CHAPTER 1

David Daniel Statler stood at the summit of the mountain and looked downward, noting his Uncle's fashionable and exclusive lodge, now a mere miniature from where he stood.

There were times, like this morning, when he felt he was living more in some fantasy land or dream world than reality, but the skis on his feet and the mountains' glorious peaks attested to the fact that what he was experiencing was indeed reality and no mere figment of his imagination. The mountain ranges stretched unendingly in every direction and the silver peaks were etched sharply against the blue-black sky.

How he came to be at Uncle Giles' always-busy lodge was still an utter amazement to the twenty-five year old. Until a few months ago, the uncle was little more than a relative whose name he heard mentioned only on rare occasions, and then in nothing other than a sort of derisive way. Quite naturally, he had grown up with the feeling that his father preferred not to talk about his brother, two years his senior.

David, an only living child and away at college when the news of his mother's sudden passing came to him, hurried home to be with his father. And now, two years later, his father had called him to his side with the words, "You must go to your uncle, Son. I have a message for him. My time on earth is almost over..."
David remembered having been in a state of shock and begging his father not to talk thus. But he had continued just the same: "I've tried to keep it from you," his father said; coughing intermittently, "but the time has come for me to be frank with you. Doctor Weegle says I have only a few days to live. My heart, David. It's curtain call for me. Now listen closely; you must carry out my last request. You can do it, Son, because you love the same Lord whom your dear mother knew and loved and whom, thank God, I now can say that I too love."

"Oh, Dad, I'm so thankful! We prayed so long, Mother and I."

"I know you did; I know it! And for this I am grateful. Now that a holy and merciful God has saved me and forgiven me, I must forgive also. And I do and I have. My brother, David; he wronged me years ago. I've held it against him, I'm sorry to say. But I can't enter the Celestial City with this grudge hanging between us like a wall. So you, my boy, must go, to Giles, my brother, and tell him I freely forgive him of everything. This letter will explain all and Giles will know what it means and what it's all about. As soon as possible after my decease you must go. It's a long way, but money will be no problem; I've always made a good living for your mother and you. I think you will be quite enamored with your uncle; he's unique..."

As David looked down, the glistening-white slope now, his father's words came forcibly back to him. Unique indeed! He was almost a legendary sort of figure, David soliloquized, watching the helicopter {which had flown him and eight other skilled skiers to the summit) as it headed downward toward its landing pad not far from the sprawling lodge.

The leader gave precise and explicit orders now, warning of possible avalanches in virgin snow and explaining the basic techniques of avalanche rescue, including how to use a small transmitter to alert others of the location should one be buried in the snow. Then they were off.

David's heart thrilled on the first downward lap. This downhill safari over thousands and thousands of feet of virgin, fluffy, knee-deep snow was like nothing he had ever been on before. It was the kind of snow that skier's dreams were made of, he realized, following carefully the orders of the guide and watching the delicate rooster-tail trails he left behind.

Stopping at 1,200 feet down the slope, the guide said, "It's relatively safe from here, so we'll ski together and stop at the bottom."

Following closely behind him, David began counting his turns, losing track after the 120th one. Somewhere down the slope, his legs demanding rest and at the same instant a voice so gentle and kind and pleading as to be unmistakable said, "You were not sent here for sport, but for service; not for fun and frolic but for business . . . business for the
King and His kingdom. Be up and doing and about His business; the night cometh, when no man can work."

David shuddered with fear. How right the Master was! Then his father's words came back to him: "Beware of materialism when you get to my brother's lodge. It will blind your vision and rob you of your spiritual joy and fervor, David. So be on your guard. You have a never-dying soul to guard as well as the added responsibility of trying to win Giles to Jesus . . ."

His father's words, trailing meaningfully and poignantly, flashed across his mind now in unmistakable clarity and purpose and David, recalling his earlier obsession for skiing, vowed to God that this would be his last such run.

He was glad when the now-settled helicopter came into view and he could unfasten the expensive skis and take off the gear which had suddenly seemed to weigh exceedingly heavy on his body.

"Quite a trip!" Uncle Giles exclaimed when David entered the lodge. "What'd you think of it, David? Ever see or experience anything finer?"

David carefully put the heavy ski suit in the specially-built room then said, "Finest skiing I've ever had, and that view from the summit is positively breath-taking. Never saw anything more beautiful. But I've made my last run."

At the last comment, Uncle Giles laughed like his sides would burst. "A skiing pro like you saying that!" he exclaimed, slapping David on his broad shoulders. "You must be kidding! Skiing's absolutely the most thrilling sport in the world. It's the most thrilling thing anyone can do."

David, seeing his opportunity for speaking, said quietly, "I know something more wonderful than skiing, Uncle Giles: allowing the Lord Jesus to come into one's heart in saving grace and sanctifying power. It's the most wonderful thing in all the world. Your brother.., my father.., had this radical transformation take place in his heart before he passed away. That's why he asked your forgiveness and..."

David never got to finish the sentence. Turning on his heel, Giles walked briskly out of the room.

David walked to the far end of the room. Here the length of one entire wall was given over to a multiplicity of windows that stood from floor to ceiling and faced the majestic mountains and the slope down which he had skied only minutes before. Drapes, opened and closed by the gentle touch of a button on the wall, hung loosely and gracefully at each end of the sparkling-clean windows, their expensiveness and elegance showing in every thread and fiber.
He heard the loud hum of the helicopter and stood watching in fascination as the driver lifted the vehicle gently off the pad and headed slowly toward the jagged peaks of the mountain ranges where, going up the backside of the mountain, the vertical rock wall had seemed to drop a mile on his ride up.

