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Part One

THE RETURN

The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also—Psalms 95:3, 4.

YOUNG DR. MARK DUNCAN MURRAY III, still in his uniform and carrying his light luggage, had come out from Morgan on the bus. It had left him at the crossroads, where the pavement was about to end and the dirt road begin—the road that led him home. He had been home but little during the past eight years. Some of that time he had been in college, some in army training, and then, war! Now he was home! Home with a limp and an arm that would have to mend miraculously if ever his fingers were to use the scalpel. But now that he was home his strength would return, even his arm would be firm and strong again!

He came to the end of the pavement, where the dirt road began which had been machined until it was almost as smooth as the pavement. To his left he saw an enormous sawdust pile and a huge stack of slabs. He saw also the tree tops and branches that cluttered the woods where the timber had been cut.

“Why are we so wasteful? We take with such a free hand, but we so seldom put back. I’ve had my eyes opened. The Lord helping me, I’ll not be that kind of mountaineer.

I hope my dad has a lot of wood ready for cold weather. That's certainly some slab pile!" he muttered, half aloud.

To his right he saw the white-faced cattle in the fenced pasture and smiled. "That's better! I'm going to have some cattle one of these days. Wonder who lives in this new house?" He looked for some signs of the owner but saw no one.

He threw back his shoulders, breathed deeply of the pure, fragrant air, and tried to quicken his pace. "Back in God's country!" he exclaimed. "I don't care if I have to walk all the rest of the way home. But I'll have to take this steep hill more slowly."

He laughed a little. A twig snapped. He jumped. Then he looked up into the trees and grinned as he said, "I'll not always jump. You old hills, you've got to heal these blasted nerves. You gave strength to my great-grand-daddy when he came to you about a hundred years ago. Now do the same for me. Give me peace of mind, health of body, and strength of spirit. Give it in double doses!"

It was early autumn of 1946 in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. Splotches of brilliant reds and yellows were already brightening the dark and substantial green of the pines, hemlocks, and firs. Here and there were clusters of wild asters, yellow daisies, golden-rod, and wahoo. The dogwood was gay with its red berries; holly promised an adorning crop of red. The fragrance of wild muscadines was an invitation to wander off the highway into the woods.

The new hard-surfaced highway cut through some of the good bottom land, breaking up what once had been rich acres of corn or wheat into smaller patches that failed to yield as abundantly as when the old wagon road had hugged the edge of the mountain, which spared the entire bottom for cultivation. The numerous clear streams were spanned with small bridges instead of being left open for

fording. Much land had been cleared, and cultivated until it was worn out, then left to lie idle for the rains to wash into gullies. But for all that, the mountains were beautiful, friendly, and—above all—peaceful.

A spring was trickling in a tiny stream from the hillside. There was a tin can beside it. Young Dr. Murray rinsed out the can, then drank deeply of the cold, clear, sweet water. Putting the can back carefully, he exclaimed, "Delicious! That's the first really satisfying drink of water I've had since I left these parts! I'd forgotten water could be so good."

He heard a car coming toward him. He stepped aside to let it pass, but it stopped. "Do you want—well, what do you know! If it isn't Doc Mark! Get in, soldier, and let me have the pleasure of taking you home."

Young Dr. Murray decided he would have plenty of time later to wander in the hills, so he accepted the gracious offer.

"You're Carl Carson, aren't you?" asked Mark.

"Right the first time! Are you just getting back? I've been out three months, and boy! is it good to be home again!" Carson told him.

"It's so good that I want to stay here in the hills until I take root like one of these pines. Do you know, I believe I missed the pines and the fragrance of them more than anything else in these mountains."

"I know. So did I. Did you go across?"

"Yes. The Pacific. And you?"

"Europe—all over the whole universe it seemed to me."

"How are my folks?"

