



I Married a Farm

BY EVELYN HARRIS

"Till debt do us part" is the decree of this woman farmer, owner of the largest pear orchard in the East. Mrs. Harris, born a city woman, relates some of the evils and advantages of living on a farm.

MY mother was more than one hundred miles away, and I knew that she would be five hours in reaching me. Five children were sixty miles away, sound asleep in their beds, and the telephone could not wake them—to tell them that their father was dead, and their mother alone. Those in charge at the hospital would not allow me to stay in his room with him for ten minutes before they took him away some place.

During those next five hours, which have now stretched into five years, I first thought of the injustice done both of us by the physician in charge, who had *not* told me until a few hours before his going that he would not recover from the operation. There were many things which he might have told me: of the furtherance of his plans and the disposition of his property had I known how very ill he was. The short will he had made said in substance that he "wanted his estate divided according to the law, and no tombstone erected for five years after his death, and not then unless circumstances would permit." He must have had some vision of what I would have to do in the way of keeping things together, and resolved, as sick as he was, that I should not feel in duty bound to spend money for something which he thought could wait.

In those five hours I thought it all out, practically. I knew there was a heavy mortgage on every one of the four

farms. I knew there was a chattel mortgage, due directly to the slump in canned foods after the war, for I had tried to help win the war by canning. I knew that during the war everything connected with the operation of the farms had so advanced in price, along with labor, that very little had been done in the orchards, and nothing new had been purchased with which to work. Then, after the war, prices had remained so high that we had tried to make out with what we had, and practically everything for the cultivation and care of the orchards was gone. But I knew I wanted to stay there. It was home for me, although at that time I had been there but seventeen years, the rest of my life having been spent in the city. I made up my mind that I would stay for the five years which he had mentioned, if there was any way possible to do so.

April 1 of 1924 had been a snowy, blowy day, and that snow was the direct cause of the death of my husband by pneumonia and appendicitis. Of course, the weather being cold, not much progress had been made in the growth of the fruit. So when I started on April 14, I simply continued what my husband had outlined for that month's work while home in bed. But the horses were old. The work seemed to pile on me, everything crying to be done at the same time. The spraying had to be finished first, and working was slow, for we had to use three barrels, holding fifty gallons

each, six horses, and nine men. The nozzles would not work; the hose burst; the drivers were careless and drove over the baby trees, and part of the spraying was never finished in 1924.

That very first year the young Bartletts set their first fruit, a very fine crop, and after carefully grading them by hand, they sold at a higher rate than any on the Baltimore markets, beating the California prices same day, same grade, by more than a dollar. My back aches when I think of those heavy baskets, lifted and held between my knees as I graded them, with the help of the children, and my husband's brother, once in a while. I was forced to hire horses and trucks both to carry them to their destination, and that was very unsatisfactory and most expensive.

My husband had rented out fields on our home farm, for he said he could get them cultivated for half the crop, and make more than if he did it with hired labor. I continued the same practice in 1924, but looking at the head-rows growing wild and the depleted fertility, I decided that 1925 would see changes in the mode of conducting the farms, and I would till seven hundred and fifty acres myself with hired help only and rent but one farm. My little daily book shows interesting reading on the margins. The weather then, as now, seemed to bother me most. In April, May, and June I read: "Rain." Then on August 5 I read: "First rain since June 28." And that means that I would have had at least one thousand dollars more for Bartletts if it had rained July 25 or a little after.

The ending of the first year found me desperate. I could not continue as I had done; so I decided on radical changes. The eldest boy decided at seventeen that he would quit school, so I meant that he should learn as much of the business as

he could. Our farms were the only ones in the county set out in Bartlett pears. Twelve thousand baby trees, around twelve years of age, two hundred and fifty—sixty years of age, two thousand—forty years of age, all of Bartletts; then around fifteen thousand of other varieties, mostly Kieffers, from twenty-five to forty years old; two hundred acres in woodland and shore, two hundred of open land for cultivation of crops, and you have a picture of my assets. The trees and the boys were both young. Neither were "sot" in their ways. As I was *not* a "born" farmer, of course this changing from the old to the new was much easier on my constitution than it would have been if I had always farmed. But my training was musical, and all of it had been for the "accompanist" style, and not any solo work. I simply seemed to lose my head when called on for solo work, and always heard every whisper and felt every flutter in the audience.

