Frost hung heavy and thick on the grapevines whose leaves, now a dull brown-gray, drooped and sagged beneath the added burden upon their already lastly-dying bodies. Rondell Derk, buttoning his heavy jacket up tight, glanced through the kitchen window to the yard and garden beyond, happy and thankful that he had had the good sense to gather the final fruits and vegetables from the garden into the fruit cellar the day before. This time of year one never could tell what a day or a night would bring forth, he reasoned. The weatherman was forecasting snow before the week was out and he had no doubt that the prediction would become reality.

He hurried outside and looked skyward, a thing he’d done for so long as he could remember. His illustrious father, a sort of weather prophet of no ill-repute, had taken his small, infant hand when he had just learned to walk (so his mother had told him) and together they had paid daily morning and nightly visits to a small knoll beyond the farmhouse kitchen door. There it was that his father had taught him the difference between cumulus, alto-cumulus, and cirro-cumulus clouds; between cirrus and cirro-stratus and nimbus cloud formations. There, too, his father had pointed out and instructed his young son what each formation of clouds was and what could be expected when one or any particular group of them appeared in the sky. He had been a willing and an eager scholar and he had learned his lessons well.
Looking skyward now, Rondell saw a bank of heavy red in the east; foul weather was indeed on its way, he soliloquized, as he watched a flock of Canada geese flying in from the north. Calling to each other with their rippling wild voices, they set their great wings, extended their webbed feet, then settled in an emerald pond below the house between two hedge-rows White with fall's heaviest frost and gold with the remnants of autumn's glory.

He studied the clouds a while longer, watched the geese swim in the water, then opened the door to the fruit cellar and stepped inside.

A smorgasbord of fruits and vegetables standing in baskets in neat row upon row met his eyes, and a fragrance so sweet, so appetizingly-tempting, greeted his nostrils as to set his taste buds to drooling. Potatoes in their bins along the cellar's cool wall were large and firm and smelled marvelously earthy; carrots, freshly dug and buried in cool, dry sand in a special bin of their own, peeked golden heads above-soil here and there, inviting the man to touch, take and taste, while baskets of large, deep-purple grapes -- remains of which Elizabeth had made neither juice nor jelly or grape butter from -- beckoned him to where they waited patiently in their paper-lined baskets to lift a bunch and enjoy their sweet deliciousness.

"We have so very much, dear Lord!" Rondell said upward, thankfully. "Thou hast sent an abundant harvest; thank Thee, all-kind Father. Thank Thee!"

Elizabeth came into the carefully-built fruit cellar then.

"Ron," she said softly, "while in prayer this morning, I felt so impressed that we should share our bounty with the Hollisters and the Grennens..."

With eyes alight, experiencing the blessing of married love..., a oneness in spirit and almost totally in mind also... Rondell took his wife by her slender shoulders and smiled down into her sweet, upturned face. "God whispered the same message to me, my dear. Besides these things," he said, lifting basket after basket up and setting them off to themselves, "I feel constrained to give two hundred dollars to the Grennens. I know we're not wealthy, Elizabeth my dear, but we are so blest in so many other ways until I just feel our Heavenly Father would be greatly pleased to share what we have with the poor."

Elizabeth's eyes were shining. "Oh, Rondell, yes. Yes!" she cried happily. "We have so much . . . so very much for which to be thankful: the mortgage is paid in full; my lab tests all came back good, with not a trace of cancer even, Doctor Stulte said; we have a good warm, durable house; we know the Lord, and so do our children; we have each other, and from our hilltop house, we have one of the most picturesque views in all of the valley. Also, the Scripture says, 'Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth.' " 
The two worked side by side, taking only the choicest and best from the baskets and bins and arranging them carefully and attractively in paper-lined boxes.

As she worked, Elizabeth’s mind wandered to Ellen Ramseur and the strangely-beautiful workings of God. She was half-afraid at the time to become personally involved with Ellen, even though she felt God had brought them together. Ellen was the elderly aunt of one of her close friends, and it was while visiting her friend, Irene, that Ellen came by.

"An unusual visit," Irene had told her later, informing her that, "Aunt Ellen has few if any friends. She will not," Irene had said, "positively will not allow any one to get close to her. Don't ask me why; I don't know. Her visit still has me baffled. She never comes.'

That's when Elizabeth had her answer as to "why" the woman came: "I want you to get her address," the Lord seemed to whisper in her ear. "Get her address and go to see her."

For a short period of time the battle was on -- should she ask for the address in the presence of the niece or wait till the aunt was ready to leave then follow her outside and ask? Would Ellen give her the address when she asked for it? Was she, Elizabeth Derk, prepared and willing to commit herself to the woman? What kinds of demands would the relationship make?

On and on the questions flew, back and forth in her mind, and not until she said a quiet, whole-hearted "yes" to God's voice did she feel relief and find rest from the doubts that assailed her.

She had begun to visit the woman and, to her surprise, she discovered that she was received graciously and cordially. Ellen was in poor health, she was lonely, and she had few earthly possessions. But she was proud -- extremely so. Through Elizabeth's kindnesses, sincere love and understanding compassion, the icicles around the elderly woman's heart began slowly to melt and the real Ellen came to the fore.

Elizabeth, to her own glad surprise, remembered finding herself looking forward to the visits, the relationship between her and the aged woman becoming one of the most enriching she had ever known or experienced. The joy of seeing the faded blue eyes light up over some gift she had brought for Ellen was reward enough. And when the dear woman passed on, a born again Christian because of her kindness, prayers, efforts and concern, Elizabeth realized the many visits had been occasions for personal blessings, for thanksgivings of praise.

Thanksgiving itself, she mused silently now as she worked, was a holiday pause -- a twenty-four-hour thank offering to God, not meant to be lightly skimmed along the surface of the one special Thursday then move, largely unaffected, into the Fridays and
Saturdays that follow, seeing only the roast turkey and candied yams and pumpkin pies, obvious gifts of God's unselfishness to humanity. No, Thanksgiving should be a three-hundred-sixty-five-days a year thing; and to the true child of God, it was just that, she mused happily, taking some of her beautifully prepared canned fruits and vegetables off their shelves and making a box of these to go along with the fresh fruits and vegetables which Rondell was sorting out so painstakingly.

A song filled her heart. Soon it found its way to her lips and she began to sing. Rondell joined her in a duet, a duet of harmony and of two hearts beating in perfect tune and time. They had so very much to be thankful for, the man thought. Yes, so very, very much.

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THE END