"Just fine. Old Doc has been busy. A lot of kids had measles. I'll tell you we're certainly lucky to have a good doctor up here among us. I guess your grandfather did one of the best things that anyone ever did when he came back from Virginia and settled here; and then your daddy did the same thing. I hope you stay around here. I reckon there'd

be enough for two doctors to do, especially when it gets out that you are here and can be called.”

“I don’t want to doctor even a sick cat for a while. I just want to soak up a lot of this sunshine, eat my mom’s cooking, and drink this good water for a long time.”

“I know how you feel. That’s the way I felt. The thing that did me the most good was plunging the point of an old plow into this old red clay and turning it over. I sorta came back to life then. For a while I couldn’t plow long at a time. I got plugged in my right leg, but it’s about well. Did you come out without a scratch?”

“I got my share. But I’m expecting to be all right before long, too.”

It didn’t take long to cover five miles in a fairly good old car over hard dirt roads. Presently Carl Carson stopped before a big, white house that had as many glass windows in it as any house in Richmond might have boasted of back in 1850.

“Won’t you come in?” young Dr. Murray asked.

“I’ll come some other time. I’ve got some stuff for Ma, and she likely is wanting it for supper. So long! I’ll be seeing you!”

A woman came out of the white house as Mark Murray, III, stepped from behind the car. “Mark!” she cried and ran lightly down the steps and on till she had reached her son.

“Hi, Mom!” exclaimed Mark, throwing down his bag and taking her into his arms. “I’m home!”

“Praise the Lord! Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come! But why didn’t you let us know? Your father would have met you,” said Rilda Murray, daughter of David and Martha Munro.

“I was afraid he might be busy. Anyway, I just wanted the fun of surprising you all. Where’s Dad?” he asked, as they went on to the house.

“He’s on a call right this minute, but it is time for him to be back. He’ll be as surprised to see you as I am.” They walked arm in arm into the house.

No one except his mother was at home. “Where is everybody?” asked Mark.

“Donald took the tractor over to Dan Cannon’s to plow some of his land. Caroline is still teaching, and Becky is in school. She’ll be graduated from high school next spring. You will hardly know her, she is so grown-up.”

“What’s Donald like? Four years makes a whale of a difference. He was only fourteen, you know, when I went into the army.”

“He’s a regular husky. Your father says he is like your great-grandfather Murray. We are all right proud of Donald. But how are you, Son? You don’t look as husky as I’d like to see you.”

Dr. Mark grinned at his mother. “I’m going to be fine and dandy when I’m home for awhile. I’m sorta restless now, hardly know what to do with myself. Right now I’d like to have a bath in this good old soft water in your big tub. Then how about something to eat? I haven’t had a bite since I ate breakfast, and then I didn’t have much because I kept thinking about your hot biscuits and good butter, honey, and fresh eggs. And milk! Mom, have you some cold milk?”

He started toward the big kitchen where he knew there should be milk in the refrigerator. Something cooking on the electric side of the combination wood-and-electric stove smelled so good that Mark lifted the lid to peep.

“I declare, Mom, I had forgotten this kitchen was so big and bright and lovely. Pretty blue walls—it’s a new paint job, isn’t it? The curtains are pretty, too. And look at the milk! Got a big glass that holds at least a pint?”

Rilda filled the glass with rich, sweet milk. “Don’t you want a biscuit and some butter to go with it?” she asked.

"They've been in the warming oven and should be good."

Mark was drinking his milk while she talked. He nodded. "And you can refill this prescription to go with the biscuit and butter. You don't happen to have some jam or honey to go with it, do you?"

"Both! Which will you have, or do you want it mixed?" she asked, smiling at her tall, good-looking son.

"I'll tell you what. Put butter and honey on one side and strawberry jam and butter on the other!" he told her, pouring a second glass of milk for himself.

"Don't worry about what I eat now spoiling my dinner, Mom. You may have thought you could never fill me as I grew up, but you will be sure of it now, for a while at least. Yet, I'm apt to get sick at my stomach and stop eating, remembering some of the hungry, starving children I've seen, the hungry old men and old women. I'll have to try to keep from thinking too much about them, though, because it makes me jittery."

