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## A Box Of Spikenard

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### Chapter 1

The thin early ridge of dawn on the winter horizon exposed the grayish-pink early morning light. Silence broken only by the sharp, squeaking crunch of snow underfoot, hinted at below zero temperatures. Anna Medford from her stance at the upstairs bedroom window watched her daughter hunch her shoulders against the 5 A.M. cold and sink her face into the coat collar as her eyes peered to their destination -- the warmth of the barn.

Drifted snow, now crusted, lay ankle deep at the milkhouse, and as Anna's eyes took in the beauty of the frigid, early morning, her thoughts wandered painfully to other winter mornings -- other winter days, really -- when she had watched Mark from the kitchen window as he made his many rounds from milking payor to milkhouse to barn to pig sty, hen house and corn crib.

They had shared twenty-nine years of married bliss, and his sudden Home-going had left an ache and a void inside her being. It was almost as if half of her was gone, she thought, recalling how she used to listen for the clink of milk pails as Mark, in his haste to finish milking the thirty-five-head herd, would clank the pails together.

Sighing, Anna turned from the window as Betsy was swallowed up inside the barn -- not to milk, but to pray. Brad McAllister, a neighbor boy on a near-by farm, now took



complete charge of the milk cows, and while Anna shared the profits with the enterprising FFA'r, the milk check was still her main source of income. Brad, who took care of his father's herd, would not be over till 7, at least; and Betsy, knowing the youth's schedule, had made it a daily practice to have her private devotions long before the boy's milking time arrived.

Anna dressed quickly, made the bed, then hurled down the stairs to the warmth of the kitchen. Betsy (bless her!) had the fire going well inside the big wood stove and the toasty-warmth was a welcome thing indeed. Sudden, unbidden tears stole fore her eyes and coursed rapidly down her rosy cheeks. How thankful she was to God for Betsy and for her dedicated, consecrated life. How utterly unlike Glenn was this second and last child of Mark's and hers. Betsy 'sat loose to the things of time,' possessing always a continuing vision of the unseen.

The saints were ever like that though, Anna soliloquized pensively -- found in almost every station of life. From dishwasher in a Carmelite kitchen to a king in his royal robes, they followed the same path, a path of withdrawal from a dependence on that which might be lower than the soul. Their derivation was to God and to His poor and afflicted.

To twenty-four year old Glenn, however, the dedication was of a different form . . . that of the world and worldly things. His evaluation of people differed (glaringly so) from Betsy's too. To Glenn, a man's ambition, his drive, success, the fact that he drove a certain make of car and that he was seen with the "right people" signified status. Character, to this wayward son of theirs, meant nothing whatever.

A sob tore Anna's slender fame. Making comparisons was never one of her favorite pass-times, not as a girl even. But the differences between her two offspring were too obvious to deny, especially since Glenn's 'turning from the faith' about three or four years ago. The boy had become suddenly sulky, foul tempered and sharp-tongued, declaring firmly that he was going to do as he pleased. He said he was no longer an infant and he was -- finally -- going to have some fun. Anna recalled the wound he had inflicted in her heart, a wound so deep and cruel as to be beyond healing. Had it not been for God's grace and His help, she was sure she would never have been able to stand it physically.

Betsy, on the other hand, was kindness, love, consideration and compassion personified. The secret of the girl's beauty of life and of the wealth of love she received was that everyone she met -- the deliveryman at the door, the casual acquaintance met while shopping, the children at church and in the neighborhood, even the miserable old town drunk -- felt the warmth of her interest, the influence of her deep sense of caring about them and the outreach of her Christian love.

One was never long in Betsy's presence without feeling that he had been lifted to a higher plane in his own self-esteem and others. In some unostentatious way, God had

endowed the eighteen-year-old with the gift of making those with whom she lived and worked aware of their own worth, their dignity and value to those around them and to the world, so that they discovered a music in their soul that was not there before.

Sliding bacon carefully into the skillet now, Anna wondered about the prodigal. Where was he? What was he doing? Did he ever think about her and his sister? Tall, athletic-built, with an unflagging sense of humor, Glenn was ever a favorite with his associates and peers.

His gifts were numerous. Humor was a natural thing; and if his wit wasn't always of the funny kind, it was invariably the good kind, leaving the listener feeling a little bit better about things in general. His face, brown as an Oklahoma field, was etched with laugh lines and his blue eyes twinkled with seeming mischief at all times.

They had had such high hopes for this son of theirs, Mark and she, and until Glenn left for college, he had ever been a model child. But now . . . ! If only she knew where he was -- where he had gone.

