

THE
MANDIE
COLLECTION

VOLUME ONE

Books by Lois Gladys Leppard

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MANDIE: HER COLLEGE DAYS

New Horizons

THE
MANDIE
COLLECTION

VOLUME ONE

LOIS GLADYS LEPPARD



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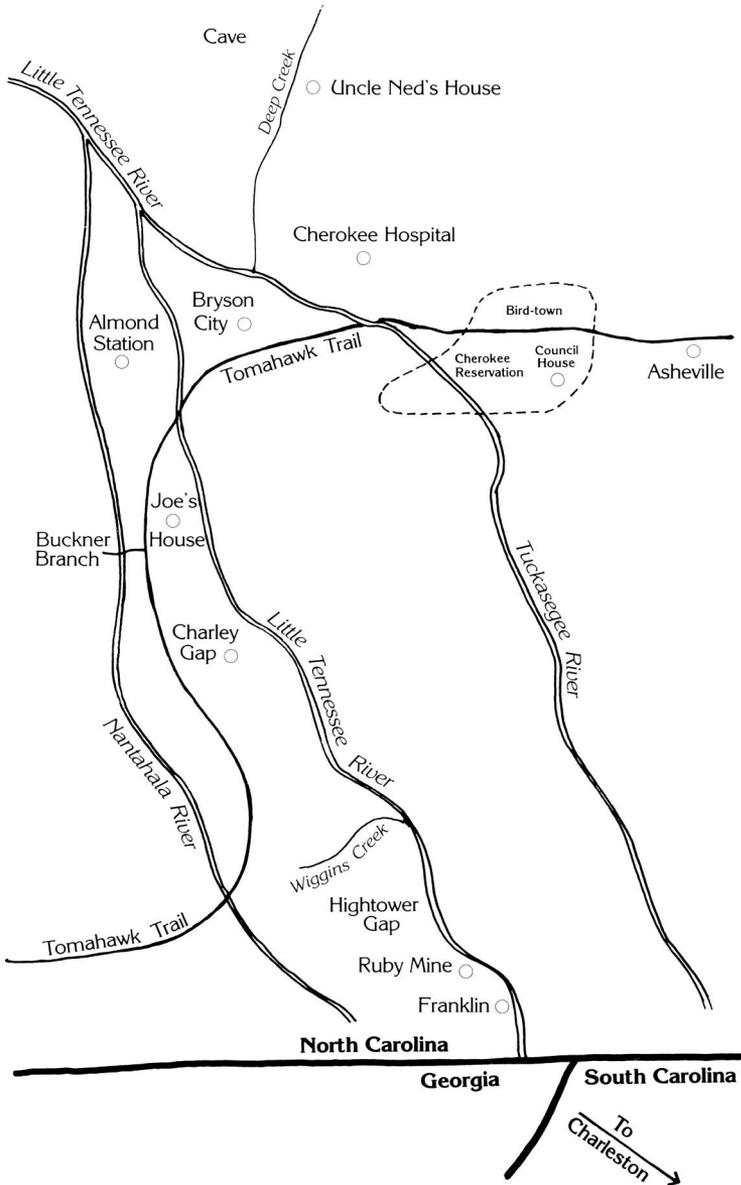
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LOIS GLADYS LEPPARD worked in Federal Intelligence for thirteen years in various countries around the world before she settled in South Carolina.

The stories of her own mother's childhood as an orphan in western North Carolina are the basis for many of the incidents incorporated in this series.

Visit her website: *www.Mandie.com*.

MANDIE'S TRAVELS



MANDIE AND THE SECRET TUNNEL

For My Mother,
Bessie A. Wilson Leppard,
and
In Memory of Her Sister,
Lillie Margaret Ann Wilson Frady, Orphans of North Carolina
Who Outgrew the Sufferings of Childhood

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“The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want—”
(Psalm 23:1)

CHAPTER ONE

MANDIE

“Don’t get so close, Amanda. You might fall in.” Her mother grasped the back of her long, dark skirt.

Mandie tried to pull free. Her tear-filled blue eyes sought a glimpse of her father through the homemade wooden coffin resting by the open grave.

“I want to go with you, Daddy!” she was mumbling to herself. “Take me with you, Daddy!” she tugged at her long, blonde braid in her grief.

