

## Chapter 6



### Madam Queen

Psalm 47:1

**“Praise the Lord!  
For it is good to praise the Lord;  
For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful.”**

#### Meet Me In St. Louis

The spring of 1947 that had unfolded its spectacular display of flowering blossoms, gentle rain showers, and sun-warmed breezes on the Thompkins farm was now generously yielding to the sights, smells and sounds of summer. Large noisy June bugs were flying in the air with reckless abandonment, crashing into window screens, brushing the family's straw hats, and even landing on the noses of Mary's cats and dogs.

The result from 4 years of blood, sweat and painful elbow grease on behalf of the entire family, caused the little forty acre farm to respond with a bountiful harvest that far exceeded their wildest imaginations. An example of these blessings could be seen in the fresh green peas that were being hulled by Ella to accompany the new potatoes that had just been brought in from the garden.

Mary Josephine Pascall's sun kissed face, now the color of budded wheat, glowed with the picture of health as she darted to the mailbox in search of another faithful letter from Grant. Finding it there, she anxiously ripped open the envelope and quickly scanned the pages for any important news.

**I'M COMING HOME! MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS!** These big, bold words seemed to jump right off the page into Mary's throbbing heart. As she tried to absorb the meaning of the powerful message, it suddenly dawned on her that her soul mate, the love of her life, was safe and already in route to his home state of Missouri.

The squeals and laughter that bubbled out of happy Mary's mouth could be heard all over the countryside. Alarmed, the dogs started fiercely barking, her cats ran and hid under the porch and the chickens cackled loudly in the barnyard. Mary looked up to see her protective mother, Ella, running down the driveway with a hoe. Since snakes were the only thing Mary feared, Ella was coming to her rescue.

After reading Grant's directions in detail, Mary learned that she was to meet him in St. Louis where he would go through a mustering out ceremony. This was when the US Army would check Grant both physically and mentally before releasing him from duty.

That evening, the little farm house was filled with an atmosphere of praise and celebration to the Good Shepherd for bringing their loved one home safely. When assessing the emotions she experienced on that June day in 1947, Mary's 91 year old face took on a reflection of the joy she had felt as a response to the life changing news she had received. She remarked, "Honey, I was out of this world, CRAZY, with excitement."

All those nights when she lay awake in bed to find her groping fingers clutching only empty air, were over. Full to overflowing with joy and anticipation, the night before her departure seemed to be endless. As she repeatedly rolled over and looked at the clock, it appeared as if the hands were moving in slow motion, or had completely frozen in place.

Finally, when the soft light of first dawn broke through her window, Mary leaped from her bed with out stretched arms ready to embrace all the joy that life had in store for her soul. Since her husband Grant was home, Mary believed that every happiness and promise were hers to pursue. It was time to close the door and turn the key on the life of a country girl. Although Mary did not know what waited around the next corner, the dreams her heart had carefully stored during the long four years of separation were hers for the living. She was now Mrs. Mary Josephine Pascall, city lady!

As Mary drove the four hours to St. Louis, her mind was crowded with a million questions and thoughts. Would Grant look and act the same? Did the horrors of war forever change him? Would he still think she was pretty and special? What would his face look like when he spotted her in the distance?

As the crazy in love newly married couple embraced in a long, overdue, emotionally charged greeting, all questions were immediately answered. At that moment, they were the only two people in the world.

### City Life

Once Grant settled into the life of a civilian again, he continued his career with the Frisco Railroad as a chef in the dining car. The requirements of his position meant extensive travel as the train moved around from city to city. Since Mary was already familiar with Grant's work habits, she soon adjusted to her surroundings in St. Louis, where they were to live for two years. Since Mary had a car, everything would be fine. Oh, how she loved her car. She exclaimed, "There wasn't anything in the whole world like my car. Now honey, driving was different then because the cars were not chewing on each others bumpers like they do now."

Sometimes, if Grant was furloughed in another city for a long weekend, Mary would jump in the car and meet him for a romantic excursion. (Mary clicked her tongue loudly as a gesture of fond remembrance when recalling these rendezvous.) Once when she had just arrived for one of those meetings in a strange city, a group of ladies approached her saying, "We just love.....your husband!" Mary not taking kindly to the greeting replied, "And I just love....your husbands, too!" The ladies quickly received the message that Grant was off limits and proceeded to move along.

