

MOUNTAIN GIRL SERIES: BOOK 2



*Mountain
Miracle*

Rose Creasy McMills



To Aunt Lorena

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Chapter 1

Grandpa Escapes



THAT FALL GRANDPA started acting funny. He would go off—nobody knew where—and not come back. Somebody would have to go find him. Once he was sleeping in the hayloft of the barn, which was not *too* bad. Another time Grandpa was deep in the woods, a bigger cause for concern. You could get lost in those woods and never be found.

Uncle John told Elizabeth that when they came upon Grandpa, he'd acted confused. "He don't seem to know he's been gone awhile. He don't understand why we're upset—just thinks we went out in the woods huntin' and met up."

Uncle John rubbed his forehead. He and Elizabeth were sitting on the big, broad steps to the smokehouse.

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John still didn't talk much to others, although he'd gotten more sociable since Grandma's death.

Velvet the beagle came and pushed herself in between them.

"What's the matter with Grandpa?" Elizabeth asked.

"I don't know—old age mebbe."

"What are we gonna do?"

"Keep an eye on him. Take turns watching him each day, startin' tomorrow."

"I want to take a turn," Elizabeth said immediately.

Uncle John looked at her.

"I'm old enough. I'm thirteen," she said defiantly.

"You'll have to ask your folks," Uncle John said.



"Where's Pa?" Daddy asked the next morning. He shrugged into his coat, making big shadows on the kitchen wall in the light of the kerosene lamp. It was dark later in the morning and earlier in the evening. The leaves were cascading off the trees and drifting into deep piles.

Uncle John and Elizabeth sat at the table eating oatmeal with brown sugar.

Mama pulled a sheet of biscuits out of the oven. "I thought he was already down with the cows." She set the pan on the stove and went to the high, small window over the kitchen sink to look out. Uncle John

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promptly snagged two biscuits, one for Elizabeth and one for himself.

“Dang!” Daddy said with feeling. “I bet he’s taken off again.” He paused and scratched his head. “Well . . . cows gotta get milked.” They could hear the cows lowing in discomfort.

“I’ll be down directly,” Uncle John said, pouring himself some coffee.

Everyone looked at him in surprise. You never quite knew what Uncle John was going to do these days.

“I’ll start looking for Grandpa,” Elizabeth volunteered. Daddy considered.

“OK,” he said with finality, “we’ve got a plan.” He stuck on his hat and went out into the chill, morning air.

Elizabeth munched on her biscuit, which was burned on the bottom. Mama still didn’t have Grandma’s touch with the big, black Acorn stove. “I best get goin’,” she said, feeding the rest of her biscuit to Velvet under the table. She didn’t want to hurt Mama’s feelings.

Elizabeth took Beezer the hound and Velvet with her to search for Grandpa. She let them both sniff Grandpa’s coat, which he had left behind and which she’d brought along. She could see her breath as they started out, the dogs excited. They knew something was up.

The sun rose from behind the mountains, gilding their tops.

First, Elizabeth tried the usual places—the barn, the granary and chicken house, and the upper field where

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the garden was still producing squash and pumpkins. *The potatoes will need to be dug up soon*, she mused.

No Grandpa.

She thought she would climb up to the apple orchard next, but the dogs were inclined in another direction—up Tyler’s Mountain.

Elizabeth felt her heart sink a bit. Tyler’s Mountain could be quite a climb. She stood there undecided and then ran back to the barn and bridled up Maud, the black farm horse, pulling her over to a stump.

The dogs sat in the tall field grass and waited while Elizabeth mounted bareback.

They followed the trail up the mountain, Maud trudging in the ruts left by the wagon wheels. About halfway up, Beezer veered off onto a smaller path that led through the dense foliage.

It looked like a deer path, and Elizabeth knew she couldn’t ride the horse in there. The branches curved over and made the space only about four feet high. She heard Beezer’s long, drawn-out bay, followed by Velvet’s howl. They had found Grandpa.

Elizabeth tied Maud to a tree, leaving her enough slack so she could graze, and followed the sound of the dogs back into the woods. In a few minutes she came out into a clearing. A little spring bubbled down from the mountain and there was Grandpa, sitting on a log and petting the dogs.

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He smiled at Elizabeth. "You come to help, Lizzie girl?"

"Sure, Grandpa," she said.

"I'm waitin' for the men," he said, "but they's late, so I started without 'em." He waved a handsaw in the air.

Elizabeth noticed that he had been sawing on several trees. She knew that you couldn't do much good with a handsaw on a tree. In the past, Grandpa knew it too. "What's the wood for?" she asked.

"Oh . . . your grandma wants me to make us a new four-poster bed," he said with mock exasperation. "I figure I better get started or I'll never hear the end of it."

Grandma had died two years ago, but Elizabeth didn't say anything about that. "It's time for dinner, and I've come to fetch you," she said instead.

Grandpa looked up and studied the tall trees. "I think that might be cherry wood right there," he said, indicating a tree. "That wood would be plumb beautiful for a bed."

"There's fried chicken and apple pie," Elizabeth added with enthusiasm.

Grandpa looked at her. He didn't know it was only nine o'clock in the morning.

"C'mon, Grandpa, let's go eat. Don't want them vittles to get cold!"

Grandpa got slowly to his feet and followed Elizabeth back through the woods, stooping to avoid

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the low-hanging branches. The dogs trailed after them, their job done.

On their way back through the meadow, with Grandpa on Maud and Elizabeth behind him, they saw Uncle John coming. The dogs bounded ahead to meet him.

How good Uncle John looks these days! Elizabeth thought. He helped out more around the farm now—his shoulders looked broader, and he was still tan from summer haying. He seldom shuffled along looking at the ground and muttering to himself anymore.

In the past, Uncle John had been withdrawn, a silent presence that everyone shunned . . . everyone but Elizabeth. It had been her determination to include him—and also Grandma's love—that had brought him out of himself.

Uncle John came toward them with something resembling a smile. Elizabeth smiled back and waved with one hand, her other arm around Grandpa's waist.