I felt the same way when I started the "solo" work in farming. I heard every adverse whisper. The bank directors, invited down, to whom I proudly exhibited the baby Bartletts: "What? Them bushes? Pull them out and plant corn." And that year Bartletts sold for five times the selling price of corn, and I had as many bushels per acre. "Till all that land? Sell it, and keep a few acres for cultivation, if you feel you must farm." And they knew as well as I did that the selling price would be very little more than the mortgage, for no one wanted to buy farms then. And I knew that if I had a few acres I would only be able to afford a hoe and my own strength back of it, and I wanted a Fordson, with my son on it, for the cultivation of the farms.

Misery! And unhappiness! But kindness every way I turned. One neighbor

sent down three hundred asparagus roots. Another sent some strawberries. Then I purchased raspberries, and we had plenty of blackberries (and chiggers). As the methods of both farming and financing had changed so much in the past forty years, I decided to be up-to-date and look for success. I was too unhappy to be afraid, and friends were kind, so I purchased a Fordson, with a plough, and a double disk, then a one-hundred-and-fifty-gallon-power sprayer, with absolutely nothing but my nerve, and confidence in the trees and the children. I was determined that the farm should have a chance, with new equipment, and we would plug along with made-over clothes, darned socks, and patched shoes.

The eldest boy was now seventeen, and the baby seven, with three between them. I had lived in the city all of my life before marrying except for gorgeous vacations each summer on a farm. I knew there was nothing in the city which could compare with a farm for a real good time for children, regardless of the amount of available cash. They all wanted to live right here where they had all been born, and where every nook and corner of the farm, nearly a mile square, bore some recollection of the much-loved father: the nooks in the woods, and down by the stream, where the first spring flowers could be found; the "poke" gathered early in the spring, as our first taste of something green, home-grown; the fine shore, a sandy beach, a gentle slope out to deeper water, the home-made boat and surf-board, which could go pretty fast when two Chevrolet engines had been hooked up together in the boat for motive-power; the bathhouses made by Nature, the little home-made tables and benches right down on the shore where suppers were served after a hot day's work and a

nice cool swim; the suppers eaten in paper plates, with agate cups for the drinks, and no dishes to wash—simply to go back home and to bed. Father had taught each of them to swim, and many fancy stunts were tried in the clean blue water of the Chesapeake Bay. The chance for crabbing, and the dishes which followed; the peaches and luscious Bartlett pears, ripened on the trees, colored by Nature and not gas. The Watermelons, with a capital W; the cantaloupes and sweet potatoes. All mean simply work in the spring and early summer; work plus cash for fertilizer and hoes after the seed is purchased. But when things begin to ripen, there seems to be no work attached to picking and bringing in the goodies for the table. Sometimes they never get any farther than the porch before they are eaten. Can you imagine anything better than sugar-corn fifteen minutes from the field? And Lima beans but twice that far?

The fall brings the chance to go gunning for rabbits and squirrels and birds. One boy shot a fine red fox for his mother's neck-piece. Then later on the persimmons and papaws and walnuts right in the woods ready for the taking. None of these clean, wholesome sports and foods could be purchased in the city with any income less than that of a millionaire. Here on the farm they were free and health-building and happiness-making.

Berries and fruit-trees added to a garden and truck patch, plus a cow and some hogs, and every one of the children had work after school and during vacation, and we had splendid food summer and winter. Two hours' work and then four hours' play kept them all out of mischief. Horseback riding sometimes four at a time, free of charge, when the horses are not busy working;

and I could not have earned enough in the city to have hired one horse.