David smiled, wondering if the ride up would be any different from that which he had taken such a short while ago. Just as he had convinced himself that the ride wasn't bad at all, they suddenly hit a down-draft which caused the helicopter to dip violently, making his heart and stomach feel like they had shifted positions and relocated higher in his chest than normal. Again he smiled, hoping none of the passengers had weak stomachs.

The helicopter disappeared from sight, lost behind one of the mountain ranges, and David's thoughts turned quickly back to his uncle and the strange but marvelous circumstances of his stay at Hidden Lodge. He had planned to leave after he had delivered his father's last request... both on the written page and by verbal confirmation of the sincerity of his father. But Uncle Giles would not hear to it. David must stay on with him; they needed each other's company and fellowship. Each was all the other had left, was it not so?

And he had consented, finally, taking the generous and sincere invitation as a signal from God that He was, after all, working in the heart and life of the apparently indifferent uncle.

If only he could penetrate the crust of heavy veneer, David thought longingly (for he was sure that's all it was.) But just how to do it was the most difficult task he had ever encountered. Not that Uncle Giles hadn't accepted his brother's lengthy letter of humble apology; he had. And David was positive that he had detected red, swollen eyes on the man when he saw him a short time later. Yet each time he made mention of God... like he had done a short while ago ... his uncle either walked out on him or passed it off with a smug smile and a dry comment.

He dug his hands deep into the pockets of his slacks, longing, praying and crying out to God for help when a soft, smooth feminine voice sliced through the middle of his deep yearning.

"Are you always serious-minded, David?" Sybil asked, coming up beside him and placing a hand upon his arm.

David stepped quickly aside, dropping the hand like it was hot wax.

"I'm really quite harmless," the fashionably-dressed bleached blonde remarked, a mischievous smile toying at the comers of her full, painted mouth.
"Excuse me, please," David said kindly, turning and hurrying up the wide, curving, circular stairway to the suite of rooms which he shared with his uncle on the 5th floor.

He was sure he heard a faint snicker as he fled, but he didn't turn to see if he was right. Sybil Porterfirri was too bold and brash for his gentlemanly nature --coming up upon him when he least expected her. Generally, though, he could tell when she was nearby by the strong-smelling, heavy perfume she wore. He was sure that whatever brand the fragrance was, it was both costly and French-made; Sybil didn't settle for anything cheap. The cheapest looking thing about her was her over-bleached hair, David decided.

"She's another soul for whom I died," an unseen but nearby voice said kindly to the young man.

Taking the steps two at a time, David fled to his room to pray, confident now of his mission at Hidden Lodge. Needy souls? They were everywhere. It was up to him to try to rescue them. Sybil included.

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CHAPTER 2

When David failed to come down to the lodge's dining room for the evening meal, Giles Statler took the elevator up to check on his nephew. Turning the door handle quietly... he never locked the doors to his posh suit of rooms... he stepped inside. Not finding David, he hurried to the young man's room and peeked through the partially-opened doorway. What he saw brought tears to his eyes and set his heart to racing rapidly and fiercely. David, apparently under a soul-burden too great for him to bear, was doubled over in a paroxysm of spiritual anguish and, what cut the uncle most, was the fact that beneath the muted, muffled groans and moans, he heard his name called. His, and Sybil's.

Retreating down the thickly-carpeted hallway, Giles let himself out the door, choosing to walk the five flights down to the dining room rather than using the more convenient and speedier elevator. He had to regain his composure and slow his racing heart down to normal, he knew.

Ever since David's sudden appearance, he had wondered how genuine and deep-seated was this nephew's so-called salvation and sanctification. Now he knew. The knowledge was both alarming and frightening. Giles Statler, man of wealth and fame who had prided himself smugly in the fact that he had forgotten his mother's godly teachings and was "doing very well without God and His help," was now brought face to face with reality and the stark fact that no one hides from God nor loses himself by moving to some far-off country, such as he had done. Always, and in some totally unlooked-for way, God was searching and seeking for the wandering sheep--the lost prodigal.
His face must have been drained of color when he reentered the dimly-lit and fashionable dining room for Jose, one of his faithful and much-revered waiters, hurried to him, remarking anxiously, "You ill, Senor? You look like you have seen a ghost."

Giles thanked the man kindly for his interest in him, remarking lightly that he could verify the fact that no ghost would dare hang around a lodge where there was as much gaiety and activity as was characteristic of Hidden Lodge.

The waiter, grinning from ear to ear and showing a set of beautiful white, even teeth, remarked with equal light-hearted banter, "The music and fun would frighten them away. What a wise man the master is!"

So saying, Jose slipped silently through the swinging doors into the spotlessly-clean and well-equipped kitchen, the circular tray poised in perfect balance on his hand above his head.

"Oh, there you are!" Sybil exclaimed, coming from a side door into the dining room. "I wanted to talk to you before I began my two-hour stint at the organ. It's about your nephew..."

Giles only faintly and vaguely heard the remark.

"I'd like to talk to you," Sybil declared again, a bit petulant and more emphatic.

"Then let us go into my office for a brief session, Sybil. But it must be brief; my guests always anticipate my little visits to each table and, as you can well see, the lodge is crowded."

Once inside the enormous office which looked out on to the distant jagged mountain peaks, Giles motioned the handsomely-paid organist-pianist and singer to a chair across from him. Twiddling his thumbs together, he asked kindly, "Your complaint, Sybil?"

