



AN
APPALACHIAN
SUMMER

ANN H. GABHART

Praise for *River to Redemption*

“Sometimes a story is almost too wonderful to be true. Thankfully, the bit of history at the heart of Gabhart’s latest novel is absolutely true, providing the perfect platform for a tale of love and generosity that will restore the reader’s faith in mankind. From the deeply compelling opening pages to the satisfying ending, readers will be inspired to examine their own lives and whether or not they ‘pray believing.’”

Sarah Loudin Thomas, author
of the Appalachian Blessings series

“Ann H. Gabhart’s *River to Redemption* will both capture your heart and bolster your spirits. Each of the well-drawn characters stepped off the pages and into my heart. This story will remain with you long after you’ve read the last page. A genuinely wonderful book.”

Judith Miller, award-winning author of *The Chapel Car Bride*

“Ann Gabhart weaves a sympathetic tale set in pre–Civil War Kentucky. Rich in historical detail, *River of Redemption* reveals the heartbreaking reality of slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, one young girl’s dangerous quest to end it, and a slave’s strong faith in God’s timing and providence. You will fall in love with these unforgettable characters.”

Jan Drexler, award-winning author of *The Journey*
to Pleasant Prairie series

Praise for *These Healing Hills*

“Gabhart paints an endearing portrait of WWII Appalachia in this enjoyable tale about two people trying to find their place in the world and discern what it means to truly be home. . . . Gabhart handles the Appalachian landscape and culture with skill, bringing them to vibrant life.”

Publishers Weekly

Ann H. Gabhart, *An Appalachian Summer*
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Books by Ann H. Gabhart

An Appalachian Summer

River to Redemption

These Healing Hills

Words Spoken True

The Outsider

The Believer

The Seeker

The Blessed

The Gifted

Christmas at Harmony Hill

The Innocent

The Refuge

HEART OF HOLLYHILL

Scent of Lilacs

Orchard of Hope

Summer of Joy

ROSEY CORNER

Angel Sister

Small Town Girl

Love Comes Home

HIDDEN SPRINGS MYSTERY AS A. H. GABHART

Murder at the Courthouse

Murder Comes by Mail

Murder Is No Accident

AN APPALACHIAN SUMMER

ANN H. GABHART



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Scripture used in this book, whether quoted or paraphrased by the characters, is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This book is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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To my beautiful granddaughters—
Sarah, Fiona, Ashley, Katie, Jillian, and Raegan

And my handsome grandsons—
Austin, John, and Matt

CHAPTER ONE

MAY 20, 1933

Piper Danson's cheeks hurt from smiling for what seemed like hours with no relief in sight. More people waited in line to take their turn in front of her and pretend happiness over her debut into society. Then again, their smiles might be sincere. Piper was the one feigning excitement as she repeated socially appropriate words of welcome.

Her ridiculous gauzy white dress looked made for a sixteen-year-old instead of a woman with two years of advanced studies at Brawner Women's College. If only she could fiddle with the neckline where it chafed her skin, but a debutante didn't adjust her clothing in public. She pretended everything was wonderful and that she loved all the flowers presented to her in celebration of her coming-out party. But the cloying odor of so many flower arrangements made her feel as if she were at a wake. Perhaps she was. The funeral of her freedom. Time to pick a man and marry.

That wasn't exactly right. More like time to accept the man her parents had chosen for her and settle down into a proper life,

the way her sister Leona had done after her debutante season four years prior.

Where was Jamie Russell when she needed him? She quickly scanned the room before the next person stepped in front of her. Jamie was nowhere to be seen. His absence was disappointing, but hardly surprising. Not now. Not after his family had lost everything in the stock market crash. While debutante balls had surely waned in importance for him in the face of such misfortune, she still expected him to come to hers. If only someone would open the ballroom's balcony doors to let in some air. She considered fainting simply for the novelty of it, but her mother would never forgive her. Besides, fainting was for fragile girls. Piper was anything but fragile. Tall, willowy for sure, but strong enough to rein in the most fractious of horses.

“How beautiful you look.” One of her mother’s friends took Piper’s hand.

Piper held on to her smile and tried to remember the woman’s name.

“You are so lucky to have this lovely ball with so many families struggling right now.”

Piper didn’t know whether to keep smiling or look sad. Perhaps this woman’s family had fallen on hard times. Her dress did look like last year’s fashion. Piper glanced over at her mother for a clue. Not only had her mother’s smile not wavered, it looked genuine, as if produced specifically for this very woman.

Piper murmured something polite and continued to smile too, although she thought having such an elaborate event at a time when men stood in soup lines out on the streets of Louisville was reprehensible. Were it not for her mother, Piper would have flouted Emily Post’s guide to proper etiquette for a debutante and escaped to somewhere. Anywhere away from this receiving line.

But she couldn’t disappoint her mother, who had worked tirelessly to organize this ball as though Piper’s future depended

entirely upon a successful debut. Piper had managed to put her off for two years, until now at twenty she was a bit old for a first-time debutante. She told her mother that, but she would have none of it.