Rilda set a plate of biscuits before him. "Why don't you sit down, Mark, and eat?"

"I'd rather stand up. I get sorta restless when I sit down. And Mom, you aren't to pay attention to any of the silly things I may do, or want to do. Just give me plenty of time and I'll be okay again. It's like being set down in a little bit of heaven to be back here in these peaceful, beautiful old mountains. I've seen mountains, high ones, rugged ones, more picturesque, but never any as friendly and lovely as these," he told her, in between bites.

"I'm glad you have come home still loving the old place," Rilda said, gently.

"There's no place in the whole wide world like it, Mom," he said, as he swallowed his last bite. Then a little shyly, "How's Margaret?"

"She's as pretty as ever. If she knew you were here, she'd be right here, too. Old man Joe Brown died about a

month ago. He was the last one to cling to the old places up on North Fork. They have all moved out to go to work in the cotton mills, or in the furniture factories. Margaret has wanted to go, but her mother has needed her."

"How is Margaret's mother?" asked Dr. Murray, leaning against the door that opened into the bathroom which, like all the rooms in the house, was large and light.

"She's right strong again. Poor Ruth! It just about killed her when she got the news that both her sons had been killed in action. It took her a long time to recover, but she is coming out of it and Margaret will soon be free again. But there! Take your bath, Son, and be ready to see your father. He's likely to be home just any minute now."

"Mom, how about a pair of overalls? Is Donald as tall as I am? Does he have an extra pair? I'd like to change clothes."

"I'll find them. Donald is really taller than you are, I believe. That's why your father says he is like old great-grand sire Murray. He is so tall and straight. I'm sure he has some extra overalls and an old blue workshirt."

Mark whistled as he went into the bathroom, and his mother smiled as she went to find the clean clothes for him. He was going to be the same old boy!

When Dr. Mark Duncan Murray, II, stopped his car, a new black sedan, before his house, he saw a young man in a pair of blue overalls and workshirt, bareheaded, having a romping time with his English setter, Jack. He wondered who he was—"likely some neighbor, waiting for me."

Then as the old doctor started up the steps from the road, the stranger started toward him. "Hi, Dad!" he called.

"Why, boy!" exclaimed Dr. Murray, senior, so happy he felt like shouting. "Where did you come from?"

"I came in this morning. I wanted the fun of surprising you and Mom, so I didn't let you know. I left my heavy luggage in town and caught a bus. You're looking wonder-

ful, Dad!" exclaimed Dr. Murray, III.

"I can't say quite as much for you, Son. You're too thin, and what is wrong that you limp? What about that right arm?"

"You don't miss anything, do you?" asked the young doctor. "There is nothing wrong that time will not heal, unless it is the limp. It won't matter. Say, you're just in time. Mom has had dinner ready for ten minutes. I'm so hungry I could eat a bear."

"What are we standing here for then?" asked Dr. Murray.

The two doctors, father and son, went into the house, one as tall as the other, but the older one heavier set. His hair was thinning, and was gray above his ears. Their eyes were alike, brown and keen, yet kindly. Old Doc was like his father, the first Dr. Mark Duncan Murray, second son of Mark Murray, who had located in that part of the foothills of the Blue Ridge back in 1850, joining others who could boast of pure Anglo-Saxon heritage.

"Mom, here's Dad. Now do we eat?" asked the younger man.

Carl Carson did a thorough job of spreading the news that young Dr. Murray was home. Hardly had that first hilarious, delicious dinner been finished when a dark blue coupe stopped before the doctor's house. Out jumped an attractive young woman who ran excitedly up the steps and into the house. As she opened the screen door, she called, "Hello! Where is everybody?" She must have known where they would be, for she went through the living room, through the dining room, and on into the spacious, blue kitchen. There she stopped in the doorway, blushing becomingly when she saw young doctor Mark.