Tears chased each other down Anna's cheeks. Taking a work-worn hand, she wiped them away quake. Hurrying to the window again, she gazed involuntarily toward the barn. The snow had meringued its drift against fence and shed, piling it high in marshmallow mounds, but the sun was now shining.

A flash of red, darting swiftly off a tree to the bird feeder, captured her full attention. The cardinal, his scarlet coat a glaring contrast to the snow, flung a clarion call on the brisk, crisp morning air and then attacked the sunflower seeds in the feeder hungrily. A blue jay, in his equally impressive but vivid blue coat, darted down fore a nearby hickory nut tree and sent a flock of noisy, gregarious sparrows scurrying in all directions, hiding eventually in the sheltering boughs of the myriad evergreens that skirted the sprawling lawn.

For a moment, Anna forgot about the prodigal, so captivated was she by the fast-moving pantomime outside her window. It was the tantalizing aroma of sizzling bacon that sent her hurrying back to the work at hand. She would have a hearty breakfast ready for Betsy when she returned to the warmth of the kitchen from her place of prayer, she decided happily, cutting the feather-light biscuits out neatly and slipping them into the oven. She had brushed their tops ever so lightly with melted butter and sprinkled them with sugar and a hint of cinnamon -- a favorite of Betsy's.

The bacon sizzled slowly to a crisp, delicious goodness and the biscuits inside the oven donned jackets of golden brown. Still no sign of Betsy could Anna see.

The girl was unusually long this morning, she realized, and, slipping the pan of hot biscuits into the warming oven of the old-fashioned cook stove, she took her stance once more by the window.

The cardinal had succeeded in luring his mate to the feeder, Anna noted, and instead of one blue jay, she saw four. They were specimens of beauty, she mused silently, in spite of their penchant for quarreling and fighting.

Not until it was almost time for Brad to come and do the milking did Betsy emerge from the shelter of the barn. Anna watched as her daughter made her way along the path to the back porch where she shed her boots before entering the kitchen.

"Cold, huh?" she said, putting the breakfast quickly on the table

"I didn't mind it, Mother -- not with all the warm clothes I have on. Oh, I do hope Mrs. Jackson and her children are keeping warm. It's been so hard for her to make ends meet since Benjamin died. I think I'll run over and check on them after breakfast. I have two sweaters; so I think I'll take one over for Janie. The pink one would brighten her cheeks up a bit and I believe that pink skirt of mine will fit her, too."

A tear shimmered in Anna's eye and a lump caught in her throat. "We'll see what we can spare, dear," she said with a catch in her voice. "But for now I think you'd better get something in your stomach; you fasted all day yesterday, honey."

"Some things demand fasting, Mother dear," the girl replied thoughtfully. "There's been something that I wasn't sure of for quite some time, but it's clear now; this morning God gave me the answer. Oh, it's wonderful to know His will, and even more wonderful to delight in doing that will." Turning and facing her mother, Betsy said softly, almost reverently, "The Lord wants me to go as a missionary. The call is as plain and as real as is the knowledge that I am saved and sanctified wholly."

"You . . . you . . . Did . . . I hear you . . . rightly . . . Betsy?" Anna asked, the color draining from her cheeks and the biscuit which she was buttering dropping to her plate. "You . . . you could be . . . imagining this, dear," she added with stammering tongue.

"Oh, but I'm not, Mother! It's real -- plain and clear, too. I'm as sure of the call as I am that I am all on the altar. I must go! First, I shall go to Bible School and take nurses' training, too."

"But Betsy, how can you do the? I mean, well . . . . Bible School and nurses' training?"

"I'll take Bible classes in the morning and go to the hospital in the afternoon, the Lord willing."

"But, honey, are you sure you can do the? Suppose there isn't a hospital near the Bible School . . . ?"

"Oh, but there is! The Lord told me what to do, and He never gives orders without making provision to fulfill those orders. So there'll be a hospital near the school where I'll be taking my training."

A faint moan escaped Anna's lips. Getting quickly to her feet, she rushed into the flying room, crying, "Betsy! O Betsy! What will I do without you?"

Like one dumb-struck, Betsy stared at her plate; then, rising, she followed her mother. "You . . . do want God's will for me, dearest Mother, don't you?" she asked, laying a hand gently upon the trembling body.

Lifting her tear-stained face, Anna said brokenly, "I do! I do, Betsy; only, how can I give you up to . . . to . . . go so far away! O Betsy! Betsy!" And now the shoulders shook convulsively.

Flinging her arms around her mother's body, Betsy buried her face on the dear shoulder and sighed deeply.