“We may have been wise to wait a few years in between Leona’s and your debuts. Especially with the situation as it is,” her mother had said.

That was the closest her mother ever came to speaking about the depressed economic state of the country. She chose to sail above it, as though money were the least of her worries. She had been a debutante in better financial times and married the man her parents thought she should.

When Piper had asked if she loved her father when they married, her mother avoided a straight answer. “My parents had my best interests in mind. Love grows with time.”

Whether love had grown or not, her parents were comfortable with their union. Her mother maintained appearances and ensured their two daughters and son had the advantages of an upper-society life. Her father supplied the necessary funds to make that possible through his partnership in a prestigious law firm, although the family had made some adjustments due to a reduction in clients able to pay the firm’s fees.

The guest list was shorter than when Leona had her debutante ball, the hotel ballroom smaller. Piper didn’t care. She had tried to convince her mother to simply have a tea and forget the ball. Her mother was aghast.

“What would people think?” She had actually turned pale at the thought. “Appearances are important. Vitally important for your father’s firm. If clients thought we were affected by the situation, then they might fear bringing their concerns to Danson and Harbridge.”

“But a tea would be so much more sensible.” Piper paused and then added, “Considering the situation.” When her mother’s eyes

narrowed on Piper, she knew she had made a mistake using her mother's word for the depression.

While her mother, who had the look of a hothouse lily, might be several inches shorter than Piper, she could be hard as nails when crossed. "That's enough, Piper. You will have a ball. Leona had a ball. A very successful one where she captured a perfect husband in Thomas Harper. Now it is your turn."

When Piper opened her mouth to continue her protest, her mother held her palm out toward her. "Not another word."

Now Piper looked out to where Leona sat with her perfect husband. She looked absolutely miserable, but that could be because she was well along with her first baby. Leona was petite like their mother, and no matter how flowing her dress, her condition couldn't be hidden. Some of the ladies were no doubt whispering behind their hands that Leona should have stayed home, started her confinement. A proper lady didn't parade her expectant body around for the whole world to see.

From the look on Leona's perfect husband's face, he wished they were both home. Or at least, Leona at home and he in his accounting office making sums add up. The man was ten years older than Leona and continually looked as though his cheeks might crack if he smiled.

Piper again resisted the urge to massage her own cheeks before they did crack. After tonight, she was not going to smile for a week. Maybe two. What was there to smile about anyway, with Jamie not showing up at this mockery of a party? He had to know about it, even if he had moved to Danville with his mother after his father's fatal heart attack. Brought on by the collapse of the Russell fortunes. Or so people said when they weren't gossiping that perhaps he hadn't had a heart attack at all but had taken an overdose of some sort.

People did like to gossip in the social arena. As if they had little else to do but find fault with one another. Piper held in a sigh.

She was definitely fodder for the gossips with her late debut. A girl of twenty should already be married or at least promised to someone. Piper could almost hear the whispers. *If that girl doesn't watch out, she'll end up the same as Truda Danson.* Alone. With no prospects.

As if she'd beckoned her with the thought, her aunt Truda stepped in front of her.

"You look like you just swallowed a raw fish, my dear." Truda took both Piper's hands in hers and gave them a shake. "A very slimy one at that."

Fortunately, Piper's mother had turned to signal the musicians since all the guests had been greeted. She either didn't hear Truda or chose to pretend she hadn't. Piper's mother often turned a deaf ear to her sister-in-law. That made for a more peaceful family life.

On the other hand, Piper's father failed to follow her mother's example. He and Truda often had very animated discussions about matters of politics or money. Truda, who held a position in the bank their father had founded, was the main reason Piper's family hadn't lost everything in the slump. She feared a crash was coming and talked her brother into selling the family stocks that were next to worthless a mere month later.

Millions of dollars of investments disappeared into thin air. But Truda wisely socked away the Danson money in a fail-proof account. Piper's mother wasn't at all sure she hadn't stuffed her mattress with it, but wherever it was, they had avoided ruin.

"I'm smiling." For the first time that evening, a real smile sneaked out on her face.

"That's better." Truda gave Piper's hands another shake before she turned them loose. She lowered her voice. "I know you would rather be jumping your horse recklessly across fences or curled in a corner with a book, as would I. The book for me, not the horses. But instead, here we are, making your mother happy. A daughter has to do that at times."

“Did you?” When Truda gave her a puzzled look, Piper went on. “Make your mother happy.”

“Oh heavens, no. Poor dear had to give up on me.” Truda laughed. “Although I did indeed wear the white dress that looked as atrocious on me as this one does on you. Green is your color. No pale sickly green either. Vibrant green to make your eyes shine like the emeralds they are.” She winked. “That would have set those Emily Post readers on their ears. Who decided Post was the expert on everything anyway? Why not Truda Danson’s Rules of Etiquette?”

Piper’s mother gave Truda a strained smile. “Really, Truda, you promised not to upset Piper’s evening.”