As the young couple adjusted to each other, they soon discovered they possessed equally strong personalities. Having been under Ella Thompkins tutelage since age three, Mary was a very forceful, opinionated young woman. Therefore, when a dispute erupted, Grant would say, "Have it your way, Madam Queen." This was a name he assigned to Mary throughout their 61 years of marriage. She will openly admit that after an argument, it would take walking only half a block before she realized that she was as much to blame for the disagreement as Grant.

### Home Sweet Home

After being transferred to several different cities, Grant finally received word that they could return to Springfield. Since Mary's family still lived there, the news was received with great relief and excitement. Although the travel had brought

great adventure into Mary's life, there was no place like home. Upon returning, Mary and Grant moved into one of the rental homes belonging to her mother, Ella. Since she was so familiar with her surroundings, Mary immediately landed a position as housekeeper for the McJimsey family; owners of the Springfield Leader and Press Newspaper. As housekeeper, Mary was responsible for meeting the needs of the entire family which included two girls and one boy. It was in their home that she prepared her first meal for a dinner party. Mary was so nervous that she can recite the menu even today. It included:

Fried Chicken  
Greens with Salt Pork  
Biscuits  
Mashed Potatoes  
Gravy  
Creamed Pears

Since it was the custom to have a medium sized breakfast, large noon meal and a light dinner, she would prepare the two main meals and leave a light fare before going home for the evening. Mary had become so accepted and appreciated by the family that she continued to bake birthday cakes for the McJimsey children even after they had left home. On each child's birthday, a cake would arrive all the way across the country from their friend Mary.

### Soul Cooking

Mary describes soul cooking as using all you've got in your bones and stirring it all up into a bowl. To Mary, it was more than cooking with your senses. She declared, "Child, I was born into this world with a 'taste bud" that was handed down through my mother's people. Grant Pascall married himself a full blown cook. When you are born with a "taste bud" you can eat food, name the flavors in what you taste and dream about seasonings that are missing. No one can teach it to you, child. God just blesses you with the gift."

Mary remembers, even as a small child, accompanying her mother to the wealthy families' homes and studying their menus while tasting their recipes. While her mother did their laundry, Mary was committing their menus and flavorings to memory. She recalls her mother and grandmother sitting in the kitchen watching her cook on the old wood stove with its water reservoir on the side at age 16. She

believed being able to prepare a meal on one of those old stoves made you a born cook.

Later on, Mary acquired cook books from the McJimsey family and changed the recipes to satisfy her own “taste bud.” Describing in detail she explained, “Honey, we could not afford measuring spoons, which caused me to season food with a pinch of this and a handful of that. As I did this, I used my fingers, nose and eyes to get it just right. My favorite big bowl would then rest right on my hip as I stirred up the best lip smacking recipe you can ever imagine.”

She continued, “The first bread recipe I learned to make was hot, soft brown, melt in your mouth biscuits, fresh out of the oven. Now honey, don't peep in that oven door during the first 10 minutes of baking them or they're gonna fall flat.”

### Yeast Monster In The Garbage Can

Mary had been tasting and eyeballing hot yeast rolls for a bit and finally decided she was ready to try them on her own. Given her enormous success using that innate “taste bud”, she approached the first attempt at making yeast rolls with confidence. After mixing her ingredients together and forming the dough into nice round shapes, she allowed them 30 minutes to raise double their size.

Nothing happened! She then finished the story with a show of great humor and drama by stating, “Those little round buggers had done absolutely nothing but sit right there looking back at me in defiance. So, feeling dejected and succumbing to defeat, I carried that mess to the back door and dumped it into the garbage can. Firmly placing the lid down, I vowed to go back in and make me some of those tasty hot biscuits that would melt in my mouth. A while later, I returned to the garbage can to dispose of something and found the lid all the way up to the handle on my screen door. When I banged the door into the lid, it almost scared me to death! I punched that yeast dough down, slammed the lid and vowed to have greater patience the next time. From that lesson came the most delicious yeast rolls you can put into your mouth.”