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## Chapter 2

All was still inside the big farmhouse after Betsy left to look in on the poverty-stricken, widowed Mrs. Jackson and her family of five children. Anna Medford, in a state of shock over her daughter's statement that God had called her to labor for Him on foreign soil, sat in the roomy old-fashioned rocking chair in the kitchen, her hands resting in the ample folds of her floral apron. It wasn't that she didn't want Betsy to do God's will; ah no! But the thought of riving without her was almost more than Anna could bear. Betsy was all she had left! She knew that someday, some way God would use this Spirit-filled child of hers, but she had never entertained a single thought that it would be on foreign soil.

The grandfather clock in the riving room struck the hour. Its deep, melodic chimes filled the house with their time-telling music, and suddenly, like one awaking out of a deep sleep, Anna got to her feet. She knew what she must do. Writing a hasty note and placing it on the kitchen sink where Betsy was sure to find it when she returned home from her mission of love and mercy, she hurried to the barn, bundled warmly in a hooded wool coat, heavy scarf, gloves and boots. She would have to settle it, she knew, for time and eternity, once and for all. God wanted Betsy; Betsy must obey; and she, Anna Medford . . .

Tears stung her eyes as she opened the barn door and let herself inside. Brad had long since finished milking the herd of beautiful Guernseys and the cows now munched contentedly on the sweet-smelling alfalfa hay along with a certain portion of grain the youth had given them. Giving Anna a casual 'good-morning' glance and an

equally casual 'once-over,' they continued eating, the breath from their nostrils and the warmth of their bodies taking the chill out of the barn.

Like her husband, Anna had always liked cattle. Often she had looked at the beautiful creatures, their soul-ful eyes seeming to speak the volume of words which their mouths could not utter, and always the cows had been gentle to Mark and her. "They know who's sanctified wholly, dear," Mark had told her one day after Glenn had backslidden and had an outburst of carnal anger.

Anna stood among the cattle momentarily now, recalling how restive they had been all that day after Glenn's grade. Not until Mark, in his soft, placating voice, had gone in among the herd and calmed them did they settle down to normalcy again, she recalled. Brad McAllister, so like her late husband, (though still only a youth) was gentle and kind to the cows. But then, Brad was sanctified wholly -- a gem in Mark's crown, for it was he who had won the boy to Christ. Brad, Anna felt, was God's special gift to her, carrying on with the plowing, the sowing and harvesting and the care of the cows just as if Mark were still living.

Hurrying toward the hay chute where the hay which Brad had thrown down from the haymow lay fragrantly-sweet on the floor beneath the opening, Anna fell on her knees and buried her face in the hay. The fountain of her heart opened from deep within and the tears literally gushed from her eyes.

For a long while no sound was heard other than the impassioned, anguished moans and groans which arose and fell from the very bottom of the woman's soul, shaking her slender frame with violent sobs. Was she, Anna Medford, still fully consecrated and totally yielded to God and to His will? Or had she taken a part -- any part -- off the sacrificial altar? Had she? Was she yielded? What about her children? Were they still upon the altar? The wayward prodigal? The Spirit-filled daughter?

Another overflow of tears and more moans and groans and soul-searching and the mother knew that all was still fully yielded and given over to God. "I want Betsy."

God's voice probed the seat of Anna's human, motherly affection. Was every vow, every promise, still intact?

"Is Betsy still all Mine? Do you still give her to Me -- willingly and joyously -- for any service I may ask of her and for anywhere I choose to send her?"

The questions were so poignant, so direct and precise as to startle the woman. Quickly her mind spanned the years that were past. From the moment when she knew that she was to become a mother she had given her offspring to the Lord, and after the children were born Mark and she had presented each child to the Lord in a public service of dedication at church. Long before that, though, while seeking God for a pure heart,

she had given all that she had (or ever hoped to have) to God in full and complete consecration.

"Is Betsy still all Mine for service?" God's voice repeated the question. "Willingly and joyously so?"

Raising her hands upward, Anna exclaimed aloud, "O, my blessed Lord and Master, Yes! Yes! Yes! With no reservations whatever. Amen and Amen!"

The presence of the Lord so flooded the mother's heart until all she could do was weep and shout for joy. Opening her Bible which she had brought with her, her eyes fell upon Mark 14:3, "And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head."

Overcome with awe and amazement, Anna reread the verse while tears of perfect restfulness, peace and joy danced down her cheeks. She had broken her "box of spikenard, very precious" and poured it out upon the Lord. The dearest treasure she had -- her most priceless earthly possession -- was "poured" upon His head and was given to Him for time and eternity.