These are the main reasons why I decided to go it alone, knowing well that each year I should have to make clear much more money than the average city man earns just to pay taxes, interest, and insurance before I paid any help or bought any food. I was too unhappy to be afraid of anything. When I found that the local banks were afraid of me as a financial risk, because of my indebtedness and sex, I went out of the State. There are no fences in finance, either. The farm here is "a place where there is something to do" for not only my own children but those of the neighborhood. They all help—at the tractor, grader, truck, sprayer, brooder, telephone, or cook-stove. In such fashion they are earning their spending-money, and some saving money also. If I can just hold my own while the children and the orchards are young, I shall be on Easy Street later on. The oldest Bartlett and Seckel trees on the farm are sixty-five years of age and still bearing profitable crops. Another orchard is forty-five years of age, planted by my husband's father when he (my husband) was a small boy. These continue to be profitable over a long period of years; hence the large planting of Bartletts here, the only one in the State.

The beginning of the winter showed on my book "Snow," then "More snow, sleighing fine." The next entry is "Mumps," the next "More mumps." All five of the children down in bed with them. Then I read: "Down to 8, too cold to work." And in six days I had twenty-one men at work on the farms. Another entry, March 20, is "Dog bit me." But the next day showed that I planted garden-seed after cauterizing the wounds. She was a big Chesapeake Bay water-dog, and she had seven pup-

pies. Her owner gave me one of the puppies, to pay for the bite the mother took. That puppy now is a grown-up dog, and she has six puppies. So one bite equals six pups—which the children are selling from five to ten dollars each.

I had a strike that year, right when I needed men most. They wanted more money, simply because they thought they could get it, as my rate was the same as other farmers paid. I did not give in to them. Most of them are working for me yet. Then we had a dreadful hail, which cut and bruised the fruit. I now carry hail insurance, and have never been able to collect a premium, for it seems to act as a preventive. I did not carry accident insurance, and upset my car, and I fell and broke two ribs and my collar-bone. I now carry accident insurance, and aside from breaking another rib trying to lift my car out of the mud, this year I have not been able to make use of *it* while farming.

Uncle Sam maintains a substation connected with the Aberdeen Proving-ground, right here on this farm. One morning, early in January, the young man in charge ran up from the tower, and met me going down, for I saw a fire. An accident to a blow-torch had set fire to the room containing barrels of gasoline and the Delco, so he threw the torch out-of-doors. By the time the fire was extinguished in the little storeroom a tremendous fire was raging out-of-doors, in the dead grass, on the block containing six thousand five hundred young Bartlett trees. By the time we had beaten out the fire, by running the tractor wheels over it, more than two thousand trees had been burned so badly that the bark peeled at once. He did not report it, because he thought that no damage had been done, as the trees were dormant (and still thinks so, by the way), but I sent in a bill to Uncle Sam for

twenty-five hundred dollars. I figured that I would lose at least that much before the trees would come back. Now, after four years, more than one-third of them are dead, and the balance are so severely damaged that but one-third are fit for anything at all. From a block the same size, last year, I shipped out more than sixteen hundred dollars' worth of Bartlett's. The War Department would pay me five hundred dollars but I refused the check. It, also, cannot see any damage done.

During the past three years the department has persisted in dropping big bombs right off my kitchen window into the deep part of the Chesapeake Bay. The big bombing-planes come over from Aberdeen, drop two or three bombs, shake the house to pieces, and fly back. The plaster has fallen three times, directly following the terrible concussion from the largest bombs, and I wrote and asked that they at least pay damages for this. A natty officer took a trip over here, looked us over, and said the house was old, and that was the reason the plaster fell. All I know is, it stayed here for more than one hundred years without falling. The men who plastered in those days knew how to do a good job. The various inspectors for the burned trees say they would have died anyway and it is foolish to try to grow pears in Maryland. Sometimes I partly agree with them. But that fire destroyed more trees in a single afternoon than all other things combined over a period of fifty years. While Mr. Hoover is on the subject of Farm Relief, I hope he'll tell some of the men under him just the value of a bearing Bartlett-pear orchard, for I think he knows something of them in California.