He arose so quickly he almost tipped over his chair. Holding out his hands, he exclaimed, "Margaret!"

They went to each other. He took her hands in his and looked hungrily into her shining eyes.

"Oh, Mark! It's so good to see you again!" she exclaimed, her voice breaking a little.

"It's good to see you, too, Margaret!" he stammered. Then he simply had to kiss her, for they had been waiting for each other four years.

There was so much to talk about that they sat at the table until the big yellow school bus stopped to let Becky off. She came bounding into the house, making a beeline for the kitchen. She, too, stopped in the doorway, her eyes widening as she saw her big brother, her mouth wide open.

"This isn't my little sister; or is it?" asked Mark, rising.

"Mark!" squealed Becky. "But you don't look like a soldier!" she exclaimed, as Mark gave her a tight hug.

"I'm no longer a soldier, Sis, thank the good Lord," young Mark told her.

The dinner dishes were washed just in time to prepare the family supper. Mark insisted that Margaret remain. It did not take much insisting.

Rilda Murray anxiously watched every move her son made. She wondered how long it would take for him to lose his restlessness, his nervousness.

"How would you and Margaret like to feed the chickens for me and gather the eggs?" Rilda asked, thinking it might help if he had something to do.

"Fine! Do you know where they are, Margaret? Do we put the eggs in our pockets, or have you something to hold them? I've put eggs in my pockets more than once, much to my sorrow a time or two."

As they came from the hen house, they met a fellow on a tractor. "There's Donald!" Margaret told him.

"Say! You don't mean it? Why, he's a regular man!" Mark exclaimed, watching his young brother drive the tractor into the shed.

Donald came toward them, looking first at Margaret and then at the tall fellow in the overalls.

"Hi, Bud!" exclaimed Mark, letting Margaret take the basket of eggs.

Only for an instant did Donald hesitate. Then, "You old scarecrow! When did you get home?" he commented as he pumped his brother's injured right hand until Mark almost cried out. "Say, you're right in time. We've still got some planting to be done."

"Nothing will suit me better, Bud," Mark told him, slipping his right hand into his pocket. It took some of the weight off the aching arm.

Before supper was ready, Jake Johnson drove up in his truck. There with him was Caroline, his lovely young wife, Mark's older sister, who taught in the neighborhood grammar school. She too, ran through the house till she reached the kitchen from which place she heard voices.

"Hello there, Mark!" she called, waiting only an instant in the door.

Mark needed only a glance, for she was the least changed of his family. "Hello, your own self, Caroline!" he exclaimed, embracing her. Then, "Hi, Jake!" as he offered his left hand. In explanation he said, "Donald just about pumped the right arm loose."

Nothing mattered, however, nothing like injuries. He was at home! His family were well. So was his sweetheart. Soon he would be.

As they sat together in the comfortable living room after supper, Father Mark asked, "Can you see any improvements around here, Son?"

"Indeed, I can! In the house I've noticed the pretty new wallpaper in the living room and the 'company' bedroom. These venetian blinds are new, to me at any rate. And I like this soft wool rug. But Mom, how do you ever keep it clean with so many feet to track in the red mud?"

"There's a mat before the front door; shoes are supposed to be cleaned on it. I've tried to teach the family, especially

the farming element, to come in the back way instead of always using the front door. But then I have a new vacuum cleaner, so I manage," Rilda said.

"We've got a tractor and a corn mill and a crusher," boasted Donald. "We had a hard time getting them because of the war, but after trying for about a year, we got them. You'll get a kick out of plowing with the tractor, Mark. It's not so keen, though, on the hillsides. It's swell for bottom lands."

"We want a tractor and some other things," said Caroline. "As soon as we get them, or the money saved up for them, I am going to quit teaching school, and Jake is going to quit working in the furniture factory. It's no fun to have to get up at four o'clock every morning so he can get to work in time and I can get some of my housework done before I go to school. But, as Mom said, we manage. And in another year, we should have enough saved for some of the things we want."