Without preamble and coming straight to the point, Sybil raised herself in her chair and said, "For some reason or other, your nephew finds me totally objectionable and obnoxious. And believe me, I can't understand why!"

Like a wet, limp dish cloth when it is tossed into the sink, Sybil retreated into the cavern of the big, overstuffed chair, looking forlorn and miserable and wretched. "What is there about me that is so objectionable, Sir?" she cried petulantly. "Most men have found me interesting and fun to be with..."
Her voice trailed away with the silence in the room and Giles, stifling the trickle of laughter that rose involuntarily inside him, said softly-serious, "David is a Statler, Sybil--if that means anything to you, which I doubt it does. You wouldn't understand."

Sitting suddenly erect in the chair, Sybil asked quickly, "Is he married? I mean, well, if he is, I certainly will have to change my plans. I never have respected anyone who breaks up a home..., or tries to, even."

Giles smiled. Tapping a gold-handled letter opener lightly on his mahogany desk, he said, "No, David is not married. He's just . . . well, like I said, he's a Statler."

"And now, quoting Paul Harvey, of course," Sybil quipped, "for what it's worth..."

Giles rose to his feet. "Simply and plainly stated, Sybil, the Statler men like to do the pursuing, when and if there is any pursuing resting in the back of their minds."

The slender wisp of a woman looked like she had been slapped in the face. Getting to her feet, she rushed out of the room, calling across her shoulder, "Thanks, Mr. Statler; I guess I can take the hint!"

Giles smiled and stepped through the open door. Then he made his way down the oak-paneled hallway until he came to the dining room where the guests greeted him warmly and motioned him to their tables for a bit of conversation and fellowship.

Smiling congenially, the owner of the lodge made his usual evening rounds, first to one table then another, talking and smiling in his customary way; but underneath the well-covered facade of seeming happiness and contentment, Giles Statler's heart was heavy. Bodily, he was with the guests who stayed at the lodge, but in thought, he was upstairs with David, hearing again the anguished pleas and experiencing the rapid palpitation of his own heart.

"Mr. Statler, you haven't been listening," a male guest accused laughingly. "I've asked you the same question three times."

"Sorry, Harry; my mind was somewhere else. I apologize. Repeat your question; I promise to be a better listener."

Harry laughed good naturedly. "It wasn't that important really, and now with Sybil at the organ who needs conversation! Let's just say that I accept your apology and settle back to easy listening."

Giles slapped Harry gently on the shoulder, then made his way to another table just as Sybil began playing.
Poor Sybil, he thought, casting a hasty glance in her direction. He hoped she hadn't considered his remark too brash nor too candid. Yet, she needed the frank but gentle rebuke. Hadn't he noticed how bold she was getting? Vain, too!

At thought of Sybil, tears stung his eyes. She was a mere nobody until he discovered her one cold winter night, hovering, nearly frozen, in a doorway, her ill-fitting coat and shoes mere fragments of clothes. She was the by-product of divorced parents and he, upon inquiry, learned that the mother had deserted her. It was then that he went into action and got custody of the homeless and then-homely little waif and street urchin. He had brought her to the lodge, clothed, fed and sheltered her and sent her away to the finest schools possible. When she returned, full-grown and beautiful, Giles felt amply rewarded for his efforts and the expense incurred. Through it all, he had ever remained Mr. Statler to her. She had her own suite of rooms on the fourth floor, taking all her meals in the downstairs dining room. Her sole income came from the nightly performance at the piano and organ, as well as her singing, all of which Giles had his secretary-treasurer pay her handsomely for.

Listening to the rising and falling of the notes on the organ, Giles’ heart swelled with pride. Sybil was a natural at the keyboard . . . any keyboard. She could sway the guests emotions with her improvisations and her vocal inflections. She sang with feeling and pathos, all of which Giles suspicioned was born into her naturally by her better than fourteen years of bitter hardship and suffering and disappointment.

The thing that amazed the wealthy man was the fact that Sybil, for all her deprivations and hurt and pain, had never seemed to harbor bitterness toward the two people who had so cruelly deserted her and left her to exist and subsist as best she could in a world almost totally unfriendly and unkind to her. She seemed able to accept situations and circumstances, whether good or bad, with a quiet resignation that baffled him and left him totally devoid of any explanation as to her attitude.

Giles sighed, looking at the petite figure playing so skillfully and beautifully. Inwardly he felt proud of her. He should have rebuked her when she first began bleaching her hair, but he hadn't the heart to do so, recalling her many sad past experiences. It was hard for him to get used to the color change. The bleaching seemed to have given her a "cheap" and brassy-bold sort of appearance, all of which he loathed and abhorred from the very center of his soul. His lodge fared well; it was not made up of the gaudy and the "cheap" sort of things, thanks to his iron hand along these lines.

Sybil raised her head; her voice, sweet and lovely and mellow as a bird song, moved Giles to tears. Quickly, he left the room and moved along the hallway to the privacy of his office. He had given the poverty-stricken girl everything that money could afford and buy, but he had deprived her of the most necessary and important thing.

Guilt-laden, he sank into the office chair and buried his face in his hands.
CHAPTER 3

Long before the sun touched the distant jagged mountain peaks the following morning, David was up. After having his devotions and showering and shaving, he made his way downstairs to the dining room where breakfast was served from six until ten-thirty.

He was surprised at the many early risers who enjoyed breakfast before the day had fully begun, and even more surprised that a large number of those present were women. But they had come, he rationalized, to ski, and not to spend their time in bed. Soon the sun would be shining and the helicopter would be in full swing, transporting party after party to the mountain's summit for their trips down, through powdery, fluffy virgin snow.

