeze the cows' teats and aim directly at each cat's mouth with amazing accuracy. The cats would take turns opening their mouths, in what appeared to be a synchronized rhythm, catching each delicious squirt of the fresh warm milk. Loud, satisfied meows could be heard as a show of thanks. Mary then continued her chores by gathering eggs, scattering chicken feed, giving the horses fresh hay, and slopping the noisy, hungry pigs. By the end of the evening, an animal parade of dogs, cats and pet chickens could be seen walking in a line right behind Mary, as if she had become the piper.

The Magic Of Summer

The fields on the small farm offered pristine places colored with the beauty of summers green. The lively little brook could be heard in the distance as it flowed over smooth rocks on its journey to the great beyond. Its water was crystal clear and reflected the happy faces of Mary and her friends as they baited hooks with wiggly worms and dough balls in hopes of catching dinner. There was nothing as tantalizing as fried fish in an old black skillet over an open fire. Somehow, a campfire made everything taste extra special. The raucous laughter and idle chatter sometimes gave way to peaceful, quiet thoughts as they all sat on the bank patiently waiting for nibbles on their lines. To pass time, they would look skyward and spot a buzzard floating effortlessly among the white cotton clouds in the azure blue sky. Then as daylight turned to evening, the blinking lights from the

fireflies filled the darkness with a special magic. At this moment in time, the friendly group would revert back to childhood by catching the blinking fireflies and placing them in a clear glass jar. The one with the brightest blinking jar won the contest hands down! They would then use them as lanterns that made the evening even more majestic.

Although the summer days would heat up and cause a body to sweat in all the humidity, cranking a freezer of homemade vanilla ice cream while sitting under the maple tree, made for a cool refreshing sweet ending to a perfect day. When Mary arose the following day to find the lard buckets setting on the back porch, she knew it was time for a walk through summer's woods in search for blackberries. Unfortunately, as much as she enjoyed the delicious blackberry cobbler, all this picking meant dealing with stickers, chiggers and ticks. Itching and scratching would soon be in order.

Autumn Arrives

Although a desire for the lazy hazy days of summer to continue forever was an unspoken hope, it was merely a dream. Suddenly the beautiful velvet rose bade its final farewell as its soft petals fell upon the faded green grass. Summer on the 40 acre farm had reached its conclusion and was giving way to the crispness of autumn. Jack Frost would soon be painting the green country side with the fiery red, orange and yellow colors of fall. The daisies in the fields had long been replaced by golden rods and purple asters.

The smell of burning leaves and fresh apple cider filled Mary's nostrils as she gathered the remaining harvest from the season. Soon, the long hours of daylight would be replaced by the, never ending, dark days of winter.

Postcard Countryside

The earth on the 40 acre farm had yielded its bounty and God had richly blessed Mary's family. The wood and coal bins were full and ready to make the ranch style home toasty and warm during the cold days and nights of winter. Winter meant fires and more fires! Mary's winter outfit would always include cotton stockings, shoes that laced or long boots, heavy coats, hats and that AWFUL LONG UNDERWEAR, if chosen!

The rectangular shaped brown patch that had become their garden had produced a bountiful harvest that now filled numerous canning jars that resided on the basement shelves. The little patch of ground had provided food for the family that would last through the winter.

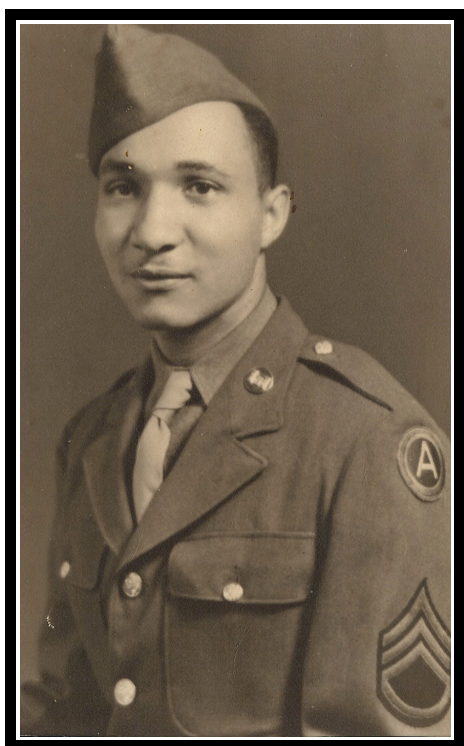
One morning, Mary awakened to find gentle snow falling outside her window. It soon covered the ground, barren limbs on the trees and evergreen boughs. When it ended, the light from the sun's rays made everything take on the appearance of sparkled icing. The frozen pond and brook in the distance appeared to be made of glass that reflected the images of light like a new shiny mirror. The brilliance of the sun had invaded the frozen glint and created a truly splendorous moment.

As Mary stood looking out her window at the beauty and majesty of the first snow on the farm, she quoted a scripture that seemed to fit from Psalm 66: 5, "Come and see the works of God, awesome in the deeds done for us." God's handiwork had created a country postcard as far as the eye could see. The first year of her return to being a country girl would soon be coming to an end. Reflecting back on the blessings the entire family had received, there was only one empty spot in Mary's heart that caused worry and sorrow. Grant Pascall, her beloved husband and soldier was still fighting for his country and would be absent for three more years.

Even though the cold of winter had arrived in Mary's life, she knew beyond a shadow of doubt that the purple and yellow crocus bulbs she had planted would soon poke their heads up through the snow as a calling card announcing good things to follow. Before long, their announcement would proclaim the arrival of a spring when her soldier would be home for good. At that point, her life would do a complete reversal from country girl back to "city lady" once again.



Horse and buggy like Mary's family owned for city travel. Horse then hooked to a plow.
(Courtesy of the History Museum for Springfield—Greene County)



Picture of Grant sent to Mary in one of her letters.
(Both pictures courtesy of Treshna Stephens, Mary's great niece)



Grant on duty during war.



**Mary, pictured in foreground, enjoying a day of fishing and picnicking on the farm with friends.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens, Mary's great niece)**