Mark sighed. "Things have certainly changed since I was growing up here—plowing with two mules, doing the hauling with a wagon, and working nearly every crop with a hoe. We had a lot of fun, though."

"We don't have much time for fun now," Donald said. "Once in a while we have a frolic at the community house and we play ball at the church playground when the crops will let us. We're going to build a new brick church as soon as we get enough money."

"What's the matter with the old one?" queried Mark.

"It's like this. The first church, which our great-grandfather helped build, was of logs. Then about fifty years ago the one we have now was built, except this one has had a new floor and new windows and several coats of paint, and a new roof during the fifty years. But it's not big enough now. We need classrooms for Sunday school. So it's going to be torn down, and a brick church will take its place.

It'll have classrooms and a basement, and who knows but that some day we'll have an organ, one of those electric ones?"

"Everything changes here except the old mountains. They are as friendly and lovely as ever," Mark said with a fondness in his voice.

"The Creator must have loved these mountains. I have to drive into every cove and up every hill where a house will stick. Always I find something that causes me to look up into the sky and thank God for the beauty all about us. It seems as if with so much that is beautiful around us we would all be better people, but none of us is as good as he ought to be. We have much more than we deserve," observed the father, thoughtfully,

Night settled down upon the mountains. The creeks became vociferously alive with croaking frogs. Caroline decided it was time for her and Jake to go home if they were to get up at four the next morning. Margaret said she should have been on her way several hours before, but she hadn't been able to make the start.

"Before we break up, let's have family prayer together. We have so much to be thankful for tonight," Rilda suggested, much as great-grandmother Rilda might have suggested in her log cabin when her son Duncan had come home from war.

Father Murray took the Bible from the table at the end of the couch.

"Dad, do you mind reading that Psalm that begins, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills'?" asked young Mark.

The old Doctor opened to that One Hundred Twenty-first Psalm. Reverently he read it, and there came a peace into young Mark's heart that had been missing for some little time. God's mountains! God's country! Into God's hills!

The next morning the older physician took his son to visit his grandfather, retired Dr. Mark Duncan Murray I, and his

grandmother, Marjorie Murray. Grandfather Murray was in his eighties, but as spry as his own father, who had lived to be eighty-seven. The grandmother was frail, but able to get around and do the cooking. A widowed daughter, Lucy, lived with them in the same house which the eldest Dr. Murray had built for his bride when he had taken her into the mountains from Richmond. This morning the two doctors passed an old log cabin when they were nearing the old grandfather's place.

"Dad, do you know what I'd like to do?" asked young Mark.

"What, Son? I haven't the slightest idea."

"I'd like to get married when I'm sorta rested up and get over being jumpy. Then for the first year or so, I'd like to live in your grandfather's old log cabin. I think this is about the most picturesque spot in all these hills. I admire that old huge fireplace, but I might not like getting logs big enough to burn in it. There is something romantic about it."

"It's yours if you want it," his father said.

"Well, I might! Of course, that's not Margaret's idea of a bride's house, I imagine; and I'd not want to live in it the rest of my days. I may get over the notion and not want it at all. Who lives in it now?"

"Your cousin several times removed, Lem Cannon. He works in a cotton mill on the second shift and lives out here. It's all right during the summer, but it's pretty tough in the winter when it's icy and slippery. It won't be so many more years probably until the hard-surfaced road goes all the way through these hills, connecting the county seats, giving us all-weather farm-to-market roads. Then, instead of large farms with considerable acres, there will be small farms of ten, maybe twenty acres each. Gradually the timber will be cut. By the way, there's still plenty of timber to build a house when you want it."

"Thanks, Dad. I hope it will be a long time before too much timber is cut. What should be done is to reforest many of these hills. That would keep them from washing into gullies."

"That and fencing and sowing them with good pasture grasses. By the way, Son, in another year, maybe two, the children will all be taken from the grammar school where Caroline teaches and sent to the high school and grammar school nearer town. They've already taken the upper grades this year, leaving only the five lower grades here."