Even in her sadness she was afraid of being scolded by her stern mother. She dared not cry out in anguish. Her voice trembled as she whispered, “How can I live without you, Daddy? You were the only one who ever loved me. I can’t bear it alone!”

Preacher DeHart’s deep voice echoed throughout the hills. “We all know Jim Shaw was a good man. He drew his last breath talking to God. We trust his soul is at peace.”

His voice grew louder and more emphatic. “But, friends and loved ones, I am here to remind you of one thing! When the time comes for you to face your Maker, you will be damned to hellfire and brimstone if you have lived a sinful life!”

Mandie trembled as she heard the words.

“You will incur the wrath of God and your soul will burn in hell forevermore,” he continued. “Above all, let us remember the Ten Commandments and keep them holy, live by them and walk the

straight and narrow path in preparation for the hereafter. Otherwise, I admonish you, your soul will burn in hell! Your soul will be used to feed the fires of the devil! When you have sinned and come short of the glory of God, He will forsake you. He will punish you!”

The child was overcome by fear and grief as the final words were said for her father and the coffin was lowered into the ground. The clods of mountain woods dirt hit the casket with a thud. She gasped for breath and, falling on her knees beside the grave, she appealed to God, “What have I done to cause you to take my daddy away, dear God? You know I can’t live without my daddy, God. I love him so much, dear God!”

The crowd standing nearby silently wiped away tears. The earth was smoothed into a mound and a rough marker was pounded into the soil with an axe. It read, “James Alexander Shaw; Born April 3, 1863; Died April 13, 1900.” Such a small remembrance for such a big-hearted man. Jim Shaw had no enemies. Everyone had been his friend.

It was April, but it was still cold in the Nantahala Mountains of North Carolina. Mandie, trembling with cold and emotion, couldn’t stop shaking enough to rise from her knees, so her mother grabbed her arm and pulled her up and away from her father’s grave. Her legs would hardly carry her.

Through her blinding tears she caught a glimpse of Uncle Ned standing at the edge of the woods. Uncle Ned, the old Cherokee Indian, came often to the Shaws’ neighborhood selling hand-woven baskets. He and Mandie’s father had been good friends. He had loved her father, too. She suddenly jerked free from her mother, running to the tall Indian for comfort. Uncle Ned stooped to catch her in his arms, his necklace of shells softly brushing against her face.

“Uncle Ned, God doesn’t love me anymore! He took my daddy away from me!” she cried.

“My papoose! Father—good man. Not gone far—only to happy hunting ground.” His pronunciation was good, but his grammar was poor. He stroked her blonde hair as she buried her wet face against his deerskin jacket.

“Amanda, come now. We’re goin’ home. Right now!” The plump woman shouted to the girl. “Come, git in the wagon!”

“Uncle Ned, please come to see me. I love you.” Mandie quickly kissed his redskinned cheek and turned to obey her mother.

The old Indian held her hand. “I make promise—your father. I look out for you. I keep promise.” He smiled and released her hand.

Her heartbeat quickened as she heard his words. There would be someone to watch over her. But Uncle Ned could never overrule her mother; she had always bossed her father around. But then, Uncle Ned had his whole tribe behind him! He would indeed keep his word to her father.

Etta Shaw snatched the girl’s hand and slapped her face. “Hesh up! Git in the wagon! This minute!” She gave the girl a shove and called instructions to her sister.

Mandie’s sister, Irene, all but lifted her up as she forced the girl to climb into the waiting wagon, the same one that had brought her father’s casket to the cemetery. All the other mourners had already turned down the long hill ahead of them.

“Now set down and shet up!” Irene was two years older, and eleven-year-old Mandie was afraid of her rough ways. She knew she couldn’t resist. She gave one last pitiful look at Uncle Ned, who stood witnessing the scene with his keen black eyes, and fixed her gaze ahead.

She would go home now, but she would come back as soon as she got the chance. Her eyes stayed on the mound of earth until they were down the side of the mountain and the row of trees blocked her view.

Sitting in the back of the wagon with her sister, Mandie suddenly realized that her mother had not shed a tear. Neither had her sister. She turned to look at her mother. Etta Shaw was busily talking and laughing with Zach as they bumped on down the rough road. She didn’t love my daddy, she was thinking. She acts like she’s glad he’s gone. How could she laugh as though she had already forgotten he ever existed?

