Martha wiped her wet, rough, work-worn hands on the towel by the kitchen door and glanced through the window to the barn and the field beyond. Snow covered the acres of land with a blanket of shimmering, glimmering white. Its marshmallow drifts pried high frosting around the fence posts, the barn and the corn crib. The wind, which had risen considerably the past hour, rattled the kitchen windows and shook bushes and trees of their covering of snow like she shook crumbs from the tablecloth.

She saw Enos make his way from the barn to the hog shed, his face buried deep in the heavy, up-turned coat collar and his ear-flapper band fastened securely beneath his chin.

Enos was such a good husband, she mused in silent thankfulness to God for this big-hearted, kind and considerate man. And he was an equally wonderful father, too--never too busy with the endless field and barn-work to make time to sit down and read to or toll stories to his three young children. Oh, she was blest indeed, to have found favor with the Lord and to have gotten such a godly companion.

A flash of scarlet passing the window drew her attention from the barn to the bird feeder on the lawn. Enos had built the lovely feeding station to match their barn and presented it to her on her birthday a year ago. He had learned from his oldest son (a lad of ten then) that she would like a bird feeder. And while she knew nothing of the
conversation which had passed between father and son nor of the many little secret carpentry and building sessions held by the two, she was overwhelmed and awed with the gift which, by all family economic standards, they could not afford. Enos and Michael, in response to her queries, had set her mind instantly at ease, Enos stating that he had "built the feeder out of scrap lumber and odds and ends" which he had been "saving for years for just such an opportunity."

Martha turned away from the window with a smile. Thrifty, thrifty Enos, she thought idly, recalling the many times when she had asked him what he intended doing with his diversified collection of "things" . . . wood, nails, nuts, bolts, scrap lumber and such things. All were kept, neatly stored, stacked, or on shelves (as the case may be) in one area of the shed out near the barn. Carpenters and cabinet makers, knowing her husband's utter distaste and dislike of waste, carted boxes of materials, which would otherwise have been burned or thrown away, to their house, explaining simply, "You'll find some use for this eventually." And he always did.

Martha took her hand and ran it over the beautiful, smooth surface of the cabinets in her kitchen. "Pecan wood," Mr. Jernigan, the cabinet-maker friend had told Enos. "Too good to scrap, but no room at my house These contractors sure are wasteful," the neighbor had said. "Told me to burn the stuff if I didn't know what to do with it."

Martha cringed at the thought of burning such beautiful wood. She was thankful . . . oh, so thankful . . . to their friend for salvaging the lovely and durably-sturdy pieces of so-called "scrap." Her kitchen cupboards and cabinets were mute but remarkable testimony to the fact that something beautiful and useful had been constructed from scraps, all of which cost her dear Enos, nothing more than the hardware for installing the decorative handles for opening and closing the doors.

She mixed bread dough and after kneading it till it formed airy-light bubbles and felt satin-smooth beneath the heel of her hands, she set it in a warm place for rising. Then she hurried to the deep freeze and extracted a lean roast from the well-filled chest for the evening meal, being careful to choose vegetables which would compliment the meat, be nutritious and make for a well-balanced diet. One of the great joys of her life came from being a good wife and mother and a contented homemaker.

By mid-morning, Martha had the house in neat order. On the back burner of the stove, potatoes simmered gently, readying themselves for a pot of her husband's favorite soup for the noon meal . . . potato soup with rivels.

The back door opened and Enos came inside, carrying a pail of fresh milk and a smaller one of thick, yellow sweet cream. "Thought it would save you a trip to the milk house," he said, placing the buckets on the counter top and getting out of his heavy clothes.
Martha rushed eagerly to her husband. How very good and kind he was! Each and every morning he saw to it that she had milk and cream enough to last her through the day. "You are so wonderful!" she exclaimed softly and tenderly.

Taking her small hands in his large ones, Enos said casual-like, "I lost Snowball during the night."

Martha gasped. Snowball was a super milk producer as well as a family pet. From shortly after her birth, she was a pet of the children. And now...

