

[Winifred Morton]

September 28, 1939

Winifred Morton (Postmistress)

Valhalla, N. C.

Adyleen G. Merrick, Writer

Dudley W. Crawford, Reviser Original Names: Changed Names:

Valhalla Eden

Winnifred Morton Mildred Moss

George Morton Jim Moss

Tryon Tyden

Mrs. Thompson Mrs. Tanner

Nadine Nellie

Edith Edna

Helen Hilda C9 - N.C. Box 1-

In the diminutive building which housed the Post Office of Eden, North Carolina, Mildred Moss busily distributed the morning mail, stopping now and then as she worked to say "Good morning" or to speak a cheery word to one of the group gathered about her waiting for the last letter and card to be put up in the little boxes that faced the wall. Her kindly

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eyes looking out through steel-rimmed glasses had an expression of welcome and good cheer as she spoke first to one and then another of her neighbors.

Light brown hair touched with grey was drawn straight back from her forehead and pinned in a secure little knot at the nape of her neck. There was no fussiness about Mildred Moss, she looked the typical little old New England mother, from her practical glasses to her yet more practical morning dress and stout low-heeled oxfords. Her small white hands moved quickly here and there as she placed mail in the proper place with swift sureness.

Now and then she stopped to glance at a letter or post card, sometimes a smile crossed her face or perhaps a frown. She knew so well the people to whom this mail was addressed, their particular problems and joys. Also, they were all her friends, she followed the life of her community with interest and concern.

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Since the day Jim Moss had brought her as a little yankee bride to his tiny cottage there on the hill nearby which has been her home for many years, she took into her heart the joys and sorrows of her neighbors, her own had made her strangely understanding. It was to her folks came for advice and help. She always gave it freely.

Pausing for a moment she patted the golden curls of a chubby child who looked up at her with expectant eyes; his little body tense with excitement.

"The package came, but baby it's so large I don't believe you can manage it. I'm afraid it's much too heavy. Can't you wait till your ma can come and get it? No?. Well, lets see, hold out your arms and I will help you get started. Oh! it's mighty big for you son, I just don't believe you can make it home?"

Holding tight to the package the child struggled valiantly through the doorway making his way along the winding path; his little legs wobbled a bit as he crossed the bridge over a

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stream in the meadow, but he trudged on finally passing from sight, and the quiet which had marked this episode was broken.

“Poor little fellow” said the postmistress. “That's a package of things his ma's sister sends. I wouldn't be surprised if there isn't candy and perhaps a toy tucked in it for him. Any way that's what he thought I'm sure.”

It was pleasant waiting there in the little Post Office, to look out on the well kept grounds surrounding it, where flowering shrubs and rows of flowers gave the morning air an especial sweetness. Sunlight made a silver ribbon of the little brook nearby. The mountains in the distance were touched with bright signals of the coming fall. Cosmos, pink and white, flanked the roadway and swayed rhythmically with each stirring breeze; everywhere hung a mysterious promise of the harvest season.

It was an interesting group of people gathered there waiting for the mail. Most of them made their home in the valley. The tall grey-haired man was once an actor, he still bore the stamp and mannerisms of the stage. Near him was the bright little woman who owned and operated a gift shop on the highway not far away, and worked with such success upon hooked rugs hour after hour. Then there was the “New Man” from Cleveland who had come into their midst to try planting, in the open, acres of flowers for the wholesale market. A dark-eyed woman held fast to a child's hand as she talked in low tones to her older son who had just come in from work at the mill. He worked on the night shift. They were all friends and neighbors of Mildred Moss.

Soon the little group dispersed and went their separate ways; the morning mail hour was over.

Carefully picking up a few sprays of an evergreen with 4 dark glossy leaves and wax-like white flowers, she came forward with a welcome greeting.

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"I thought you would come, so I stopped on my way through the garden and gathered some Sweet Olive for you. I haven't forgotten that you love it. I didn't have time to cut any for you when you were over here before. I've been sorry about that ever since.

"It's strange," she said, drawing up a chair, "how the perfume of a flower can remind you of people and things in the past. The Sweet Olive shrub was there in the garden when I came, I don't even know when Jim planted it, (if he did) or where it came from. We've tried so often to root a cutting but never succeeded. It was blooming when our little son died. He only lived eight months. George Jim did so want a son."

There was a far away look in the woman's eyes and a sigh escaped her, then she went on.

