

## DENISE

Have you ever been to a movie-house? I have – six times – with Mama and Daddy’s permission. And it has changed my life. Sitting in the dark watching the picture stars fall in love and get in trouble while wearing evening gowns. Did y’all see *Three Comrades*? When Margaret Sullivan died that terrible death in that long, shiny gown, I had to go to bed for two days.

I read about it in the *Ashville Citizen*. This man, this Mr. Selznick, says he’s looking for a new girl. “The best girl that shows up will play the part willy-nilly.” And I just know he’s talking about me. They’re searching high and low for Scarlett, and I’m sitting right outside Siler City. This is my year off from Bible School. I got plenty of time to make a picture. The paper says he’ll be in Charlotte on Friday the 14<sup>th</sup>. Valentine’s Day! They’re looking for an unknown: young and charged with electricity.

I sneak a tablecloth and fashion myself a Hollywood dress – snow white with a red felt heart here (*Over her heart.*) for the Day.

I slip off and buy the bus ticket. I sit in the chicken house and practice “Fiddle-dee-dee.”

When Valentine’s came, I was up at the crack. My sister June had just bought a new pocketbook that matched my Hollywood shoes, and I snatched it up as I stole out of the house. And when I got to the bus stop, I saw before me . . . there standing before me . . . every girl in my community.

The bus pulled up and, we filed on. There were ten or fifteen girls on from Bushy Mountain already. Every stop, more girls would pile on. We pull into Charlotte not speaking a word.

They march us in ten in a row. Mr. Selznick is sitting behind a desk with his hand held up to his face like this. (*Demonstrates.*) Two little men sit by his side and whisper things in his ear like the Last Supper Picture.

Mr. Selznick looks up and down the line, and he says, “You, little girl with the heart, you stay.”

I go, and I stand before him, and he asks me my name, and where I’m from, and how old I am, and have I ever been to Charlotte before, and was I planning on staying overnight. Friendly things like that. He says I am delightful. That if he didn’t know better, he’d swear I was a Rockette. I didn’t even know what a Rockette *was*. He says, “I’ll be in touch.” And when I looked up from writing down my address – he winked at me.

On the bus home, everybody’s crying. But me. “I’ll be in touch!” He’s gonna write me! I could be the new girl! I’d be perfect for Scarlett! I find a pack of violet candy in June’s purse, and I eat the whole thing in celebration.

But you see, yesterday marked four months. And Mr. Selznick hasn’t been in touch. I’m pretty sure I’m not gonna be Scarlett. The paper says they gave the part to Paulette Goddard. She’ll be good. (*Starts to cry.*) I know this has to do with Jesus and my soul in some way. My mama and daddy wanted me to say something and . . . I know I lapsed. My sins are many and easy to count.

I'm powerfully sorry for not honoring my Mother and Father. For snatching my sister's hard-gotten belonging and eating what was in it. But as far as the sin to myself, I truly haven't figure that out yet. I pray I will, and I know Jesus hears my prayers.