The knowledge that her consecration was still intact and all laid upon the altar of sacrifice filled Anna's soul with inexpressible delight and heavenly joy. Never, for so long as God may grant her life, would she be able to express the deep inner feelings of her heart over the preciousness -- the blessedness and the sacredness -- of this moment. In giving, she had gained; in submitting and surrendering, she had obtained. Her peace and joy was inexpressibly wonderful. Truly the ways of God were past finding out.

Getting to her feet, Anna started for the barn door, noting as she went how clean Brad had left each cow's stall. Some of the herd were still eating, others were lying down, chewing their cud contentedly. Dropping a few soft-spoken words to them, she opened the door and walked out into the dazzling, glittering world of snow and sunshine and sub-zero temperatures, her heart aflame with God's divine love and glory.

Passing near the bird feeder, Anna noticed the area was a bee-hive of activity -- the sparrows were back. The blue jays, apparently having picked out the choicest sunflower seeds and eaten to their fill, had left the yard. The sparrows, cashing in on this valuable time, were having a literal 'picnic.' It was a noisy one, to be sure, but Anna didn't begrudge the tiny, feathered creatures a single morsel or seed, especially not when she remembered how the Savior had said that not one of them fell to the ground without His knowledge of its fall.

Taking her boots off on the back porch, she hurried inside, expecting to see Betsy. But the girl hadn't returned home yet. A smile turned the corners of Anna's lips; her Betsy was already a missionary. For years she had been receiving practical

training-visiting the sick in the small hospital and the single nursing home in the nearby town as well as helping the neighbors in the valley. Regardless of the circumstances or the situations, Betsy had been able to apply herself by helping those in need and alleviating, to a great degree, the suffering and grief of those to whom she ministered.

Hurrying to the cupboard, Anna got baking powder, salt and cocoa off the shelf. She would bake Betsy's favorite cake, she decided happily, sifting flour out for measuring.

It was early evening when Betsy finally came home, tired but happy. "I'm sorry to be so late, Mother," she said sweetly, "but Mrs. Jackson had one of her sick headaches; so I stayed and cleaned the house and took care of the children while she laid down. I did some baking for them, too; I thought it would give her a bit more rest tomorrow. But say, what do I smell!"

"Something special for you, dear."

"O, Mother, you're a dear! My very favorite dessert!" Betsy exclaimed, lifting the lid off the cake plate and viewing the beautifully hosted cake beneath.

"It's a sort of celebration cake, dear," Anna said softly.

"Celebration cake? What do you mean?" Betsy asked, a puzzled look on her face.

"Elisha, after Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him, drew a yoke of the oxen with which he was working and made a sort of feast for the people before he arose and went after Elijah and ministered to him." Anna said meaningfully.

Rushing to Anna and throwing her arms around her, Betsy exclaimed tearfully, "O Mother! Mother! Then you . . . you won't . . . mind? You had me worried for a while this morning. I must go, dearest Mother."

"Yes. Yes, of course, Betsy; and you will go. It was a time of severe testing for me, and while I'll miss your dear presence dreadfully I know that God's presence will more than fill the vacancy. This morning, honey, after you left, I broke my box of 'ointment of spikenard very precious' and poured it over my wonderful Lord. O Betsy, you must go. Yes, you will go with my blessing and with all the mother-love my heart possesses."

"Mother! Thank God! Thank God!" Betsy said through her tears.

Weeping softly, mother and daughter clung to each other.

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### Chapter 3

The days passed sweetly and swiftly by for Anna and Betsy, each day a treasured memory for both, and when Anna finally saw her daughter off at the airport, en route to Bible School a few months later, she was possessed with an overwhelming feeling of delight and pure joy. It was like she was giving a priceless gift of purest love to her Savior and Lord. The pain of parting was eased by the knowledge that Betsy would finally be fulfilling God's call for her Life. This, above all else, was the important thing, Anna soliloquized as she drove home from the airport to the empty house.

Pulling into the driveway, she spied Brad on the porch. "Anything wrong?" she asked when she had put the car in the garage and shut the door.

"Nothing, Mrs. Medford. I just thought you may be lonely without Betsy; so I stopped work early and came to greet you," Brad explained simply.

Warm tears washed out of Anna's eyes and danced down her cheeks. "O, thank you, Brad; thank you," she said. "It was so kind and thoughtful of you to come. You'll never know what your presence has meant. Come inside and have a glass of milk and a piece of Betsy's favorite cake -- I baked it yesterday so she'd have some before she left."

Thanking Anna, Brad followed her inside.

"I'll sure miss Betsy," the youth affirmed with a catch in his voice. "She was always telling me how thankful she was that God saved and sanctified me and then sent me here to help you out, Mrs. Medford."

"You do more than help me Brad," Anna said softly. "You are the man of the farm. God has given you wonderful ability and insight into farming. It's a talent, a gift of God to you."