"I remember how I stood looking down at my little son, so still there in his casket. He seemed such a tiny mite to have to go all alone back to God. I went out in the garden and gathered a little bunch of the fragrant white flowers from the Sweet Olive shrub and slipped it into his little hand to go along with him.

"Sweet Olive was blooming when my sisters came for their 5 first visit to us. I think it was the only thing that pleased them. They were shocked about everything else. My new life was so different they just couldn't understand. I had lived in a large and comfortable home, had known every convenience, it seemed hard to believe I could be contented and happy here. The cottage so small a friend once laughingly said: 'Why Mrs. Moss, I could reach my hand down the chimney and open your front door!' It wasn't quite that bad but the cottage is awfully small. However, I just loved the place from the very first day when I saw it there among the flowers. I love it yet. That's why I have not gone to live with either of my daughters or back north. It was in that house life's joys and sorrows came to me. It was is there I have lived, I couldn't leave it now.

"Forty-four years ago we came to Tyden nearby, for my father's health. He did improve for a while but not for long. We should have come sooner, I suppose.

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"I'll never forget the day we arrived in the little village where there was so much beauty and so few conveniences. How drab and cheerless the cottage was that we had rented sight unseen. The cottage where , in bad weather , winds blew with such violence they actually raised the rug on our parlor floor and rattled the windows something awful. We shivered over a "hot blast" stove and I guess we thought a lot about 6 our comfortable home back east. Jim came to the train with our friends to meet us the day we arrived. He was kind and helped in getting us settled. I think of that so often now.

"I was never what you might call beautiful, but Jim said from the very first time he saw me coming down the steps of the Pullman car, he knew I was the girl he wanted. From then on he was certainly a persistent suitor. Aren't men funny anyway? He came to call right away and asked me to go with him to a dance next evening at the village hotel. Being a stranger and thinking it would be very informal, I wore some simple dress. Imagine my surprise when we arrived to find it a gala affair. Women in beautiful evening gowns, lovely looking, so well groomed and up to the minute. I just supposed I would meet country folks and was terribly embarrassed. But there was friendliness and good cheer among those people, who later became my friends. Most of them were here as we were, seeking health. I soon forgot my embarrassment and had a good time. They were all so kind.

"Next fall George Jim came up to Boston and we were married quietly, as my father had been dead such a short time. I can't say my family took very kindly to it. "Why on earth did I want to marry him? Why go back to that little country town?"

"Well, I couldn't say then, I can't now. With the death of my father our home was broken up. My two sisters were away 7 teaching and there was only mother and one brother left. It just seemed as if I walked out of one life and into another the morning Jim brought me, his little yankee bride, back to the new life. He took my hand and led me through the door and smiled as he said in a half embarrassed way, 'Well, here it is "Doll", make the most out of it you can. '

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“And I did, too. I set right to work. I covered all the bare spots as fast as I could. I spent days and days changing that bachelor den into a presentable home. Curtains went up; flowers were put everywhere and you've no idea how that helped. Out came my wedding gifts and it wasn't long before the cottage looked mighty different I can tell you. Jim was delighted, he watched with ever increasing interest although he wasn't much help at any time.

“Then I tackled the yard. I just have a passion for bringing order out of chaos, and the days just flew by. I was so occupied I forgot my old home and its comforts. I even overcame my dislike of taking my bath in a large tin tub, (There was no bath room until years later) and my hatred of Jim's old lop-eared hunting dog, always under foot; always dirty. I conquered everything in sight except Jim. In all our married life together I never really succeeded in making him look neat. He loved his old work clothes, his perfectly filthy pipes and that old dog. He could in no time reduce a nice straight room 8 to an upset one, with his easy way of mending and pottering with things in the house instead of the work shed or the barn. I'd work so hard and then be embarrassed to have company come in and find both Jim and the house looking so awful. But, like most women, if they are sensible as well as wise, I grew to care less about the looks of things and more about Jim and his comfort.

“I'll always remember the day an old friend of mother's from down east came to call and of how she lifted her skirts carefully as she crossed the bare floor of the living room to keep them from getting dusty. I cried, I was so angry and hurt. I know now my little sitting room must have looked terrible to her, and then at the beginning of our second year of married life, the first baby came. The months before were filled with doubts and fears. I hadn't realized at first how far away Boston and my people were. But I did, when I knew the baby was coming. I remember helping Jim get ready to go to a wedding. I had planned to go too, but then the time came I just felt too miserable. I found George's Jim's clothes for him and coming up the steps with hot water for him to use for shaving I stumbled; there was a queer sharpe pain that startled me. I didn't mention it however.