Finding a table away from the hub-bub of activity and noise, David sat down. Seeing a lone figure seated at a table in the far corner of the enormous dining room, David gasped. Sybil, of all people! Whatever could have brought her down this early?'? he wondered, noting the tired, distressed look on her face.

Getting quickly to his feet, he made his way to where she sat, her face now buried in her hands.

"Pardon me," he said softly and kindly, "but I feel I owe you an apology for the way I acted yesterday."

Sybil raised her head. "$I suppose I deserved it," she said resignedly. "$I had it coming to me." Her eyes rested on the table; she spoke like a submissive, rebuked child.

"I still feel that I owe you a sincere and heart-felt apology. Mind if I join you?"

David seated himself across from her. "$Are you having problems?" he probed gently. "$If you are, I have a Friend who solves problems and heals hurts and binds up wounds."

Still not raising her eyes to meet his, Sybil said unbelievingly, "$It sounds too good to be true. It's more like a fairy tale or some such thing; no one can do all that."

"No human person, but my Friend can. He's in this kind of business."

"Everyone has enough problems of his own; why should I bother and trouble anyone with mine?"
"Because my Friend wants to help you. He's the great burden-bearer—the healer of broken hearts, broken homes and broken lives."

For a long while, neither spoke. At mention of broken hearts and broken homes, Sybil's eyes filled with tears. Then, slowly raising her eyes to meet David's honest ones, she asked in little more than a whisper, "Is that true? Really and truly so?"

"Every single word of it is true, Sybil. My Friend, Jesus, knows all about your heart's deepest need and longing, and He is standing nearby to give you help when and if you want it. But you must want His help. He said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: And ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' Now doesn't that sound as though He is wanting to help you?"

"It's beautiful. I wish I could believe it."

"You will; one of these glad days you will believe it and be made new..., in Christ."

Not at all brash or brazen and bold now, the dainty, petite young woman got to her feet, saying, "If you will excuse me, please, I shall be leaving."

"It was a pleasure to talk to you, Sybil. And one more thing before you leave, remember that I shall be praying for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Statler; I really need it. I feel so all confused and mixed up at times."

With that, she hurried away.

David, looking toward the indigo sky outside, marveled at the change in her. She seemed much like a whipped pup, he thought. Something had set her to thinking; what was it? or who? It was as though she was evaluating her life and its purposes and had found that, during the introspective evaluation, she had come up short on the side of all things good and noble and worth while.

"Coffee?" a soft, pleasant voice asked, and the waitress, a modestly-dressed attractive brunette placed a menu in front of David.

"Thanks, no. You may keep the menu; I think I'll go buffet this morning. My stomach's empty and hollow to its very bottom."
The young woman smiled warmly. "Tea?" she questioned.

"Hot water, please. Aren't you new here? I mean, well, I've never seen you in here before. I thought Mr. Statler used only men to wait on tables."

The young woman blushed. "Generally, he does. This morning, however, one of the waiters was ill and couldn't come. I was asked to replace him—for today only. I mean, for the breakfast hours."

Seeing that she seemed ill at ease with his statement, David added quickly, "I'm glad you're here. Do you work at the lodge?"

"Full time. It's in another area, though. And now I must be going; I think the orders are ready for the group of women at the oblong table."

David watched as she disappeared through the swinging doors into the kitchen. She was different. Yes, she was different from the great majority of young women whom he knew. Could it be that here, in his uncle's fashionable lodge, was a Christian woman? Her attire and beautifully done-up long hair seemed to supply him with the answer. Suddenly, he had a desire to know her better—to find out more about her.

He had just settled down to eat when a voice spoke across his shoulder. "David Daniel Statler! It is you, isn't it?"

Turning, David came face to face with a tall, broad-shouldered handsome young man. "Chuck Lansdowe! Is it you?" He got to his feet and wrung Chuck's hand in fond recollection and remembrance.

"One and the same, Dave. Guess God hasn't made too many changes in either one of us. Aside from being more mature and a bit more flesh on your bones, you look the same. What are you doing up here in this hidden, secluded and out-of-the-way place? You're the last person I'd have expected to find here."

"I was going to ask the same of you, Chuck..." "Why am I here? Well, I'll tell you; Mr. Statler... hey, that's your last name, too! You wouldn't be any relation, surely?"

"He's my uncle."

For answer, Chuck let out a long, low whistle. "Now isn't that something! Fancy finding an old school mate in the wilds of nowhere, almost! It's incredible. But now, as to what I'm doing and why I'm here, it's this simple: I'm an airplane pilot for a private company. Mr. Statler needed supplies flown in and I was chosen to do the honor. Guess you remember that I always wanted to fly supplies in to the missionaries on the various isolated fields." David nodded.
"Well, I'm almost ready to see my vision and my calling become reality. The Lord willing, I'll be leaving to fulfill this God-given call in late spring. This is a part of the training."

"Sit down and share breakfast with me, Chuck. We can talk and visit just as well over warm food as no food. And besides, my stomach's demanding a certain kind of attention."

"You married?" Chuck asked.

"No. How about yourself?"

Chuck turned the water glass around and around between the palls of his hands. "I was engaged, Dave, but she let me know that she would never be a missionary's wife. I told her the engagement was off, that I had to obey God. It was the most painful part of my life so far. But God has been blessing me beyond anything I ever imagined or dreamed possible since I took my stand. It was Marie Keffinger; you may remember her. A very pretty girl and one who seemed spiritual, too. Why she waited to tell me until I proposed marriage to her is a real mystery to me. But my life, along with its heartaches and heart breaks, is totally yielded to God. In His time and in His way, He will give me the companion He has reserved for me. I believe this as surely and as positively as I do that I am sitting here talking to you."

