



## TRURO TALES and TRAILS

... by Grace DesChamps

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### Mary Ball Has Front Seat For Drama Of Vast Atlantic Spread In Foreground

Higgins Hollow Road, winding along the base of high, wooded hills, is one of those artless, little roads in which Truro abounds. Old, arching trees; an old house here and there, set back from the road—a relative absence of winds—mark the spot where some long-dead mariner or farmer built his home, choosing this shelter between the hills for his roof-tree and garden.

Almost nothing about Higgins Hollow Road suggests that nearness of the Atlantic, just over towering bluffs to the East. Indeed, when you drive up the winding, private road leading from here to the home of Miss Mary Ball, perched like an eyrie on a headland above the sea, you marvel how so much contrast can happen in less than half a mile of travel!

If the sight of limitless ocean—of hill upon ancient hill—works some kind of witchery on you, anyway—a glimpse of the world, perhaps, when it was young!—you will marvel the more when you gain the final rise to the Ball home. From this eminence, the little valley roads seem no more than tiny folds in the hills—almost untenanted, they look, until your eye begins to pick out habitations to the south: a house here and there on the sides of the bluffs above the Pamet Valley.

To the West, from the northern corner of Miss Ball's property, you can look across the Cape, and through a break in the hills, catch a glimpse of the bay. A late, afternoon sun was funneling into this notch between the hills when Miss Ball and this reporter watched it—each bundled up in a warm jacket, but unmindful, anyway, of December winds.

The sun, bottled up there between the Western hills, gave them a dark, craggy outline touched with gold—but here, where we stood, sea and sky were pooling their light to bathe the whole back shoreline in bright, crisp colors. It could have been a Homer Winslow painting without a frame.

At our back was the sea—mile

upon everlasting mile of it!—3,000 miles of water in one direction before you touched another shore, the coast of Spain and France! Those lines of Byron's about man-and-the-sea went running through your head . . . (But man, "whose control stops with the shore," had got his come-uppance here, all right! Never would he sink the pylons of one of his grubby, little factories into the edge of this not-to-be-trifled-with sea!)

It was a wonderful afternoon. Miss Ball had invited us up to look around this remarkable terrain, but we stayed to hear about the 71 years of history since the late Sheldon W. Ball had built the original Ball Summer home here in 1890—which had to be expanded in 1904 when five Ball youngsters (S. Osborn among them!) needed more living space.

We heard about the end of the poor old excursion steamer, "Longfellow," which sank off Ballston Beach in 1904. A proud and snappy little side-wheeler by her picture, and accounts of her from our own forebears, she had brought those early "tourists" from the city to Provincetown in the days of "leg-of-mutton" sleeves and drooping, sophisticated-looking moustaches. (Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon Ball had made their honeymoon trip on her!)

#### Terrific Explosion

But now, ignominiously, reduced to a tramp of the seas and loaded with 300 tons of nitroglycerine, she had given up the ghost here—oddly enough, within a few miles from the scenes of her heyday. But the gay old steamer, now turned into a truck-horse, had had the final word. Water pressure detonated her cargo of dynamite some months after she sank—and she blew up with a bang that could be felt in Boston. (We hope it rattled the windows of her owners—so lacking in sentiment about the old steamer!)

Horace Snow, Sr., who—because he was never too far from where things were happening, invariably winds up with a minor role in local history—was on his way

home from seeing his girl the night the "Longfellow" blew up. (His girl was the late Helen Martin, who later became Mrs. Horace Snow, and she was living in the old "Tony" Joseph house, then on the highway near Longnook.)

As was his wont, Horace was taking a crosscut across the hills to his father's home on Castle Road, and was just abreast of the present Snow Cemetery when the blast shook the quiet night—and Horace, also.

From the look on his face as Horace recalls the event, it could have been Walpurgis Night, with the Valkyries set loose by the blast and all of them in hot pursuit of him. "By golly," he wiped his face, feelingly, "I never stopped running until I was safe inside the house—and the door bolted!" The explosion heaved up quantities of fish from the ocean depths and strewed them along Ballston Beach.

Often, before a storm, friends of Miss Ball are invited to witness from the windows of her living room, the show put on by a wrathful Atlantic. But today the doughty old sea was biding its time, showing no teeth, or only a few of them—only a light coating of whitecaps on its chilly, blue expanse. A big freighter plowed steadily along, close to shore, its tall cranes and white-painted after-house shining in the sunlight. (Let those 15-knot winds rise to 45 or 50, though—and haul into the East—and you would have seen that freighter putting miles between her and this shore!)

It's still something of a marvel how Miss Ball's house, substantial though it is, has resisted the force of those great, Winter Northeasters. In late years, however, Miss Ball has been steadily reinforcing it. Inside the Ball living room, facing the sea, angle irons strengthen the corner supports; cross beams buttress the roof timbers and Miss Ball lately has had a heavy, link chain fastened tautly, North to South, between the sidewalls. (If you had seen a couple of sea anchors to windward, you wouldn't have been surprised!)

#### Retired Teacher

A retired teacher, Miss Ball

now writes and paints here during the seasonal months. She is one of those property-owners in the National Seashore who have had to forego substantial financial returns from their scenic property—now at a premium for homesites. A piece of land, marked off into three large house lots, already had prospective buyers until the National Seashore bill was passed.

Nevertheless, Miss Ball had only kind words for the National Park Service personnel who had recently called upon her. Land acquisition Agent George Thompson had brought with him several assistants he called "land architects". They were studying this terrain to plan for the most careful use of it.

"I like them," Miss Ball confessed. "They were considerate—highly intelligent. They want to preserve all this under the best possible circumstances. They gave me the feeling they're going to succeed".

Miss Ball will continue to own her home here and three acres of land without interference from the Park Service. Inside the Ball home is a wealth of locally interesting mementos—inviting another story on this high spot of the National Seashore, and we have promised to do it.

