

Chapter One

Rugged Roads



1926

Lora Heatwole peeked past the curtains into the gray morning to see two headlights. “They are here!” She snatched her gingham sunbonnet from the hook by the door and tied it into place. “Right on time,” she said to her mother, “and just a few minutes before six.”

Her mother scurried from the kitchen where Lora had just finished breakfast, the smell of bacon and eggs still lingering on her apron.

“I hope you have a safe journey, Lora. You will write to us, won’t you?”

“I will, Mother.”

Lora grasped the handles of her well-stuffed baggage and hustled out the door Mother held open for her. She skimmed down the steps just as the Model T stopped in the driveway.

“All aboard!” Aunt Nellie grinned as Lora slipped into the back seat beside her thirty-year-old aunt.¹

Lora crammed her bulging luggage into the tight quarters and turned to wave at Mother. There was no need to make a fuss over her departure. That just didn’t happen in her household. Besides, she would be gone only a few months.

“Good morning, Jim,” Lora spoke to the driver. “I’m all set and ready to go.”

“All right, fair ladies, let’s be on our way.” Jim Shank’s eyes crinkled at the corners as he shifted gears. “There’s a long trip ahead on this fine June morning.”²

Lora glanced at Aunt Nellie, a gleam of anticipation in her eye. “Finally, we can go!”

Her scholarly aunt’s eyes twinkled. “Oh, comrade, we are off on an adventure.”

The Model T pattered past the barn where the soft lowing of cows broke the morning silence. Lora turned for a last glimpse at the familiar, square brick house where a few lights lit the windows. Home—that place nestled in a hollow surrounded by fertile, rolling fields just outside of Dayton, Virginia—warmed her heart.

She smiled. It was a good home. She had grown up in a large family, the oldest of twelve children. At twenty-three, her callused hands knew the virtue of hard work and had

1 Patricia H. Hertzler, *The Story of Melvin Jasper Heatwole and Mollie Grace Coffman*, pp. 21, 23, 27. Lora Frances Heatwole, born November 3, 1903, was the daughter of Melvin Jasper Heatwole (1878-1963) and Mollie Grace Coffman Heatwole (1883-1956). Nellie Coffman (1896-1986), Lora’s aunt, was the daughter of Joseph Weaver Coffman (1857-1933) and Sarah Heatwole Coffman (1859-1958).

2 James H. Shank was a deacon in Virginia Conference and had come out of the Old Order church a few years before this. He was interested in the mission work of the church.

the skills for many domestic duties. She had received years of Bible training and had learned practical ways to live the Bible daily. She would miss her family, but at last she was headed west for a new and different life.

Lora sang, and Aunt Nellie harmonized with her:

*“I’ll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain, or plain, or sea;
I’ll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I’ll be what you want me to be.”*³

As morning light diffused the darkness, they passed through the countryside and approached the mountains that loomed in the west. Some miles later the travelers entered the foothills where ferns grew lush along the streams. The flash of a white-tailed deer disappeared into the underbrush beyond the crystal-clear stream. Just ahead the road curved and grew steep, a switchback here and a hairpin turn there, always winding upward. The motor revved a deeper hum.

Lora took a deep breath to ease the nausea that stirred in her stomach. This trip would not be easy. Though she recognized the familiar symptoms of motion sickness, she dared not complain. Today—June 4, 1926—she was finally on the way to her much-anticipated destination. Fresh, cool air filtered through the windows, which helped a great deal to ease her queasy stomach.

Adjusting her glasses, Lora watched the sun-dappled road churn beneath the wheels. By now her head ached with the constant movement. She shivered and buttoned her duster.

³ “Consecration,” *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, No. 105.

“Who would have thought you could shiver in June, Aunt Nellie?” Lora murmured.

Aunt Nellie replied, “Well, Lora, we’re in the mountains. Remember?”

Lora gave a weak smile while her head throbbed and her stomach churned. The steep incline challenged the Model T, but eventually it crested the peak and rolled downhill toward a sharp bend. Jim hugged the inside of the road to keep away from the unprotected precipices. A stunning view of distant mountains outlined the horizon beyond the valley. The lone automobile seemed but a speck on the long road that twisted through this rugged country, bumping through potholes and huffing up steep, rough roads, leaving a thin trail of dust lingering in the air.



*Miles of narrow, and sometimes dangerous, roads
wound deep into remote mountains.*

Drawing her gaze back to the roadway, Lora gasped and clutched the edge of her seat as another curve loomed directly ahead. All of her life she had heard about these

mountain roads. Now she understood what folks had said at her family table. Lora shuddered. A wrong move could mean disaster, perhaps the end of life. *Lord, grant us a safe journey*, she prayed.

Jim shifted into a lower gear and expertly maneuvered through each curve and challenge. Lora breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that the Home Mission Board had asked him to take them to their destination. No woman in her right mind would drive these rugged, remote roads alone, for travelers in these parts could expect flat tires, an overheated motor, and delays of many kinds.

“Feeling all right?” Aunt Nellie asked.

Lora answered, “I’ll be glad when we get there. Riding is never easy for me.”

“I know,” Aunt Nellie replied sympathetically.

Lora was miserable. She squirmed among the packages and bags. If only she could squelch her misery, if only the journey would soon end. She just might have to ask Jim to stop so she could relieve her ailing stomach.

The Model T rounded a turn and shuddered to a stop.

“Better give the vehicle a rest,” Jim said. “This looks like a good place to enjoy a view too.”

Lora scrambled out and took deep breaths of pure air. Ah! It helped to stop moving. She stood by Aunt Nellie as the two gazed westward.

The mountains loomed much closer, green and textured with trees at the edge of the deep valley, where dark forests sprawled among the patchwork of meadows, fields, and thin patches of fog. Tiny houses and buildings lay scattered in the lowlands like pieces on a board game. Here and there smoke drifted from chimneys even on this summer day,