"Really, Mrs. Medford? And here I was, wishing God would call me to a mission field, like Betsy, or give me the ability to write or sing."

"A talent can be many things, Brad. For you it is being a super agriculturist. Then, too, God has endowed you with a brilliant brain for figuring -- doing mathematics. O how excellent are the ways of God! Can't you see how wisely and carefully God has chosen your talents? You need to be a super mathematician these days to keep all the records that farming requires, and our wonderful Lord in His all-wise scheme of things has blessed you with two great gins: farming and figures."

Brad's eyes lit up perceptibly. "I guess I never thought of farming as being a talent, Mrs. Medford," he said, smiling. "But I believe you're right. I know I feel perfectly at ease turning a furrow and harvesting the grain or milking cows. I guess God doesn't need

everybody to go to Africa or Brazil or Hong Kong to work for Him. Somebody must stay home 'by the stuff,' as the Bible says about some of David's men."

"That's right, Brad. The Lord needs shining lights at home, each one shining in his particular neighborhood or area."

"I'll sure miss Betsy," Brad said again, taking a bite of the cake which Anna had set before him. "But I plan to have a part in her work; only you mustn't tell her -- not ever. You see, Dad and Morn and I talked it over, and Dad said I may send a certain amount every month to help pay Betsy's schooling."

"Brad!" Anna exclaimed tearfully. "You need your money, Son. Betsy's going to try to find work, and then I'll be helping as much as I possibly can."

"Don't deprive us, please, Mrs. Medford!" the young man said emphatically. "Betsy has helped all of us so much that the neighbors in the valley feel they'd like to help her now. This is the only time and the only way we know how to repay her for all the kindnesses she's showered on us."

Anna Medford was speechless.

"We've started a fund," Brad continued, "a 'Betsy-for-missions' fund, the neighbors and Mom and Dad and I. Since Dad got saved, he can't do enough for the Lord; and he said, that while we may never be able to go to Latin America, we can have a part in the work by supporting Betsy. She'll be our mouth, Dad says, and our hands and feet of mercy, but we'll be the ones to help feed and care for her. So, in an indirect way, I guess we could be called missionaries too; or at least missionary helpers. Now you won't tell her, Mrs. Medford, will you?"

"Not if I'm not supposed to tell, Brad. I'm good at keeping secrets."

"I knew you were, else I wouldn't have told you. I was so exceed about it that I could hardly contain myself when Betsy told me that she'd be studying and working. Said she'd look for work as soon as she got settled good in school. I told her that I didn't believe God wanted her to kill herself before she got to the mission field. She laughed and quoted II Thess. 3:10, saying, 'that if any would not work, nether should he eat.' What she doesn't know is that I collected enough money to pay for her tuition for the entire first semester of school. It should be there now. The business manager is to tell her it's a gift from friends. That's all; nothing more, nothing less."

For a long while Anna stared at the neighbor boy, amazed at the adult thinking of the youth. A new side of Brad had emerged. She was seeing a part of him that she had never seen before, the part which had both spiritual depth and sound wisdom to it. Logic, too. Or had he suddenly become full-grown, now that Betsy, the Florence Nightingale of

the neighborhood and the valley, was gone? she wondered, sensing the void which her daughter's departure had created in the home.

"Well, I'll be running along," Brad said, quickly getting to his feet. "I have more plowing to do. If these nice fall days hold, I should have everything finished by the end of the week, the Lord willing. Thanks for the cake and the milk, Mrs. Medford. I'll see you again. In the meantime, if you get too lonesome, call Mom and have her send Jean Ann over. You'll not be lonely with her around. I guarantee that. Whew! She chatters like a magpie"

Anna laughed. "Thanks, Brad. I'll remember that," she promised. "And thanks for stopping by; you'll never know what a great fin your visit was. God bless you, my boy."

She watched until Brad had disappeared along the fence row of the 22-acre field. Then she went back inside the house, aware of the emptiness without Betsy.

On an impulse (or was it impulse, she wondered later on) she began singing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . . Praise Him all creatures here below . . . Praise Him above ye Heavenly host . . . Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

In that instant, when she had finished, she knew that she was victor over her loneliness. God had given her the victory. Rejoicing, she deeded quickly that she would busy herself being about her Father's business . . . praying for and with her neighbors like Betsy had done. She would do her best to continue Betsy's Good Samaritan deeds.

The days became shorter now, and from the meadow a filmy, flimsy blue-grey mist emerged; autumn had set in. The trees looked as if they were on fire; they were aflame with color, leaping to the hilltops, skipping to the meadow and pausing by the fence-row in glory and splendor they blazed. The van ley was a spectrum of color.