"But, Dad, isn't that a good brick schoolhouse?"

The elder Dr. Murray chuckled. "It is that! And I have a dream about that good brick schoolhouse, Son. I dream of you and me turning that good brick schoolhouse into a hospital for the mountain people, especially for maternity cases."

"Dad! Why, that'd be swell!"

"You'd like it?"

"Like it? I'll say I would. It would be a whole lot easier on us that way than going into just every sort of place, taking care of labor cases under all sorts of conditions. And it would be safer and easier on the mothers and babies."

"That's exactly what I've been thinking. I've frequently talked it over with Father, and he thinks it's as fine an idea as his brother Donald's was when he wanted to be the first doctor here in the hills. He was killed in the Civil War and Father tried to take his place, you know. Now if we can build up a community hospital, we'll be making these mountains a much better place in which to live."

"Dad, you give me new courage and strength. It's not going to take me very long to get back my full strength."

"Don't get too excited, Son. They may not do this at all. They may continue things as they are, for it does seem a pity to take all the school grades away from our immediate community."

Young Doc was thoughtful for a moment. Then he ventured, "Even if they do, why can't we put up our own building? I've got my savings. It won't take it all to get married, especially if we live in that old log cabin."

"We'll see, Son. There's Father out at the wood pile. We've tried to persuade him to cook with gas, or oil, but Mother won't consider cooking with anything but wood. She still thinks that food cooked on a wood stove and in an iron pot is the best there is. Sometimes I agree with her, although it's easier certainly on your mother to use her electric stove during the summer heat. There, he has seen us and knows our car. He may have heard that you are home."

The car stopped before the white-haired old mountaineer. The young doctor wanted to jump out and run to him, but jumping out of a car wasn't as simple as it had been four years ago. But he did get out and limped as fast as he could to his grandfather.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Grandfather Murray. "If it isn't young Mark. How are you, Son?"

"Great granddad! How are you?" asked young Mark, kissing the old man.

"I can't complain, not a bit. You do look right well, but none too fat."

"I've gained five pounds since I got home yesterday!" declared young Mark, laughing.

"If it had been any more, you'd have said so, wouldn't you? I hope you do gain; and you should, eating your mother's good cooking. Let's go in to your grandmother. She'll be proud to see you."

She was waiting at the front door, a tiny, bird-like old lady, with a radiant smile which appeared to be chasing the wrinkles in her face. "Why, it's young Mark!" she cried, as Mark stepped up to her. "My eyes are a little dim; but I'd know you, lad."

Mark took her into his arms, lifting her off her feet. "How's my Granny?" he asked, kissing her and letting her down gently.

"She's a mite out of breath right this minute. It's been a long time since a handsome young man lifted me clean off my feet. I'm right proud to see you, young Mark, and thank the good Lord for bringing you back to these mountains safely."

"I'm proud to be back," young Mark assured her, sincerely.

They had a good chat, each gradually fitting into today as if there had been no harrowing yesterdays.

"Have you told young Mark about our hospital?" asked the grandfather.

"I certainly have, and he is right enthusiastic about it. He even wants us to build one of our own if the pupils aren't sent to the other school," his son replied.

Grandmother Murray smiled knowingly. "I told Duncan young Mark would be for doing something like that."

"It's the best thing that could happen in these mountains," quickly spoke up young Mark. "Dad says the hard-surfaced highway will come all the way through one day instead of stopping as it does about five miles in each direction from us. Then if we have a new brick church building and a community house for social gatherings and the like, with a small, efficient, community hospital we'll be sitting pretty up in these old hills."

"I'm glad to hear you talk like that. I hope to live to see the opening of the hospital," the grandfather said.

"I hope you do, too. You look well and hearty, so you should," said young Mark as he turned to his grandmother and asked, "Granny, how come I'm supposed to be Dr. Mark Duncan Murray, III, when you call Grandfather Duncan? Seems as if I should be the second, not the third. Where's the missing link?"