"Amen," came David's clear affirmation and approval. "And that is how I feel about it for my life too, Chuck. Almost, I let my heart lead me toward the wrong girl. But God was faithful in warning me and chastening me. And when I stopped dating and seeing her, I had His blessing and His smile once again."

Still twirling the glass gently between his hands, Chuck said, "This is where couples by the multiplied thousands miss it. They ride over the checks and the warnings of the Spirit, and come, ultimately, to ruin and separation and divorce. So many whom we knew in college are divorced today. And the sad thing is that they don't seem to feel any guilt or shame and remorse about it."

"Coffee for you?" the diminutive waitress asked, excusing herself for breaking in upon the conversation and sliding a menu beneath Chuck's arms on the table.

Chuck smiled engagingly up into the clear hazel eyes before him. "Whatever Dave has looks super-good to me. Is it buffet? For breakfast?"

The girl nodded assent. "Seems the cooks here go overboard to please and to satisfy hungry appetites," she exclaimed, pointing to where the buffet stood, loaded with steaming-hot, tempting, tasty food, arranged in such a way as to capture the eye and set one's taste buds to drooling.
"I'll go buffet," Chuck decided quickly.

"Help yourself, Sir. And what about a beverage? Coffee, tea or milk? Our coffee is the freshest! Mr. Statler has given strict instructions and orders that no coffee dare stand around and collect oil and become 'old' tasting. The teas are imported, having a flavor all their own."

"Quite a sales pitch!" Chuck remarked with humor. "I'll take one of the teas; any one."

"Thank you," the slender girl replied, hurrying away.

When she was gone, and as they sat eating, Chuck said, "Dave, that waitress is a Christian. I'm sure of it. She has all the marks of a child of God--dress, long hair, and everything."

"I noticed," David answered casually, the same urge and desire to know her better again possessing him and sweeping over him.

"Imagine that--in this no-man's land, a child of God! What's her name? Any idea?"

"None at all. I haven't seen her until this morning."

"Well, one of us is going to ask her her name and find out what she's doing up here. Knowing you and your rather shy nature, I suppose I'll have to do the asking."

"Good suggestion, Chuck. Yes, a very good suggestion. And now, I'll tell you how I happen to be here. It was God, of course..."

The two talked way into the morning and when Chuck's plane was unloaded and he had to leave, he broke the good news to Dave that he was scheduled to fly another load up to the lodge later in the week, whereupon David invited him to spend the night with his uncle and himself. And thus they parted.

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CHAPTER 4

In her very feminine suite of rooms on the 4th floor, Sybil stood staring through the windows to the towering mountain ranges in the distance, feeling empty and frightened and lonely. Mr. Statler had been kind to her, too kind really, she mused silently amid the falling tears. But for all her accumulation of things . . . beautiful clothes, expensive coats, costly perfumes and elegantly furnished rooms..., something within her was searching and seeking. For what? She didn't know. But the longing inside persisted, gnawing away
somewhere in her heart and soul like one of the rats used to do in the dingy, dismal
apartment she had shared (or tried to share) With her mother so long, long ago.

Her mind wandered quickly backward into time. Where was her mother? Did she
never miss her daughter and long to see her? And what about her father?

She could barely remember the man who was her father. Often she had conjured
up visions and dreams of a tall, handsome, broad-shouldered and respectable individual
who dressed like royalty and was proud to be seen with his daughter as they walked the
busy thoroughfares in some great metropolis. But this was only idle and foolish dreaming.

Thinking of her barely-remembered father now, Sybil's mind raced back to the
apartment of her childhood and to the rat. It had become a sort of pet/companion to her
during the countless nights when she lay in bed shivering and waiting for the key to turn in
the miserable latch and admit her poor, unhappy and intoxicated mother. On more than
one occasion, she had dug out from between the thin and badly-worn blanket to find a
bread crust or some other little tid-bit for the rodent, whose gnawing and scampering
across the floor had spelled company and another presence beside her own in the cold,
dark room.

The young woman paced on the floor..., longing, long, searching. Searching. What
had triggered the sudden unrest? she asked herself candidly now. Was it Mr. Statler's
flank rebuke or his nephew's attitude yesterday? she wondered.

Coming to grips with herself, Sybil had to admit that each had played a vital part in
recalling the hidden and deeply-buried needs of her heart. Mr. Statler had been too
indulgent with her, seldom rebuking her for anything she did--like bleaching her hair. She
knew he was displeased; knew, too, that he did not approve of it nor like it. But the
desire to be "different" . . . to be someone other than herself., had driven her on, and
when she saw herself and was pleased with the results, she hadn't cared what anyone
thought. It was her hair, she had contented strongly in the inner chamber of her heart.

Looking at herself in the mirror now, Sybil suddenly wilted. She looked cheap and
bawdy, much like the girls and women did who roamed the streets at night when she
lived with her mother. She felt ashamed of herself and, pulling the long strands of hair
back over her head, she wadded it up in a knot, being careful to pin it securely to the top
of her head. Then she pondered what to do to change it back to its original shiny-black
color without dyeing it. Instantly her better judgment told her that only with time would
this be possible. Until time had restored the natural color and luster, she would have to
live with the sin of her pride, which was at the root of the bleaching.

Sybil groaned. What a foolish young woman she had been, and how devoid of
peace and inner rest and satisfaction was her heart. Nothing she tried had given her
peace.
David's words, so recently spoken, seemed to jump out before her. "Come unto me," he had said. And what was that about a broken heart?