This was the time of year Betsy liked best of all, Anna mused one morning, standing in the doorway and gazing at the scarlet sumac in full color parading along the road. Fall and spring were the girl's two favorite seasons.

The low hum of the tractor drew her attention to the 40-acre field that skirted the woods. Brad was busy picking corn, she noticed, watched as the bright red picker went up and down the long rows of dusty-brown corn and greedily gobbled up the stalks, depositing the kernels of golden grin safely away in a self-contained unit.

Whatever would she have done without Brad? she wondered. Then she recalled the sparrows that were mentioned in the Bible and she was forcefully and wondrously reminded of the fact that God always takes care of His own. Bowing her head, she had a season of thanksgiving and praise. O, she was blest! Beyond measure.

The days skipped by on velvet feet. The leaves fell to the ground and the trees stood starkly-naked, bare and bleak. Wild geese honked their way across autumn skies and the air became crisply-cold and frosty, forming ice along the edges of the pond and the stream. Snow fell, and in no time at all, the farm was locked up tight in winter's frigid grasp, its icy clutches.

Thanksgiving came and went, as did Christmas, without her beloved Betsy, but Anna, playing the Good Samaritan role with pure delight and joy, saw to it that those deprived or bereaved of a loved one or poverty-stricken were well-fed and much loved -- around her very own table, the widowed Mrs. Jackson and her family among the number.

The "heart" of winter locked Anna inside, the drifted roads and icy conditions making it almost impossible for her to get out. But she didn't mind; there was so much to do for Betsy, so many things to make and prepare for her for the time when she would leave and go to the field of her calling.

Before Anna was aware of it almost, the glistening, glittering meringue drifts had melted and vanished, and the crocuses, daffodils and tulips donned colorful bonnets and went parading across her lawn. Another spring had arrived.

Betsy came home for a few days, and the great mother-heart, overflowing with love and thankfulness to God over Betsy's dedication and consecration to the Master did everything within her ability and power to make the short stay one of time-filled memories and beauty. Together they called on and prayed with neighbors and friends, and together they baked, cooked, cleaned and washed dishes. Anna, except for those absolutely necessary things to do, pushed all else aside, devoting her time to the joy of being with her daughter again. Betsy, effusive in her description of her schooling and her nurse's training, related instance after instance where God had been able to use her as His witness.

"I feel no one should even think of going out as a missionary, Mother dear," she told Anna one day, "until they have been a missionary at home -- in Jerusalem, as the Bible says. After all, witnessing is our duty as Christians regardless of our geographical location. In God's sight no soul is of lesser or greater value in one county -- one nation -- than another; each is equally important to Him. Our responsibility is to witness, to reach those for whom Jesus died. Oh, I can scarcely wait until I get to the field! The call literally consumes me!" Betsy confided emphatically. "In fact, it burns within me like a flame."

"What about the young men at school, honey?" Anna asked cautiously.

"Not interested," came the instant reply. "At least not until I know God's choke for my life. So far, I've had no desire for dating. There are some wonderful young men at school, though, Mother -- Spirit-filled men who are called of God into the ministry --

pastors and evangelists -- and if they really want God's will for their lives they'll find the right companion without wasting my time or theirs."

Anna smiled; she had heard of the numerous young men who had tried without success to date her daughter. "They feel she's playing hard-to-get," Mrs. Aaron (one of the women who went to the same church as Anna and Betsy did) told her when her own daughter Charlotte had returned back to Bible School after the Christmas vacation. "They just don't know that girl's total dedication to the full will of God!" Mrs. Aaron had added softly.

Thus year number one passed; then two and three; then four; and finally a radiant Betsy received her Bible School diploma and her RN degree.

At last the long-awaited day had arrived; the well-spent training-preparing period was over. In the strength and the name of the Lord, Betsy boarded the plane for her field.

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#### Chapter 4

Anna Medford and the crowd of loving neighbors and friends watched Betsy's plane until it was swallowed up by the clouds and had disappeared from sight. Then in a gradual trickle they walked thoughtfully to their cars and headed homeward, honored and happy that a daughter of their humble but prosperous valley should have gone to foreign soft as their emissary for God's cause.

Hadn't most of them helped put the young woman through school and nurse's training, they mused? And didn't they have a fight to feel proud of her grades and her accomplishments?

