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Living on the Coldwater Road

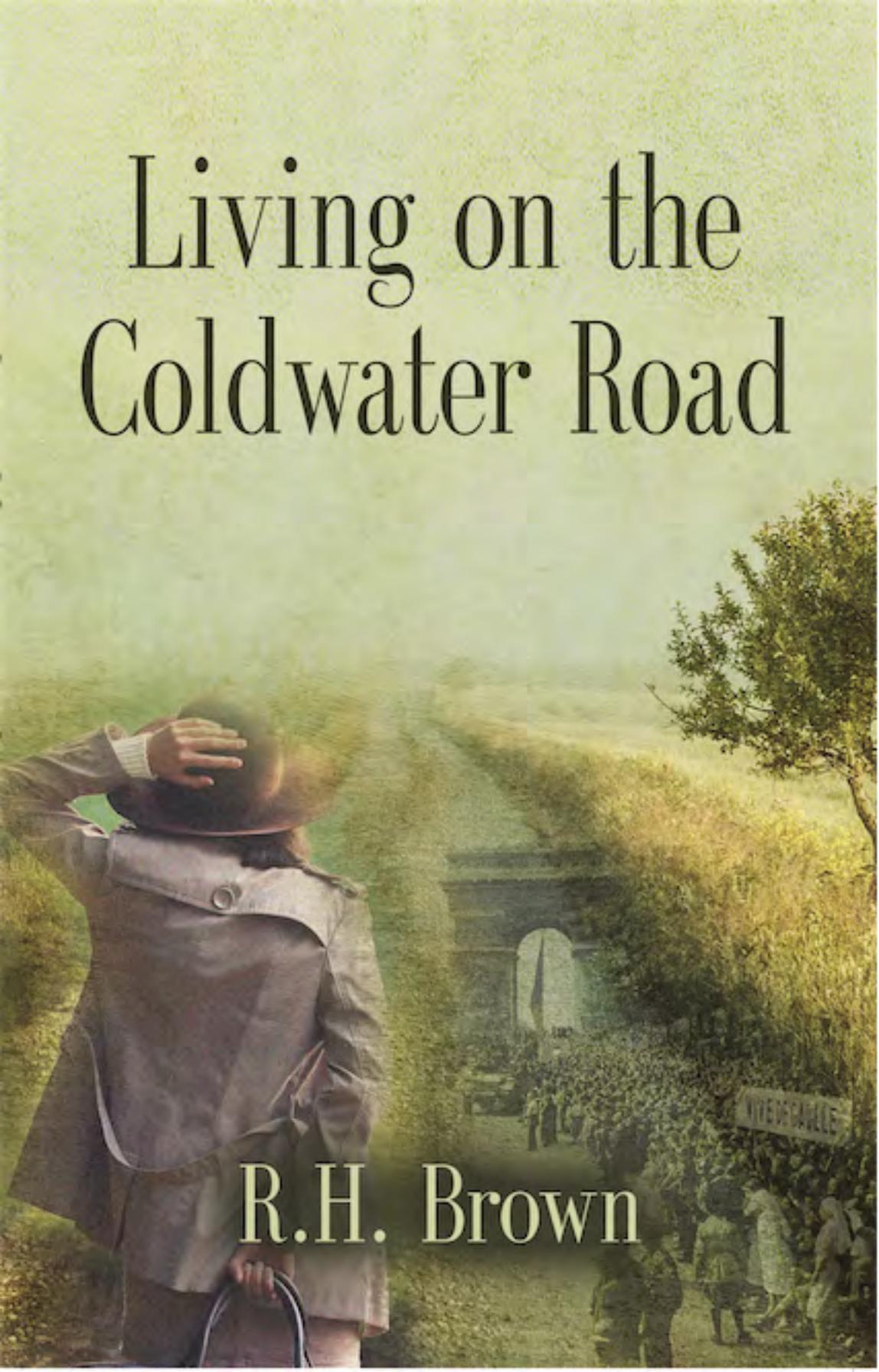
by R. H. Brown Jr.

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The background of the cover is a detailed illustration in a classic, slightly faded style. It depicts a woman in the foreground, seen from behind, wearing a light-colored trench coat and a wide-brimmed hat. She is looking down a dirt road that leads to a stone archway. In the distance, a large crowd of people is gathered, and a sign on the right side of the road reads "VIEUX-CALLE". The overall atmosphere is one of a historical or literary setting.

R.H. Brown

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-530-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition

Chapter 3

Four months in Rose's life passed from the happiest time to a challenge. A turning point in her young marriage. The Community's annual Fourth of July barbeque was drawing close. The coming annual event was the talk of the community. Members of the community would gather and talk. The event was always the topic of their discussion.

It was a time to gather a covered dish, a new husband and parade them both in front of the relatives. Here was her chance to shed the stigma attached to being the last woman in her family to gain marital status. It wasn't the potato salad, covered, sitting in a large glass bowl that caused Rose's concern.

She had labeled the bowl with her name printed on the bottom. Applied to the bottom of the bowl, her name stood as a reminder of ownership and begged for the safe return of the bowl. A long-time custom used to identify containers taken to family functions.

The band of gold worn by her new husband was also an identification of sorts; at least to Rose's way of thinking. A slight frown formed on her brow. Was she being sensitive by the whole matter? As quick as the thought had appeared, she dismissed it from her mind.

John Robert had hinted that the gala festival was not his cup of tea. His heart may have said no, but his mouth was going to say yes. Rose was hell bent on parading her prize, her husband, for everyone to see. How could he refuse, it was not going to happen?

It was true, Rose's relatives made up the consensus of folks residing in the little community.