Tears spilled out over the long dark eyelashes and dropped to the floor. Oh, why couldn't she experience what David had been talking about! Was it for her, this that he had spoken of? Why hadn't Mr. Statler seen to it that she went to church? This Man called Jesus, did He really do all that David said He did?

The questions darted back and forth through the troubled mind like the little paddle ball did with which she played as a girl. Burying her face in her hands, Sybil sobbed.


"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden . . ."

In anguish of soul, the young woman dropped on her knees. "Oh God," she begged, "are you listening? Where are you? Please God, what must I do? I'm coming..."

The peace that flowed over her made her laugh and cry for joy. Her soul, so long dissatisfied and filled with an inner longing and deep fears, was now released and set flee. The guilt was gone; so was her condemnation. Like a bird freed from its prison-cage, was her soul.

She stood to her feet and surveyed herself in the full length mirror, sure that the newness of this glorious and blessed transformation was showing all over her being; but the only difference she noted was in the blotched makeup on her face. It was all runny, like paint spilled or splashed in funny blotches across her cheeks.

Rushing into the bathroom, Sybil washed it off, declaring, "I'll never need you again; I'm new--inside out, new." Then she set to work with a will, trying to change her hairstyle until it would match what had happened inside her heart.

Downstairs, David waited until he saw the little waitress, then he motioned to her.

"You don't get a bill," she said a bit frustrated. "You are Mr. Statler's nephew."

David was shocked. How had she known this? Who had told her?

"Neither is your friend to pay--orders from Mr. Statler himself."

"Chuck... my friend..., waited and waited for his bill, and when we couldn't find you any where I told him I'd take care of his breakfast. He had to leave; he's an airplane pilot."

"So I understand," came the calm reply.
"Pardon me if I ask you a question or two; are you a Christian?"

The girl smiled warmly and broadly. "Indeed I am, and not ashamed to let the world know it. I gather that you, too, know my wonderful Lord and Saviour.

"I do. For twelve years, He has been my dearest Friend and my closest Companion. He is not only my Saviour but He is my sanctifier, as well. I've had my personal Pentecost, where I died out to all of sin and self and was cleansed by the purging, refining fire of the Holy Ghost. Oh, by the way, I'm David Statler."

"Pleased to meet you, David. I am Gall Beckley and I, too, have been wholly and entirely sanctified. But I must run now; I'm a working woman and I try always to give a full day's work to my employer, never loitering or lingering when I should be at the job. Glad to know there's one of like mind at the lodge."

David watched until Gail disappeared behind the kitchen doors. Then he walked across the room to the enormous stone fireplace and sat down. Save for an elderly couple, he had the sitting area all to himself. The couple, he noticed, stared vacantly into the blazing fireplace, their countenances sad and forlorn and dejected looking.

For a brief while he sat and prayed, trying to find the proper course to take, and when he got to his feet and stepped up to the fireplace and fed a thick log into the flames, he commented casually, "This should last a while."

A faint flicker of a smile darted briefly and momentarily across the wan face of the woman, but her companion, still staring, acted like he hadn't heard.

David walked over to the couple. "It's quite obvious that you haven't come to Hidden Lodge for skiing; I suppose it's a sort of holiday for you? An anniversary present from a devoted son or daughter perhaps?"

The woman gasped; the man turned pale and continued to stare. They were undergoing some kind of extreme stress or strain, David was sure, or deep sorrow even.

"Do you enjoy reading?" he asked quickly, extracting several tracts from his inside coat pocket and handing them to the couple.

The man reached out and took them without uttering a word. Then touching his wife on her shoulder, he left the room. The woman rose obediently and followed.

David sat down on the sofa and prayed. Everywhere he looked, it seemed, people were suffering with heartache and heartbreak. Oh, there were so many needs hidden and buried beneath one's physical surface, he thought with an aching heart. He must do
something to help as many as he could. God stood in need of solid witnesses here at his uncle's lodge just as much as at any other place.

Suddenly, he wondered who the couple was and where they had come from. Getting to his feet, he hurried out of the room in search of his uncle. Giles would know all about the pair, he was sure, and he would be able to tell him what was bothering them.

But he was disappointed; Uncle Giles knew nothing about them other than the fact that the letter, requesting a room for two, had stated they would be staying until the following fall or longer. They had remained solely to themselves, the uncle had said, and no amount of gentle persuasion or kindly favors had made so much as a dent toward the opening of their little world.

Sadly, David walked out of the office and headed up the steps. Prayer! he thought with renewed faith. Prayer was the key. Closing his bedroom door, he fell on his knees.

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CHAPTER 5

Night fell, and with its heavy, indigo blue curtains pulled, the skiers flocked in from the slopes. Noise, laughter and good humor filled the dining and sitting room. Faces, reddened and healthy looking by sun and wind, were fresh-scrubbed and clean. Warm ski boots and outfits were put aside for more dressy dinner jackets and dresses.

David, standing in the shadows of a fern-embanked archway, searched the room for the couple who had lain so heavily upon his heart all day, but they were not there.

Finding his uncle, he asked what room number the aging couple had.

"I never bother my guests, David," came the firm reply. "That is poor policy. Most people who come here do it so they can 'get away from it all.' Their words. I'm sure those old people would let us in on what's bothering them if they so desired. However, since they choose not to do so, I would advise you to forget about them."

David felt like his hands were tied. Thanking Uncle Giles for his advice, he walked away, determined to find the couple. They needed help. Badly! His heart told him so.