But an even greater responsibility was theirs, now that Betsy was actually en route to the field. Yes, they would rally 'round this Florence Nightingale of theirs and help to support her. Hadn't she saved old Mr. Berringer's life by obeying the Spirit's proddings late one dark night when she had gotten out of bed and rushed fearlessly across the plowed fields to the aged man's door. Not receiving an answer to her knocking and her calling, she had run toward the barn, calling his name as she ran. Hadn't she managed (somehow) to get his lifeless form into the house from where she had stumbled over him along the path and called the ambulance -- not a minute too early! And hadn't she sat with the Cowleys night after night, helping to nurse the critically ill Sammy back to life and health! And hadn't she . . .

On and on the list went, and now, in return for her sacrificial love poured out upon them, they would repay in their way.

The valley was revolutionized, and all because of one family -- the Medfords.

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Watching the plane skim across the marshmallow-looking clouds, Betsy's mind raced back to what she had read about Latin America and, sighing with contentment, she relaxed against the cushioned seat. Practically everything about the county to which she was going was stupendous, she knew. It had the world's largest rivers, she had read, and the world's densest forests; the world's most fertile soil and the world's richest natural resources. Except for the Himalayas in Tibet, it had the world's highest mountains, too, plus the world's highest navigable lake and highest railroad.

But, superlatives aside, the continent called Latin America could not be properly described by things of comparison, Betsy soliloquized, recalling the book's elaboration of the largeness and the versatility of the area.

A smile turned the corners of her mouth as she recalled the first time she had found Latin America on the globe in her room. It was not a single geographic unit, as she had supposed, but rather two -- Central and South America, and part of a third, Oceanic America. The dialects spoken were of equal surprise to her, too; there was Portuguese, Creole, French and Indian, with a minority of the people speaking Spanish.

Betsy's mind raced from one thing to another regarding the country to which she was going. In its climate, as well as in its other features, South America alone presented a series of contrasts. Along the equator in the Amazon Valley it was so hot and humid as to render life visually intolerable for the white man, she had read, while in the Andes there were glaciers along the equator. Here the tremendous heights made it practically unliveable for the white man. Between both these extremes, however, could be found all the vacations of climate, depending largely upon the elevation. Quito, capital of Ecuador, was said to have a most delightful climate in spite of the fact that it was right on the equator.

In the equatorial region, the climate was said to be "vertical," remaining always the same at any given altitude. In that area, Betsy reasoned whimsically, one should have no right for complaining about the season. If one was not satisfied, he could change things by simply moving up or down the mountain, thus regulating the temperature one desired by as narrow a margin of one degree through the simple process of moving 335 feet up or down the mountain, since each 335 feet of elevation lowered the average temperature one degree, or vice versa.

Thinking and smiling to herself, Betsy's eyelids dosed and she fell asleep, her heart already in Latin America.

Many days later, with many language study hours behind her, Betsy, armed with gospel tracts and her Bible, walked down the hot streets, passing out tracts and

witnessing to all who would listen to her in her still imperfect dialect, tell of a Savior who lived so deeply and so much as to lay down His life for them.

A young man with copper-colored skin stepped into the open doorway of his little shop and listened.

"Please, Sir," Betsy pleaded, noting the curious, intent look on his darkly-handsome face, "take this and read it."

The man remained motionless for a while; then he laughed. It was a loud laugh, a mocking laugh. "Learn the dialect!" he shouted in perfect English, turning and disappearing inside the shop, the tract which Betsy had handed him lying in the open doorway.

Undaunted, Betsy continued on, and not until the last tract was given away and she was safely back in the small room which she called 'home' at the far corner of the mission compound, did she realize the reason for the man's laughter. Then, setting her nurse's cap on the top of her head prior to going on duty in the mission hospital, she doubled up with convulsive laughter . . . she had used the wrong word for what she was trying to say. Again! Oh, would she ever learn!

Thus began the girl's lessons in the dialect, and on more than one occasion her marvelous sense of humor -- of being able to laugh with those who laughed at her -- opened doors and hearts that may well have been closed forever. Her genuine love and concern for her people, as Betsy called the natives, was ever understood, however, and before long God had given to her her first convert.

In a letter to her mother that same night, Betsy wrote, "Because you gave me over wholly to the Lord, dearest Mother, and urged me to fulfill my call, this soul whom God has helped me to win will be as much a part of your reward as she is mine . . ."

Late one night as she came out of the hospital to go to her room, Betsy became aware of a presence. Looking around her carefully she saw no one, yet she was fully conscious of the fact that she was being followed.

The palm fronds ruled ever so softly and slightly in the tropical breeze, and the night birds made their usual amount of melody and muss. The dogs, too, were at their customary nightly pastime -- barking and howling miserably and noisily. Everything seemed normal and a part of the county to which God had called her. Everything, that is, except the uncanny feeling that she was being followed.