### Trouble With Meat Recipes

Choosing meat dishes for Mary's table sometimes presented difficulty due to her love for animals. When asked if her infatuation for animals continued during adulthood, she exclaimed, “Hush your mouth girl! I loved animals so much it was

hard to kill and eat them. How can you kill something that has been following you all around the yard? When I went hunting with Grant, if an animal came close, I would just shoot straight up in the air and it would run away. Grant probably knew he would have a hard day as a hunter if I went along.

Once I tried to wring a chicken's neck for dinner without any luck. After twirling it around for a while, it just walked off in a wobbly state, turned around and looked at me like I was crazy. Other people brought me the chicken ready to fry. When you bit into my chicken, it was crispy on the outside with an explosion of moisture on the inside. I've eaten squirrel, rabbit, fish, turtle and frog legs, but don't be thinkin I'm gonna eat possum or coon.. Possum is nothing but grease and coon is just too cute. Once I hung the clothes over a line to dry and looked out the window to see a raccoon jumping from sleeve to sleeve, eventually pulling my day's wash down on the ground. It was so funny.”

### Mary's Pets

Pets were welcome guests at Mary's house and actually described as thinking they were human due to receiving so much spoiling from their master. Cats, dogs, and even chickens followed her every step. When she planted a garden, she made sure to include enough for all her welcome four legged friends to graze on at will, without ever being chased away.

One of Mary's favorite pets was a little black wire-haired poodle called Gigi. It has been reported that on many occasions, Mary was spotted driving down Fremont Avenue with Gigi draped around her neck. The humorous aspect to this sighting was due to Mary's dark Afro hair style. Her hair and Gigi's coat looked so similar that differentiating the two was impossible, thus, creating the illusion of a strange creature driving behind the wheel.

Once, Grant happened to be walking near Jordan Creek when he spotted a tiny animal desperately swimming in search of dry land. As the shape swam closer, he realized it was that of a very small piglet. Grant reasoned this little cunning pig had escaped the slaughter house located up stream a short distance away. Given this fact, he felt strongly the little piglet was deserving of a safe harbor. Therefore, he waded into the water, scooped it up in his arms and carried it home to his animal loving “Madam Queen”.

Of course, the moment Mary laid eyes on the little homeless animal, she squealed louder than the piglet. Wrapping her welcoming arms around it, she started thinking of where it would live. After feeding it and naming it “Woo-Woo”, Grant and Mary worked together making it a home on the back porch.

Day after day, Mary loved and cared for little “Woo-Woo”; spoiling it with the tremendous flow of affection that only she could offer. As a result, she had a new member in the parade of pets that followed her every step. Squeals and oinks were added to the array of pet sounds already filling the air in the Pascall back yard. As a result, out of happiness, that spoiled little piglet appeared to grow larger by the moment.

Therefore, it dawned on Mary one day that the home they had provided for “Woo-Woo” no longer fit. They now had a piglet that had turned into a large pig almost over night. Since pigs loved mud more than anything to keep cool, they were out of city options. It was time for her prized pet to move to the country where her friend's farm was located.

Sadly, with tears streaking down her face, Mary waved goodbye to her friend “Woo-Woo” as the truck drove him down the street and out of sight. Realizing he might end up on someone's table in the form of a pork roast, she elected to never see her pet again. It would break her heart to know he had become someone's dinner.

Observing animal behavior was a fascination that remained strong throughout Mary's life. During the storms, her pets would hide under the covers with her for security until the thunder ceased. However, the most incredulous discovery to Mary was noticing how much their expressions and behavior mirrored her own.

### Food For Thought

Having eaten so many delicious meals prepared by his soul mate, the expertise she displayed in the kitchen did not go unappreciated or unnoticed by Grant. Consequently, well into their journey of life together, he gave Mary some food for thought by saying, “Madam Queen, I think you should consider opening a barbecue restaurant of your own.” Mary appreciated this flattery but put it out of her mind and went on with her busy schedule.



**Mary sitting on steps with Grant  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**



**Mary and Grant on rendezvous in Wichita, KS.  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**



**Mary pampering pets.  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**



**Mary and Gigi, her poodle.  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**