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“Long after George Jim had gone I stood at the window looking 9 out into the still starlit sky. I thought about home and mother. I fought back the nervous homesick tears; I just wouldn't be a coward!

“That's the only night I can ever remember thinking our home was large; as the minutes went by it grew to greater and greater proportions. I felt lost, weary; courage failed me and I fell sobbing into bed, homesick and frightened.

“Next morning I just couldn't get up. Waves of agony rolled over me, George Jim ran for the Doctor and old Mrs. Tanner , who greeted me cheerfully upon her arrival with, 'Howdy, have ye taken any ile yet?' She was a strong forbidding looking woman whose thoughts were much more upon the misery she had in her jaw than comforting me.

“The arrival of Nellie later in the day is still vague in my mind, visions of old Mrs. Tanner and the kind hearted Doctor are all confused. I went off into a strange world after a few whiffs of life saving chloroform where everything got all mixed up with queer looking people and sounds like a dog moaning and the faint cry of a baby. And then blackness, deep and awful.

“Out of this I came and looked up into the distressed eyes of Jim. I managed to smile and he promptly began to weep, his face all puckered up in the most ridiculous way.

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I thought of course something awful had happened , as old Mrs. Tanner came in with the baby. She took one disgusted look at Jim. 'You git' , she said. This ain't no place er time fur ye to be a bawlin'. He got. Just the touch of that little form which I sheltered so naturally with my bare arm seemed to give me a new kinship with the world; my heart sang and I felt [?] glorified.

“Drawing her close to my side I drifted off into a deep contented sleep.

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"My first sick bed tray was truly a masterpiece of country art. Mrs. Tanner appeared with a large tin waiter, (kicking the door of my room open as she came). It was unadorned by napery. A saucer contained sugar, still another butter, a huge slab of it; a blue bowl was filled to over-flowing with greyish oatmeal, a cup with no handle held strong black tea, and warm milk still remained in the saucepan in which it was heated. I made up my mind right then and there to make short with my convalescence.

"When our next baby was coming I decided I wouldn't have old Mrs. Tanner there nor a nigger woman either. As it so happened Jim had only time to get the Doctor and it was Jim who held the lamp as the Doctor worked to bring our second daughter into the world. He brought still stranger trays of nourishment.

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"Baby Edna never thrived, her frail doll-like face and body frightened me. We did everything, tried everything to prolong her life, but she slipped away at the end of the fourth month.

"So much care, so many sleepless nights and busy days took its toll. I was weak and tired, The kind old Doctor said 'No more babies for a while Mrs. Moss.' His good advice fell on deaf ears. I wanted more babies; I loved them so. It wasn't long before another one was on the way. Contrary to what we expected her advent into the world was normal and uneventful.

"Hilda was a tiny baby. Everyone said I would never raise her, but I did. She is married now and has a nice family of her own; all such bright healthy children, too.

"Then several years later I lost my boy. People said I just didn't know how to care for them, who can tell, I did my best. The Doctor advised this and that, I changed diets and wept over my poor little babies. I tried so hard to be a good wise mother, to make them live.

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"And now, the two daughters are gone their separate ways, both are happily married. Nellie came home when her father died but no not in time to be of much help to me. I used to sit by Jim and strive to comfort him, he seemed like a little child too, so frightened and suffering so. He was afraid when the 12 end came he would suffocate to death. It was cancer of the throat you know, but he died peacefully, thank God.

"So few people really understand their neighbors. No one thought Jim was especially good to me (they just didn't know) or that he provided as he should for us, and yet I look back over all those years, even the awfully lean ones, and I'm not sorry I married Jim. I've sold the land , which he had bought with an eye to future advancement in price. I've had good profits from the pecan grove he planted and each year I sell a good many crepe myrtles and other shrubs, while the holly trees he tended so carefully yield a good revenue when we harvest the branches at holiday time. Life was hard at times but I've never come to want. Jim looked far enough ahead for that. I only started the Post Office because I was lonely after Jim died and needed some definite work to do. It wasn't because he didn't leave me enough. The work brings me in daily contact with people and makes the days go by faster that's all.

"Do come again while the Sweet Olive is blooming. I love to share it with you."