Quite fearless by nature, Betsy walked on, praying softly aloud as she went. Whoever it was, she decided, must learn that Christians had a protector in the Living God; except for His permissive will, no evil would befall the child of God.

From out of the shadows in front of her, barring her passage down the path, a man stepped.

"What do you want?" Betsy asked in the native dialect.

The man studied her briefly. Then he said quickly, "You must leave here at once! Go home to America from where you have come."

"That I cannot do!" Betsy exclaimed without a moment's hesitation. "God called me here, and I must stay here until He tells me He is through with me."

"Leave at once," the native urged softly. "You have enemy here; is trouble if you remain."

In the shadows, Betsy studied the man, imprinting upon her mind his features and looking for anything unusual about his physical being with which to later identify him, if necessary.

"You hear me, missionary?"

"I hear," Betsy said quietly but fearlessly. "Now you go and tell your friend -- my enemy, as you called whomever it is -- that I am called by God and that I take orders from no one else. Goodnight, Sir, may God have mercy upon your soul."

Brushing query past him, Betsy continued toward her room, leaving the man completely baffled and unnerved. Coming to meet her with a light in his hand was David Forum, one of the mission doctors.

"Betsy! Betsy!" he called aloud upon seeing her.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're all right! I was awakened out of my sleep with an overpowering fear for you. What's the meaning of it?" David asked, taking her arm and linking it into his strong one, a thing he had never done before.

"Thanks for coming, David. I just had a guest; rather, I should say a victor confronted me in the path, telling me to leave here at once. Imagine it, David, telling someone called by God to leave!"

Looking full into Betsy's face, David said quickly, "I guess now's as good a time as any to tell you how much you mean to me, Betsy, and to ask that you allow me to protect you and to love and care for you for so long as each of us lives."

Betsy was silent for a long while. Then she said quickly, "I have a mighty Protector in God, David. And I have no intentions of leaving here. God called me to Latin

America and, like I informed my mysterious caller/visitor, until my marching orders come from Heaven, here I will remain."

"But that doesn't answer my question," David said softly, tenderly. "From the day you arrived here, I knew you were God's gift to me."

Sighing, Betsy said, "That makes two of us, for I knew you were God's special gift to me, David. I knew it as clearly as I knew I was called to come here. Yes, I'll marry you . . ."

The wedding was a simple thing, totally devoid of pomp and elegance, but it was a sacredly beautiful wedding nonetheless -- a ceremony and a union upon which God's smile and approval fingered. Anna Medford, in a dress of palest blue, sat placidly and joyfully beneath one of the myriad palm trees and, with misty eyes, viewed the ceremony with motherly pride and love.

A few days later, while she and Betsy were distributing tracts and gospels of John in the busy town, Anna stopped suddenly in front of a little shop. Standing like one petrified, the color drained from her cheeks. Then, like one coming out of a trance, she exclaimed happily, "Glenn! Glenn! O Glenn, I have found you at last. Thank God! Thank God!"

In an instant, she flung her arms around the tall, dark-haired, bronzed man.

Betsy, wondering if her mother had lost her sense of reasoning, stood by, watching, as a crowd assembled.

It was apparent that the man was embarrassed and, had it not been for the tears that Betsy saw trickle down his cheeks, she would have continued to wonder about her mother's sense of reasoning.

"Glenn! Oh, Glenn, thank God, you're safe!" Anna again cried happily. And now Betsy saw the arms enfold her mother and then she knew. Yes, she knew -- many things.

Beckoning for Betsy to come to him, Glenn said, "I knew you the first time you came to the marketplace; I knew you were my sister. But I didn't want you here; I was afraid of you -- afraid of what I knew I'd have to do if I got back to God . . ."

"But why, Glenn?" Betsy asked quickly. "The Highway of Holiness is a glorious highway upon which to travel."

"A backslider doesn't think as you do, Betsy; the backslider is miserable. That's why I sent my friend out that night to tell you to leave. I came here to be away from everything and everyone religious. Then you came into my little world with your gospel

tract and, well, everything I planned and for which I had been living these past number of years was shattered."

"Then you read the tract?" Betsy asked quickly, hopefully.

"Read it! Of course I did! It has haunted me ever since, and I believe I'm going to die unless I get back to God."

Drawing the pair inside, Glenn said softly, urgently, "Come, Mother, Betsy, I have a little room at the back where we can pray . . ."

As the door closed behind and Anna followed the prodigal, the Scripture came forcibly to mind, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1). She had poured out her "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious" and her "bread upon the waters," in not withholding Betsy from God for His use and now -- yes now -- she was finding it after many days.

Brokenly and thankfully, she and Betsy began to pray.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END