One of our special problems down here on Maryland farms is that of boarding the "hands." As I live near a sum-

mer resort, of course all of the women cooks want to work there in the summer-time. There is no fun at all in getting up by daybreak, cooking a breakfast for twenty to forty men, and then going out to start the men in their work. I simply never had a chance to eat, and don't yet. My idea of heaven is a place where I shall have the time to eat something which some one else prepares, and no dishes to wash.

It is easier and neater to farm in men's clothing than in women's garb. It used to take a long time to dress in the morning, especially to put up my hair. Then when I'd get in the field, I could not always go down to a gate, I'd just climb over. The briars caught my stockings, and wire ripped my dresses; my hair-pins were always lost! I hated to keep a hat on all of the time, and without one my hair was hanging down my back. One day I had it cut and appeared with a bob. As long as I farm, personally, I shall keep my hair short, at least until I find other farmers wearing it long. But around here dressing for comfort also means dressing for conversation, and there is talk about my attire.

The lots rented out to tenants by my husband had grown up in locust and sassafras in most instances, and the field used for permanent pasture for sheep and horses and our one cow was soon to become a wilderness. Eight men with grubbing-hoes worked for two weeks, and I figured I had spent around two hundred dollars on one acre of ground, trying to rid it of locust bushes which sprout up each year even after they are grubbed out. One day riding along the road I noticed men putting up a fence of round posts for the State Roads Commission. I asked what they paid for such posts, and then went to see the boss. The year following my grubbing-up that acre, I sold nearly one thousand dollars'

worth of locust posts to the State Roads Commission and three farmers, and the lap-wood sawed in stove lengths paid for all of the cost of cutting and hauling both. I am exchanging some of the stove-wood with the School Board for transportation of the two children in high school, and after I have finished fencing all of my farms, I shall have more posts for sale, but I grub only in orchards now.

Along with all of these trials and tribulations, I find entries such as "Ate first peas to-day," "Raspberries are going fine," "Chicks ready to eat," and ready early, for I soon found that a farmer who farms cannot fool with a setting hen. There are too many other aggravations which have to be endured, to fool with getting chickens in that fashion. I had a small brooder-house built, swapped some fancy sugar-corn seed for a brooder, exchanged fancy eggs for day-old chicks, and the children come pretty near taking care of them for me. We have fried chicken oftener and earlier than in the old-fashioned way, and I cannot see that I lose any more chicks.

I persuaded my second son to buy a cow, for which he paid fifty dollars. She has provided us with milk about the whole year round, for during the summer we sell the surplus, and in the winter we purchase about the same amount. The boy now has a cow worth one hundred and fifty dollars, has sold a calf for twenty dollars each year, and has a surplus milk-account also. He has a few hives of bees, on which we hope to learn how to grow honey profitably. At present we simply have a mighty fine dish of honey and waffles whenever we feel like it.

Along with the tractor, the power sprayer, the windmill, and everything I can do, including the hail insurance, I still have not found any way in which I can either control the weather or work

while it rains. During the blossoming period no fruit will set if the rain falls steadily for three days while they are in full bloom. My diary shows more rain than any other one thing. That might prove two things: when it rains I have less help to cook for and more time for bookkeeping, or it might mean that this record will be valuable some day in preparing for a rain insurance. The rainfall here in Maryland has washed away in the spring hundreds of bushels of pears which could not "set." Then during the summer the lack of rain has kept the fruit small, and thus I lost hundreds of bushels of pears. California has a dry spell when fruit is ready for pollination, and then irrigates before picking. "So *they* say."

The man going to college gets a degree and a diploma and goes to his life-work. The man or woman on a farm studies year after year, practises year after year, and never does learn enough about his work to say that he is ready for a diploma. What works this year may not work next year, but there is always a thrill about sticking the plough into the ground the first time each year. Nothing can beat it. The first furrow ploughed with the new Fordson made me feel as if I was going to win out. But the birds ate up most of that early, first-ploughed piece of corn, and I had a debt instead of a profit. But before the debt, I had visions of early corn, carefully cultivated and sold at a high figure.