Her thoughts turned back to the happy times with her father. He was always laughing, always ready to take her side in any disagreement with her mother and Irene. She could see his smiling face, his red curly hair, his blue eyes twinkling with some little secret between them. He had always been there to comfort his dear Mandie through the trials and tribulations of her eleven years, and then suddenly he was gone. God had taken him away.

Mandie was beginning to realize the way things really were. She could never remember being loved by her mother. Young as she was, she knew Irene was her mother's favorite. As far back as she could recall, Irene had always been given the new dresses which were later shortened to fit her, even though the dresses were made with rows of tucks around the skirts that could have been let out as Irene grew. She had never had a brand new dress in her life. The old, dark blue frock she was wearing had been made for Irene and, although it was almost threadbare, it had been hemmed yesterday for her to wear to her father's funeral. Mandie tugged at the faded fabric wishing she could be rid of the dress.

"Why don't they hurry up and get home?" she cried to herself. Her mother and Zach were leisurely riding along, talking too low for Mandie to understand what they were saying, with an occasional loud laugh from her mother. Irene kept herself busy snatching at the bushes as the wagon brushed past them on the narrow dirt road.

At last they got down to Charley Gap and their log cabin came into sight. It was huddled in the trees at the bottom of the slope. The hill to the north behind it gave protection against the cold mountain winds in the winter. The clearing around the house was already full of wagons and buggies and horses. People were standing around talking under the chestnut trees. Zach drove their wagon straight to the barn.

Mandie knew she would never be able to escape her mother that day. She would have to help wait on all these people who had come to eat and drink as soon as her father had been laid out in the front room on Friday. Today being Sunday, the whole congregation had come after the church services, which had included the last rites

for her father. She knew none of them had been home yet to eat and that meant work for her. She had never been near a death before and she couldn't understand why they all acted like it was a party. Why don't they all go home and leave me alone? she wondered. I want to be by myself and think.

The chickens clucked and scattered as her mother jumped down from the wagon. "Let's git to the kitchen and see about the vittles."

She waited to see that Mandie was coming along behind her. Mandie scooped up her fluffy white kitten, who had come to greet her, and ran toward the house.

"See you in a little while, Zach. Gotta git this crowd fed. Better come on up and git something to eat yourself," Etta called back.

"Be along in a minute, Etta." Zach spit tobacco juice as he replied and began unharnessing Molly.

Irene jumped down from the wagon as a tall, gangly boy came up. She put on her best smile and smoothed her skirts as she tossed her dark hair.

"Hello, Nimrod," she giggled. "Wanta take a walk up to the springhouse 'fore Ma puts me to work?"

"Shore, Irene," the boy answered eagerly. "Druther slip off any day than work. Let's go git a long, cool drink of that sprang water."

The two hurried off behind the cabin before Etta missed Irene.

As Mandie walked through the crowd in the front room, she saw old Mrs. Shope take a dip of snuff, stick her sweetgum toothbrush in her toothless mouth, and then remark, "Poor child. He was all she had. Things is goin' to be rough now for all of 'em."

Mrs. DeWeese shook her gray head. "No, not so long as that thar Zach Hughes is around." She smiled a knowing grin.

Mandie fled through the door into the kitchen, not wanting to hear anymore, and, above all, not wanting to speak to any of these people. They were mostly her mother's kinfolk and friends. This

was her mother's part of the country. Her father had always told her his people lived a long way off, but he had never said where.

The big, round oak table was loaded with food the people had brought, but it held no enticement to her nervous stomach. The warmth from the wood cookstove felt good to her. The heat thawed her somewhat and she wanted to talk.

"Mama," she began, unsure of herself, "where did my daddy come from?"

Etta Shaw stopped to look at her and she set down the plates from the cupboard. "What do you mean, where did he come from?"

"Well, you always said he was raised in a city somewhere—"

"That's right," Etta interrupted. "He was book read. That's all'n you need to know. Now git all the knives and forks out, and the glasses. We'll be needin' all of 'em. And run git that first piece of ham hanging on the right side in the smokehouse."

Mandie gave a sigh and obeyed. She longed for the day to end.