"Pneumonia, I'm sure," Enos commented sadly, pulling off his heavy boots. "The vet thought she'd pull through, but she lost the battle. Probably too weak from giving birth to that new calf."

Martha brushed tears from her eyes. Snowball's newest and latest arrival was a direct copy of her beautiful and gentle-mannered mother, who was golden-tan all over and not white at all like her name would suggest. The children had named her when she was bought and the name had stuck.

"How's Fawn doing?" Martha asked quickly, pity and compassion welling up inside her for the little motherless calf.

"She'll make it fine," Enos replied, hanging his coat inside the closet off the kitchen pantry. "She's drinking out of a bucket already. Had a bit of a problem the first day or two, after Snowball was too sick to get up. But everything's fine now."

Enos was silent for a while; then he said, "You know, Martha, I believe God's got something good for us. Really good! Yes, something good's going to come out of this."

"How's that?" the golden-haired woman asked, thinking of their nearest neighbor who would have been cursing and ranting and raving over "the injustices of God." No matter what happened at the Bilbry's farm, so far as Mort Bilbry was concerned, God was the root of all his trouble.

"Mort was over when Snowball died," the husband said with a thoughtful look in his hazel eyes. "He looked shocked when I told him that everything we had belonged to God--that we were just sort of taking care of His things until He called us Home."

Martha chuckled inwardly. Shocked? For Mort Bilbry, that was an understatement.

"I told Mort that Proverbs 3:9 and 10 said for us to 'Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.' " 
Martha's heart swelled in praise to God: Mort listened. He actually must have listened while Enos quoted the Scripture! In itself, this was a miracle.

"I told Mort how we had honored God by giving Snowball to Him... she was the firstfruit of our dairy herd, as you recall..."

Martha nodded. How could she ever forget! Snowball had come from one of the neighbor's dairy cows, taking up permanent residence at their farm shortly after her birth. When she began producing, Enos put every cent he made from her deliciously-rich milk into the church, to be used wherever it was needed most. Within a few short months, God had enabled them to buy another good dairy cow; then, later on, still another. Thus God had blessed, until now they had a herd second to none in the valley.

"Mort said he couldn't quite make my kind of figuring out, but he did add that it looked as if something or Someone was sort of favoring me.

"I told him that God doesn't have any favorites; any and all who will keep His Commandments and walk and live according to His Holy Word may experience what you and I are experiencing... the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

"I'm sure he can't understand our Bible-based way of 'giving to God' first, Enos. Only last summer, while I was washing vegetables and putting the choicest and largest of everything into my 'tithe' baskets, he wanted to know what I was doing and why. I told him that those finest and best were my tithe vegetables, that you and I had made it a practice all our lives to pay tithes on everything . . . not just our money.

"Well, you should have heard him! It was sad, to say the least. He ranted and raved and whipped his index finger back and forth at me, saying that he earned his money; God had never done anything for him, nor given him anything, either.

"I asked him gently whom it was that gave him the breath which kept him alive and who sent the rain for the watering of the earth. He merely grumbled and walked away, muttering that we were a bunch of religious fanatics."

Enos shook his head; a half-smile turned the corners of his mouth. "Today he was different, my dear. Yes, he was different; he listened and didn't get angry."

"Miracle of miracles!" Martha exclaimed, shaping the bread into loaves and sliding each into a well-greased bread pan.

Enos chuckled. "Remember the milk cow and the heifer I gave him last Tuesday?" he asked. "That was a sort of 'firstfruits' unto God for Mort's salvation. God strongly impressed me to do this . . ."
Tears surfaced in Martha's eyes. She was now beginning to understand. Enos' kind of first-fruits in this case were a sort of heaping "coals of fire" . . . in love and compassion..., upon a hardened sinner. And it was working. Yes, already it was working! And something inside her heart told her that before too long the work would be complete.

"Knowing Mort," Enos was saying, seeming to have followed Martha's train of thought, "he'll be as liberal and as generous as we are after he is saved."

Martha nodded and smiled. What a wonderful husband God had given her. And how very wise, too!

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THE END