They all laughed at him. "I'm really Mark Duncan, Mark," said his grandfather, "but my father was also Mark, just like yours, so I was called Duncan. I didn't know I was Mark for a good many years. By that time I had become used to being called Duncan. You really are Mark Duncan, the third."

"Dad, maybe I'd better change mine to Duncan. When I was a youngster, I was Junior, but I like having a name. How about it?"

His Granny settled it: "You just keep being Mark. Your father can be Dr. Murray as he is now. You can be Dr. Mark. Wouldn't that do? Your mother speaks of your father as Doctor, so you won't have any trouble at all."

"That's a good idea, Mother," Doctor Murray agreed. "I like that better than old Doc and young Doc. Makes me feel younger."

From then on it was Dr. Mark and Dr. Murray. It came naturally to everyone. When it was time to go, Dr. Mark told his father he wanted to do some walking about; in fact, he might try calling on Margaret. He'd like to hear what she would have to say about living in that log cabin that was almost a hundred years old.

"I'll be glad to drop you off at Margaret's, Son. It's a good four-mile walk from here. I'm going up to see how your Grandfather Munro is, and Margaret's house is on my way."

Mark really wanted to walk. But four miles was perhaps too much until he had strengthened his leg by shorter walks. Consequently he agreed, "Okay, Father, then I'll walk home. It won't be but about two miles by the path across the mountain."

When they were on their way, Mark asked, "How is Grandfather Munro?"

"He's just wearing out with old age. There's little that can be done for him except to keep him happy and com-

fortable. Your grandmother is as fat and jolly as ever; but she, too, is too old to be very active. You must see them right away."

"I might try it this afternoon. Margaret and I might pay them a visit."

When they reached Margaret's small, unpainted, weather-boarded house, they saw her out in the front yard, sweeping away every foot-print and trace of twig or bark.

"Margaret's oldfashioned. She keeps all the soil swept from their yard so that not a blade of grass could grow if it wanted to," Dr. Murray observed, but not in a critical way.

"I like grass. Maybe I can persuade her to like it if I do the lawn mowing. She always seemed to like our grassy yards."

Dr. Murray did not linger longer than to discharge his son.

"Don't work so hard," called out Dr. Mark, trying not to limp as he went up to Margaret.

"Hello, Mark!" answered Margaret, throwing down her straw broom and extending her hands to him. "If we had a nice lawn like yours, I'd not have to sweep so much."

"Do you like grassy lawns?" he inquired, looking deep into her hazel eyes.

She nodded, smiling. It's hard to talk when one's heart is fairly bursting with love and joy.

They did not go into the house immediately, but sat down close together on an old school bench under an apple tree. He took her hand and held it tightly.

How and where should he begin? When he had operated on wounded soldiers, he had lost no time in getting started. Why waste these precious minutes? "Margaret, has time made you change your mind?" he blurted out.

Margaret gave his face a searching look. Then smiling, she nodded her head. "Yes, it has, Mark!"

His head dropped. His heart became heavy. Where was that peace, that strength of the hills?

"I'm sorry," he murmured, loosening his grip on her hand.

She tightened her hold and entwined her fingers in his. "You should not be, if you still think you want me, Mark. You see, time has made me love you more than I did four years ago when I was just sure I'd die when you went away!"

Mark turned to her. "Margaret!" he exclaimed, slipping his arm about her. "Do you mean it?"

"With all my heart!"

He held her gently for a moment, then sat back and sighed. "I'll put you to a test, young lady! Would you be willing to live for a few years in my great-grandfather's old log cabin where my grandfather grew up?"

"In the old Murray cabin?" asked Margaret, her eyes opening wide.

Mark nodded, but he suddenly felt low and miserable.

"O Mark! I'd love it! I think that is the most picturesque spot in these hills. I've often looked at that old cabin and thought how easy it would be to make it into a simply perfect place."