It was also true; her husband had yet to be accepted as part of the family. A city boy has a lot of changing to do to blend in with the country folks. Rose guessed her husband's participation in family functions were going to be a sore spot in the marriage. The thought was weighing heavy on her mind.

No amount of begging and no amount of coaching was going to change her husband's mind.

She would put that date on her inner calendar, the day someone finally told her no. Oh, it wasn't going to stop her from attending the festivity, not Rose. Mr. City boy was not going to spoil her moment in the spotlight. Mark this date on your calendar. Rose would have her way, come hell or high water. Here stood the couple's first major disagreement and what was to be the result.

John Robert was claiming himself as winner by default. Not so fast mister, backing Rose into a corner, wait and see. It would take more than a jab to her heart to floor this young Miss. This fight was not over; it had just begun. John Robert may have thought he won the fight, but in Rose's mind, he was losing the war.

John Robert dismissed the matter as over and done. In Rose's mind, it wasn't over till it was over. Putting the episode behind him, John Robert was content to make peace and harmony with his new bride. Rose, not so much. She came from a strong stock of farmers, a God-fearing bunch of people. Rose submitted to defeat in the first round, but she still had plenty of fight left in her.

Rose busied herself making a bowl of potato salad. The food would be her contribution to the annual event. When she had finished, she covered the dish with wax paper and looking to her husband said, "I'm ready to go." John Robert remained steadfast. Taking his gesture as a no, she said in somewhat louder voice, "I'm ready." Standing before her husband, Rose presented the large bowl to him. "Papa is sitting in the driveway, waiting on us," she said. Are you coming? It was more of a demand than a request. John Robert shook his head.

Rose tucked the bowl under her arm and stormed out the room. She gave a quick glance over her shoulder. John Robert was still sitting, shaking his head. Rose slammed the basement door, it was her way of saying this was not over, not by a long shot. She made sure the slamming of the basement door would send a message to her husband.

Rose's well laid plans and the announcement would have to hold for the time being. The surprise she wanted to share with her husband wasn't going to happen. Her family would be more interested in learning her secret than the man responsible for it, so be it.

Rose marched straight to the parked vehicle. She threw open the passenger's door. She threw the salad bowl to the floor then climbed into the car. Papa gave his daughter a knowing look, but had to ask. "What's the matter?" he asked. Rose crossed her arms and threw her head back. Her silence caused a tinge of concern from her father.

“Where’s your husband?” he queried. Still no answer. “I’m not leaving here until I find out what is going on between you two,” he scolded.

“If you must know, he’s not going,” she offered. “Let’s go,” she pleaded. Papa knew his daughter. Something had her tail feathers in a ruffle, but he wasn’t going to push it any further.

The two rode down the road, ever so often Papa would cut his eyes toward the right. Time and time again he would see Rose, sitting there, arms folded. There was determination written all over her face.

The Church sat on the banks of Coldwater Creek. The grounds were ideal for informal gatherings. Behind the old wooden sanctuary near the edge of the creek were rows of handmade tables. Those tables, covered with white linen tablecloths and packed with home cooked food, stood ready for the eating. The area, designated for a fourth of July picnic, ready for the big gala.

As Papa turned off the main road, Rose stretched her neck to see who was there. Papa smiled and said, “All the family beat us here.” Rose shot back, “Not my fault we are late.” Papa was good at picking his battles, this was not one of them.

Parking under one of the huge oak trees, Papa motioned his hand toward the bowl. It still sat upright on the floor. “Want me to tote that for you?” he asked. Rose grabbed up the bowl and made her way started to the tables. Papa smiled to himself, she’s still on her high horse.

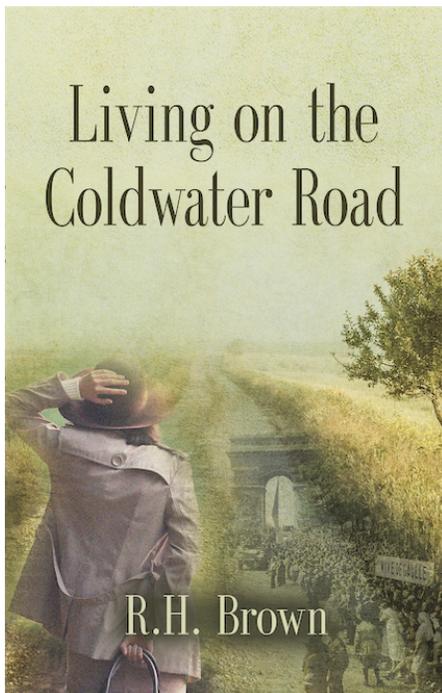
Rose busied herself around the table ignoring questions by curious folks. Women, eat up with wanting to know where her husband was and why he wasn't here at the picnic. Rose brushed them off with a wave of her hand.

The fellowship over, the folks had consumed all the decent food. The women were busy cleaning up while the men folk gathered under the big oak trees. The children played in the creek. Every so often, you could hear the girls squeal. The boys, standing up to their knees in the water, delighted in splashing the girls.

Being with family and friends gave Rose a chance to cool down. The confrontation earlier in the day was the farthest thing from her mind. She had waited until her sisters and mother were close by to deliver the news. "Does it have anything to do with John Robert?" her mother asked.

Rose smiled and nodded. "Well, hurry up and tell us," her sister prompted. Unable to prolong the news any longer, Rose whispered, "I'm going to have a baby." Everybody smiled and nodded in agreement. Her sister squeezed her shoulder and said, "I'm so glad." For the young couple, the episode marked a turning point in their marriage. A pattern of give and take that would predict future actions. A road neither had traveled before.

The trip would have its moments, but each reminded to skirt the potholes along the way. John Robert had let go somethings in their new marriage; could his new bride do the same?



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