Friends in other States send me the best they have in the way of encouragement, information, and general goodwill. Some of them I've met, and some I know only by this old, second-hand typewriter. I do not hesitate to stop in any county, in any State, and ask a question of a farmer about his work, and I get a friendly response every time. The advice I get is so contradictory that I

want to stay on the farm and find out for myself what can be done.

I can see more than was possible twenty-three years ago when first I came to the farm. I travelled a good bit on horseback, and used my feet for many a weary mile over the land (the tracks of a woman's shoe are easily followed in worked ground). Once in a while, during the first year alone, when so many men were doing what a few can do now, I would go to the top of the observation tower on the government property and look out in the orchard with the glasses and see—men resting on the end of the row, and loafing generally. And it made me feel badly, so I have learned now not to see many things, or—if I do—to forget them as quickly as I can. I can stand on the porch and listen for the tractor, and know that the orchards are being worked or sprayed, and that is a comfort. In the first days I could see but one field at a time, horseback or walking, but up in an airplane with my son a few weeks ago I could see the whole farm at one time. A square mile of farm and woods and marsh just by going “up in the air” a little. I did not see many things which are only visible when a person is right down on the same level, but I was happy to see nearly two hundred acres in bloom, of pink and white in square blocks, interspersed with the soft velvety green of growing wheat, and with the deep browns of the ploughed fields it made a picture which I shall not soon forget. I took pleasure in the thought that my first ride in an airplane was with my oldest son as pilot, and over our own farms. I thought, while riding along so smoothly over a small negro settlement, of life as we are living it. I knew very well that down on the ground there was disorder and filth and badness, but up in the air the little town looked just like a Christmas-tree garden,

with tiny houses and trees and a white strip of road (which I *knew* was filled with deep ruts and mud-holes). Everything looked all right. And I just wondered if the Providence which watches over us in all kinds of weather and conditions saw only the beautiful side. I just wondered if He was so high up above us that He could not see the mean, petty, dirty, bad things which we of earth know is down here because we are on the same level with it.

And then I thought of spraying or dusting with an airplane, as a commercial practice, in an orchard. I know it is being done by the government in forest projects, but think of the time saved if it could be done on the farms also. I could see, in my mind, the little horse-drawn wagon with which I had started to spray, and the long, long wait for repairs. We are in a hurry to live and in a hurry to die, it would seem from the fatal accidents in the cities daily.

But down here on the farm Nature can't be hurried much. We are sprouting acorns which we are going to plant, and there is not much chance of hurrying them into oak-trees; we are planting walnut seedlings for logs fifty years hence; we are planting pears which must grow for fifteen years before there is much profit in them, but we'd like to care for the work in the fastest form of locomotion known at the present time. And we like to travel as much as we can and in as short a time as possible. I am hoping to drop in on some California pear-grower some day and watch him work, without losing too much time from my own orchard.

My method has changed completely during the past five years. We used to grow acres of corn, and had the stable enlarged for the horses necessary for its cultivation. This year I have had installed on a convenient corner a tank

holding more than one thousand gallons of gasoline, and in a few minutes John D. Rockefeller's man can fill it for me. That saves me many hours of corn-growing and many dollars in housing both corn and horses. Machinery attracts my boys more than horses do. They know something of the upkeep and repair work on both engines and tractors. One boy with a tractor and plough can do the same amount of work in the orchard that four men did with eight horses in a month (by that I mean the days in the month which were fit to work the ploughs). One round trip between the trees with a double disk, and the ground is worked in a short time.

Farming in the old way was not profitable, interesting, nor adventurous. Farming in the new way gives something of the spirit of adventure, and that had to be considered if the children were to be interested (and myself, too). Interest and excitement of some sort must be furnished, and on seven hundred and fifty acres, employing at times as many as sixty men, both are available. Interest and interest money, too, for as I started farming with no capital at all, some one had to have interest in either the farms, the prospects, or myself, to lend me money. I borrowed on all three, and to safeguard them placed a very large life-insurance policy on myself and eldest son; increased the fire insurance and now carry hail insurance also. But I cannot do much with the weather problem. It is the only thing I really fear. From a mouse to a mortgage, and from a politician to the President, I fear none, and can hold my own with a smile and plead my case.

