MARY

Mary was blessed by being born into a Christian family. Her grandmother was called Dorcas, her grandfather, Paul, her mother Ruth, her father David, her elder brother James, and her younger sister Magdalene. Their surname was Christian. They lived in a quaint, large house in the village of Riverview in England, and worshipped in the stone 12th century church of Trinity Chapel. There was a private co-ed Christian school on the outskirts of the village and the three Christian children had been there since Grade One.

They all enjoyed school because they were intelligent, kindly, helpful, popular and excelled in sport. As a result, it was no surprise that they each became Head Prefect in their final years. Their father was the village doctor, and James had decided to follow in his father's footsteps and join his practice on graduating. Magdalene wanted to teach in a high school and so she majored in English and French Literature. After much thought, Mary decided to study Philosophy and see where it led for her future employment. Everything seemed too good to be true – and of course, it was.

All the Christian young people studied at Cambridge University because it was very near their home in Riverview. On all levels they did very well. Mary met Ian at the Public Speaking Society. Ian came up to her and said "Hallo, I'm Ian Jones, and I need a dance partner for Thursday night in the Hall. Would you like to come with me?" "Yes, thank you,

I should like that very much." "What residence are you in?" he asked. "None," she replied smiling, I live nearby at home." "Where is that?" he asked. "40, River Drive Riverview Village," she answered. "Right! I'll pick you up at seven." Mary was excited, looked at her well-stocked wardrobe, and went into Cambridge to shop. She tried on several long dresses in various shops and finally bought a strapless dress in blue silk with a sequined cumber band. "My," said Ian as they got into his car after being introduced to her parents, "you look simply stunning!" At midnight as the dance ended, Ian looked at her, drew her into his arms and kissed her. And that was the beginning of their love story.

"Where do you worship, darling?" Mary asked one Saturday. "Nowhere." Ian replied. "I am an atheist." Mary was shocked. "I can never marry you," she said. "Christians should marry Christians and 'not be unequally yoked.'" "Don't break up with me my darling Mary," Ian pleaded. "I can't live without you!" "No! I must" said Mary and burst into tears. But after two months of misery, she went back to Ian, and that was her first step in her fall from grace.

Ian was very wealthy. He had inherited a fortune from one of his aunts who had married a billionaire. "Let's get married now, my darling Mary," he said. "We'll move out of our residences and buy a house near the university. I'll buy you a car and you can get your driver's licence. "My parents

will never agree to our marriage, neither would the church marry us. Fortunately, I am of age, so we don't need their permission." And then, a time of great excitement came about – buying a house, a car, a wedding dress and planning their wedding. It was held in the Magistrate's Court in Cambridge. Mary was radiant in a white silk wedding dress embroidered with sparkling pearls. She wore a fingertip net veil, a coronet of miniature roses, and she carried a bouget of the same. Afterwards the Christians invited the Jones family for a delicious celebration at the Riverview Hotel. "They make a wonderful couple," said Mrs Jones." When the Christians got home, Ruth said, "Oh dear, we must pray for Ian's conversion."

As the University was in recession, the happy couple honeymooned in South Africa, stayed in Cape Town, went in the cable car to the top of Table Mountain, visited the winelands and flew to the Kruger National Park before flying home. While they attended lectures, they stayed in the Riverview Hotel, Mary learnt to drive her small Mercedes, and they searched for a house that suited them. After looking at about ten with agents, they bought a large thatched double storied house in a suburb near Cambridge. It had an open plan living room and kitchen with a stairway leading up to four double ensuite bedrooms with a large balcony running around the house overlooking a pretty garden and a sparkling pool. There were several shrubs, tall trees and a summerhouse. "It's the house of my

dreams, darling!" exclaimed Mary. "Let's call it DREAMS," said Ian. They chose a well-known decorator who furnished two rooms for the children they hoped would soon make their appearance. "I think two children would suit us," Ian said. "I agree," answered Mary. Unexpectedly they got three. A boy called Richard, after Dawkins, of course, and twin girls called Joan and Johanna, after Joan of Arc, of course. The happy grandparents spoiled them rotten.

One afternoon, Mary got a frantic call from her mother. "Dad's been involved in an accident. He is not expected to live!" Mary was devastated, phoned Ian and told the children's nanny to look after them until she returned. She found her mother on her knees next to her dad's bed. His head and face were completely covered with bandages and the whole family were standing around the bed, crying and praying. Ian arrived and held the sobbing Mary in his arms. He had come to love and respect his in-laws as they did him. Shortly after he arrived, the monitor on the wall showed a straight line. The memorial service was held the following week. The church was full. Ruth, dressed in a white blouse and skirt, walked in carrying David's ashes in a wooden box. Father Benedict announced the hymn, GLORY BE TO GOD THE FATHER. He preached a short sermon and followed the Anglican funeral service. A few friends read tributes, followed by those of his children and finally Ruth walked up to the lectern. "I am reading David's favourite Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not

want. He leadeth me in green pastures beside still waters. He restoreth my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and they staff comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointeth my head with oil, my cup runeth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever' - and that is where David is now. David was the love of my life - I treasure so many happy times I had with him. He was truly God's gift to me, and I shall never marry again. Since his passing, I have thought and prayed about my life without him. I shall keep our home which has so many memories for our family and where they can sleep over or visit whenever they like. However, I feel led to serve our Lord by setting up a physiotherapy practice in a poor part of London for poor people who cannot afford professional help. I have already bought a small flat and am renting a large set of rooms for my practice. I know you will pray for it and for me. 'Absent from the body, present with the Lord. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. The Lord gave,'" her voice broke, 'and the Lord hath taken. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'" When they got home, Mary said to Ian, "I hate God. This was the last straw. I am an atheist!"

Joan and Johanna had just returned from a school trip to India. A few days after, they both started vomiting and were unable to eat or drink. They were the only girls in their group

who were affected and were now being fed intravenously. “Why just our girls?” Mary cried. “It’s not fair! How can God be so cruel?” “Oh,” said Ian, “so you are no longer an atheist, my darling Mary?” They never left their daughters’ sides: reading to them, holding their hands and petting them. After a few days, Mary was distraught. “I can’t bear this any longer!” she cried. “There’s no improvement! What can we do? Oh God, I beg you, please make them whole! Please forgive me for saying all those wicked things about you! If you heal my girls, I’ll serve you all my life!” And from that hour the girls were healed.