Going up the winding stairs, he walked the full length of the first floor hall, then the second. It was while he was going down the hallway on the third floor that he saw them. They were sitting near a window and looking out into the dark night.

"How about a tray for your evening meal?" he asked, coming up quietly upon them. "I missed you from the dining room so thought I'd find you and see if I could bring a tray of food up for each of you."
The man gave David a bitter look.

Undaunted and ignoring the look, David reached his hand out and laid it upon the man's arm. "I'd like to help you both," he said kindly and sincerely. "You're going through some form of deep water and fiery trial and I do want to help bear whatever it is you are trying to carry in your own strength."

Tears shimmered in the faded blue eyes.

"Jesus is waiting to bear your burdens and to carry the heavier end of this load," David said.

"No one can help us!" the man declared emphatically. "What do you know about trouble? You're too young to begin to imagine what trouble really is."

"Perhaps so, but Jesus Christ is the great burden-bearer. He is calling for you to come unto Him and He will give you rest."

As before, the man touched his wife gently on her arm and together they entered the seclusion and the privacy of their room.

This time David got the number. Bowing his head in fervent prayer just outside the door, he entrusted the two into God's care and keeping.

His uncle was looking for him as he entered the dining room. "Where's Sybil?" he asked the nephew.

Looking shocked, David replied, "I have no idea, Uncle Giles. I haven't seen her since early this morning. Seemed like she had something on her mind --like she was troubled or had a problem."

"Go to her suite and find out why she's not at the keyboard. The guests have paid for her musical services; this is included in their room and board."

David's face paled. "I . . . I can't do that," he said kindly. "It wouldn't be discreet; me, a man, entering her apartment. The Bible says we are to abstain from the very appearance of evil. Someone may see me and imagine a very evil and wicked thing. Is there not a woman in the kitchen whom you could send up?"

David's face took on a distressed look. He hated to disobey his uncle's command, but God's orders took priority over any of man's. Did not Acts 5:29 state, "We ought to obey God rather than men?"
Giving David a look like he had not seen before, Giles Statler stormed out of the room, declaring, "I'll go and find her then! I am accustomed to having my orders obeyed. However, it seems the good old Book takes precedence over me and my orders."

It was said with derision and scorn, and David, feeling the lash of the sting, dropped into an overstuffed chair and quietly prayed, begging God to soften the man's heart and to bring him to his knees.

Giles was back in a little while, his face pale and white and angry. Hurrying into the crowded dining room he announced, "Sorry folks, there will be no keyboard stylings by Sybil tonight--due to circumstances beyond my control. But there will be music tomorrow night again."

"Is she ill?" someone asked quickly.

"Sick?" came the word from many a lip.

"She deserves a rest," one of the women declared. "Such a tiny little thing. Give her a vacation. My friend here is quite an accomplished musician.

"Then get to the organ or the piano," Giles said with irritation registering in his

A volley of applause rang out as the young woman stepped forward and began playing. It was not at all like Sybil's playing; soft, smooth and easy to listen to. But it got the motley crowd to tapping their feet and clapping their hands in time with the up-tempo and heavy beat.

Giles Statler looked on in disgust and disapproval but said nothing. This was the kind of music that made people disorderly and loose, he realized; not at all like the music he had had the great instructors train Sybil for.

Many of his guests were now on their feet, dancing, and Giles, shaking his head unbelievingly and knowing that he would not be missed, slipped through the archway and down the hallway to his spacious office where he locked the door behind him.

David sat dumb-founded. It was unreal--all this gyrating and sensuous moving of the body.

In utter disgust, he headed for the stairs. On an impulse, he turned and walked along the long hallway toward his uncle's office.

For all his worldliness and his materialistic proclivity, David had by now gotten to know his uncle well enough to know that to a great degree, he was quite a conservative individual. The man was an ardent love and devotee of the great masters of music,
loathing the up-tempo and heavy beat of the existing and present generation; nor could he tolerate the slovenly, sloppy, careless dressing of the age. From the top of his shock of graying hair to the very sole of his feet, Uncle Giles was conservatism through and through—in everything. It revealed its unmistakable banner in the soft grays and tweeds which he wore, and in the subdued and relaxing shades in which the walls of each and every room were decorated and furnished accordingly.

David could well imagine the hurt feeling of the man who had ever abhorred the type of music which was presently being played, and when he stood in front of the office door and got no response to his light knock, fear gripped his heart.

"Uncle Giles," he called softly. "May I come in, please?"

He waited. "Uncle Giles," he repeated, "please let me in."

For a long while David waited, and when the door finally opened and Giles, standing pale and trembling in the open doorway, beckoned his nephew to enter, David rushed forward, exclaiming in great concern. "Are you all right, Uncle? You look . . . white. What has happened? Where is Sybil?"

Never before had the young man seen such a display of emotion as he now witnessed in his relative. Slumping into a chair, Giles let his head drop into his hands while he sobbed uncontrollably. "I'm ruined!" he blurted between sobs. "Ruined, I tell you. First Sybil, now this low class music. I can't take it; I can't!"

With a protective arm around his senior's shoulder, David asked gently, "What has happened to Sybil? I'm sorry if I appeared rude and uncooperative when you told me to go up and check on her, but you see, Uncle Giles, in order to keep the smile and the approval of God upon my life, I must abide by His laws and commandments and precepts. My salvation and sanctification was purchased at too great a price for me to take lightly and trample under foot. Then, too, my chief delight and supreme satisfaction and joy comes in pleasing my wonderful Lord and in being obedient to Him and His Word. Someday you will understand this."