"How?" asked Mark, reviving rapidly.

"Add another log room is all, and put a chimney to it to help the cookstove. Fill in between the logs with cement, then scrub those old logs inside 'till all the old dirt and dust of years comes off. Finish them with a coat of clear varnish. There might be another, or two glass windows put in, but it does seem a shame to cut the big logs. We could have the house wired for electricity because the line goes right by it. Why, Mark, I'd love it!"

He simply had to kiss her, at the end of that list of possibilities. "When we get all that done, will you marry me?" he asked.

Margaret Brown was not demure or shy; neither was she bold or brazen; she was just frank and sincere. So, with head held high she said, "Whenever you're ready, Mark, I'll be ready!"

Whenever he was ready! He wished he were ready that minute!

"We'll go to work on it right away. Of course, the Cannons will have to move. Is there any place around here they could rent?"

"There certainly is! No one has lived in the old Josiah Smith place since he died almost six years ago. It needs repairing; but Dick Smith, who owns it now, works at a sawmill; he could easily do the repairing. Then the Cannons could move. Would you think I was taking things too much in my own hands if we should drive over in my coupe this afternoon and see Dick? I don't want to hurry things, Mark, but these four years have been so long!"

"Are you telling me! I'm glad to have something to do. I think that will help me get over the jitters more quickly than just lolling around. We'll stop and say hello to Grandfather and Grandmother Munro on the way. Do you know, Miss Margaret, I believe you are going to be a wonderful wife! It has seemed to run in the Murray families to have wonderful wives ever since great-grandmother Rilda Murray."

"Thanks, Mark. Of course, I've never seen her, but I know your Grandmother Marjorie Murray and your own mother. They are both wonderful, and I've heard so many stories of the first Rilda Murray that I feel as if I've known her. Oh, Mark, sometimes it seems just too wonderful that you have chosen me. It was my great-grandfather who broke your great-grandmother's finger!"

"Don't forget that it was my great-grandfather who won your grandfather to the Lord, that started him into his life of splendid usefulness. I am not marrying your great-

grandfather, nor anyone else except you. And you are marrying only me. So, for better, or for worse, till death do us part, shall it be, Margaret?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling through happy tears.

"And we'll live in the old log cabin with all the antiques we can find. We'll help my dad build a community hospital. We'll work with the other young folks of these hills and see if we can come to deserve in small measure the blessings the good Lord pours out upon us," Dr. Mark announced with decision.

From the doorway a voice called, "Mark, aren't you ever going to come into the house and speak to me?"

Instantly Mark and Margaret arose and started toward the house as Mark called "Coming, Mother Brown!"

Hand in hand they went, but not too fast, for they wanted to keep as long as they could the sweetness that had bound them.

When Mark had greeted Mother Brown, he asked, "Do you know why I came home?"

"I 'spose because the war's over, and it's 'bout time, too," she told him.

"You're right! But I also came home to get married!"

"You don't say!" she cried. "Did you know that, Margaret?"

"I've found it out, Ma," she replied.

"Who's he going to marry?" the old lady asked.

"Me!" Margaret replied as she hugged her mother happily.

"I might have guessed," Mother Brown said, smiling upon both. "Well, the Lord bless you. You sure know each other, at least you ought to."

"I know her well enough to love her," Dr. Mark volunteered.

"And to keep on lovin' her," she advised him.

That night at home, as Dr. Mark stretched out and tried

to relax and coax sleep, he remembered that bit of advice, "And to keep on lovin' her!"

"That's the Murray way, Mother Brown. We keep on loving our wives. I remember how that first Murray who came into these hills loved his wife, Rilda, and how she loved him. The story has been told to us all our lives, and some day I hope to pass it on to our children, Margaret's and mine! I can almost see those pioneers as they came into these parts, just as I came home. Was it only this morning?" he thought.

So we shall read the unfolding of that story which Doctor Mark Duncan Murray, III, had heard all his life—the story of the Murray family.