The story of farming is tied up with debt and discouragement many times,

but if the children can grow a little popcorn and pop it by the open fireplace fed by locust chunks in the living-room, why worry about steam-heat and the miners' strikes? If they can sharpen their skates and try out the ice just outside the kitchen window, before a friendly game of pitch and a half-bushel of apples, why worry about the movies or the talkies or the ice-cream cone? Hundreds of successful men had their weekly baths in a basin or wash-tub before the kitchen-fire, and is there any reason to suppose that new ones cannot thus be bathed?

The eldest boy has chosen aviation, and as he has had one crash and is wearing a pivot-tooth, he has gained experience. The eldest girl is majoring in physical training, and the farm has helped her. The other children are not yet old enough for a decision.

A woman can farm successfully without a husband or a gentleman manager, but a man can also do without a cook and housekeeper. Neither is often done, for the intimate, close companionship of a farm needs two to express. The plans are more effective if talked over and picked to pieces several times before being used. It is difficult to be in more than one place at a time, and in many instances during the day it would seem that three places need my attention at once—the orchard, the brooder-house, and the kitchen.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow." And then he showed them to me, more than twenty years ago. I have the sons and daughters of the horses, hogs, and chickens. I feel as if I had married the farm as well as the farmer, and am convinced that nothing but "non-support" would ever make me consider a divorce.



Mojo

THE STRANGE MAGIC THAT WORKS IN THE SOUTH TO-DAY

BY RUTH BASS

CONJUR is a strange thing. Some conjurers are born that way. Some learn their magic through long, slow years of patient meditating and watching of signs, and others, like young Donis, have conjur thrust upon them by accident. Donis picked up a hat that had been blown from another negro's head in a whirlwind. He handed the hat back to the man. A few hours later the owner of the hat stooped to untangle the traces from his black mule's leg. He was laughing. The mule became frightened and kicked the man to death. He had died laughing aloud, and his death was attributed to Donis who had taken the hat from the devil in the whirlwind. Men would no longer work around him. He could not get a place to stay or to eat. Eventually he was forced to live away from his fellows in a tumble-down cabin on the edge of the swamp and follow conjuring as a trade. Sometimes a gal will come down from one of the plantations begging him for a love-charm; or a half-scared buck will come, willing to pay for a trick that will bring his wandering woman back home. But mostly Donis will be alone with the swamp and the silence—and the powers of conjuration. For magic is a lonely thing and when it falls upon a native of the Bayou Pierre swamp-lands there is no escape from it.

In these swamp-lands there are different ways by which a conjurer can be

identified. If you are a double-sighted person and can see ghosts, if you happen to have been born on Christmas Day, or are a seventh son, you are born for magic. Others say, if you are an albino, or have three birthmarks on your left arm, or a luck-mole on your right arm, or if you have one blue eye and one black, you are born to conjure and it will be no trouble for you to learn the art of gri-gri. Of the several conjurers I have known in Mississippi, each one had some distinguishing physical characteristic. One was tall and dark with grave eyes. One was an undersized, dwarfed mulatto, almost an albino, with green eyes and a cunning little face. I remember one who had a twisted back and walked with a sickening, one-sided limp. But the most powerful conjurer I know to-day is a tall, dark woman. Her straight-backed, small-breasted figure seems in some strange way to suggest unusual strength. Her eyes are grave and wise, terribly wise in the ways of ghosts and devils and mojo, as well as in the practice of medicine. "Dat sickness ain't nat'ul an' doctor's medicine am bound tuh be agin hit," they say and send for Menthy. Menthy will come, grave and dark, to work her cures. A strange conglomeration of superstition and folk-lore these cures are.

She might prescribe the sucking of alum, or rubbing the limbs with graveyard dirt. Her specific for all diseases