“Not to worry, Wanda Mae.” Truda’s face went solemn, but her eyes continued to sparkle with amusement. “I will refrain from speaking any more truth the entire evening and speak only words that will tickle my listeners’ ears.”

“Piper and I will appreciate your restraint.” Her mother motioned Piper toward the dance floor. “Now, go. Braxton is waiting to usher you out for the first dance. I hear he is an excellent dancer. Do try not to step on his toes.”

“But he has such big feet, Mother dear.” Truda whispered the words near Piper’s ear as they moved away from her mother.

Piper stifled a laugh.

“Does the young man indeed have big feet?” Truda peered out at the guests as though checking shoe sizes.

“Braxton’s feet are fine. My feet are the clumsy ones.” Piper sighed, her giggle gone. She’d taken dancing lessons. Her mother insisted on it, but though she learned the steps, the smoothness of their movement escaped her.

“Then you should do something else. Something better.” Truda turned her gaze back to Piper.

“But a debutante must dance to the tune played for her.”

“Perhaps for this evening, but come tomorrow you can pick

your own tune. It is 1933, dear girl. We are no longer in the dark ages where a woman has no say in the choices she makes.” Truda gave Piper’s arm a squeeze. “Marry if you must, but only do so for love.”

“Mother says love will grow.”

“So it can. Properly nourished.” Truda raised her eyebrows. “But a good seed well planted in the rich loamy soil of romance puts down the strongest roots and grows best.”

“Did you ever plant such seeds?” Piper had never heard of Truda having a suitor.

Truda shook her head without losing her smile. “I was born before my time. Independence in a woman was not admired twenty years ago. Nor was I beautiful enough to encourage young men to court me in spite of that stubborn lack of coyness. Or perhaps I never met the right man to tempt me to court him.”

“They say I look more like your daughter than my mother’s.” Piper smiled. “So perhaps I will be in the same situation.”

“Come now, child. You are much lovelier than I ever hoped to be. Didn’t your mother just say this Braxton was waiting to sweep you off your feet? One of the Crandalls, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Your excitement at the prospect sounds a bit lacking. I can’t remember which one he is. Point him out.” Truda looked out at the guests again.

“He’s beside Thomas.” Piper didn’t look his way. She could feel him waiting for her. A nice man. Already established in his family’s business. Something to do with railroads. Her father claimed him a good match. Love would grow.

“Hmm. A pleasant-looking fellow. Tall enough so you won’t have to worry about towering over him if you wear a shoe with a heel. That’s good. Men don’t like to feel short. That’s why they sometimes prefer those petite girls, but I say be glad you’re tall enough to reach the high shelves in a cabinet. A useful ability.”

Truda let her gaze wander around the rest of the room. “But where is that curly headed boy with the burnished brown eyes who was always trailing you around before you went off to college? Jamie Russell, wasn’t it?”

“He must be otherwise occupied this evening.” Piper pretended she didn’t care.

“Or uninvited. We do close ranks against the less fortunate, don’t we? Such a shame about his father. I hear his brother is trying to revive their business. Manufacturing washing machines, I think. Or was it stoves? Either way, no one can afford new things right now.”

“Yes.” Piper looked around at the ornate room, the flowers, the plates of food. “Unless one is a debutante.”

“Try not to sound so thrilled.” Truda laughed softly. “Or so much like me.” She gave Piper a little shove. “Go. Dance with Braxton of the Crandall railroad fortune. Tomorrow you can take a vow of poverty and walk a different path. But for tonight, be your mother’s daughter. A blushing debutante.”

A flush did climb up into Piper’s cheeks as she turned toward Braxton but stayed where she was. Surely a blushing debutante should wait for the man to approach her.

She scarcely knew him. Since he was five years older than her, he’d been away at Harvard while she and her friends first tasted the freedom of stepping out. Then she’d been away at school except for holidays or summers when she spent every moment possible with Jamie.

She wanted to glance around again to see if perhaps, invitation or no invitation, Jamie had come. But instead, she kept her gaze on Braxton Crandall. One might consider him handsome. A strong chin line, a nose not too big, neatly coiffed brown hair parted on the side. He excused himself from the group around him and came toward her. She had to wait until he stepped nearer to see that his eyes were a grayish blue. He was clean-shaven. That was a plus. Piper had never cared for mustaches.

She almost laughed aloud as she imagined Truda's voice in her head. "*Well, I should say not. A mustache never looks good on a lady. That's why some wise person invented tweezers.*"

The nonsensical thought did help. Her smile was genuine and whether it was meant for Braxton Crandall or not little mattered. His own smile got wider.

"Miss Danson." He reached for her hand. "I do think you, as the lovely lady of the hour, are expected to lead off the dancing. Would you grant me the pleasure?"

Piper inclined her head and let him take her hand. As they walked toward the dance area, she hoped for a slow waltz where she could count her steps, even as she remembered the last time she had danced with Jamie. A fast Charleston that had them laughing and leaning on one another in exhaustion when the music stopped.

With Jamie, she never had to count steps.