As though he didn't hear, Giles threw his hands in the air in a gesture of utter exasperation, crying, "How could she do this to me! How! After all the years I spent on her, invested in her!"

At a total loss for understanding, David said nothing, wondering how any "investment" could possibly fit in with the petite little Sybil, whom he felt had been hired for the express purpose of filling a nightly musical engagement the same as the waiters and cooks had been hired to fill their various capacities of employment.
"I tell you, David, if you had seen that frightened, half-starved and nearly-frozen girl when I found her huddling in a miserable doorway one night, you wouldn't believe it's the same person.

"What drew me to that part of the city that day is still a mystery to me. I had no business whatever there. Yet I was strangely drawn from the busy thoroughfare to this miserable and foul-smelling area. And that's when I saw her.

"I suppose it was her eyes that first arrested my attention. So like a wounded deer, they looked. I passed by; then just as quickly I spun around on my heels and went back. 'What do you want?' I asked when I came to where she stood, shivering from cold and trembling with fright.

"'I did not call you, Sir,' she replied in perfect English and with careful politeness.

"'Then why am I here?' I asked, feeling suddenly very foolish and totally stymied and mystified.

"She shook her head sadly, her great, dark eyes piercing the very heart of me. They were too large and too frightened for her tiny face.

"'Where is your mother?' I asked.

"I was soon to find out that she had neither father or mother; she was one of the many whose parents take off for parts unknown and desert their off-spring, leaving them homeless, desolate and destitute, not caring if they live or die, survive or perish.

"Suddenly, I knew something had to be done, and done quickly, or the child would either starve to death or freeze to death. Gathering her bony little body up in my arms and covering her amply with the coat which I had by now removed for her warmth, I headed for the nearest police station, though I had no idea how close nor how far that may be.

"The law officers informed me that she was indeed homeless; they had no idea where her mother had gone and the father they had never seen.

"I went into action, and before long Sybil was in my custody, where she has been ever since."

David stood in silence, weeping softly as the wonderful story unfolded. His uncle had played the role of the Good Samaritan to a street waif--an urchin.

"I fed her, housed her, clothed her, and saw to it that she had the very best kind of teachers, and now . . . now..., this! I can't believe it!"
"What has she done, may I ask?" David begged softly.

"What has she done? She . . . she . . . Oh, but you will think it's wonderful; I forgot. Sybil said she got saved this morning. Converted, mind you! And she declares that her musical renditions must now be nothing other than that which will glorify Christ and bring glory to His name. Oh, I can't believe it; I can't! All my investment in her, wasted."

Facing his uncle, David said softly, "No, Uncle Giles; that's where you're all wrong; the investment is only now just going to begin to pay big dividends. See if soon you don't agree."

In a gesture of total resignation now, the wealthy man leaned across his desk and wept.

* * * * * * *

CHAPTER 6

It was the following morning at breakfast that David saw the changed and transformed Sybil. The inner light shone through brightly on her countenance, and her entire being and person attested to the glorious fact that she was indeed "born of God."

Making his way over to where she sat alone at a table, he said, "Praise the Lord! I learned the good news last night from my uncle's lips."

Smiling shyly, Sybil said, "I'm afraid Mr. Statler is badly upset with me. He's had quite a shock. I've really been praying for him."

"That makes two of us," David injected quickly.

Sybil's eyes clouded over with tears. "He's such a very kind and compassionate man, your uncle. In fact, from him and in him have I received the only 'father' image I've ever known. I was so very tiny when I last saw my real father. It is to Mr. Statler that I owe everything . . . the lovely suite of rooms upstairs, my musical career, my board and clothing. Well, you name it; it has come from his beneficent hand. But of course, you haven't the slightest idea what I am talking about for your uncle never tells about his many charities and his multiplied kindnesses. This would take away his greatest joy, should the world know what he is doing or had done. He's actually a very modest man by nature. Yet for all his many kindnesses and excellent qualities, he deprived me of life's most essential and important thing . . . salvation through Jesus Christ.

"And while you are here, and now that I have the opportunity to do so," she continued, "permit me to say 'thank you' for your numerous rebukes; 'rebuffs' maybe the more adequate and proper word, however. I needed them dreadfully, David; and while it
wounded and hurt my pride, it was the very thing I needed. I was becoming more vain and haughty and proud every day. Conceited, too. And when you 'brushed me off' the way you did, it helped to humble me. Then another thing; you will never know how much those beautiful words which you quoted to me day before yesterday meant to me and helped me. Thank you! I have experienced personally the true meaning of that 'Come unto me' verse. Christ has given rest to my sin-weary soul and today I am so happy in Christ that at times I can scarcely believe I'm me."

David sat spellbound, listening. Oh, the joy and excitement of a new-born soul! he thought. "That's what the Scripture means," he said, "when it declares, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' That's found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, in case you're wondering," he added, drawing a beautiful New Testament from his pocket and turning to the page. "By the way, do you have a Bible or a Testament?"

"Sorry to say, but I don't. And I was wondering where to go to buy one. We're clear out of bounds for such things up here. I thought of asking Gail Beckley; she's so very religious and . . . and different." And now Sybil laughed. "You know, David, I always viewed Gail as a 'square,' an out-of-her-time sort of 'peculiar' young woman. But, looking back now on her daily walk and carefulness and conversation, I see she has possessed the thing for which my soul was crying --peace and soul-rest. She's perpetually happy and joyful--attributes which I could never claim to have until yesterday. Yes, Gail's been at peace with herself."

"And with her God, Sybil. This you now understand for yourself. And now I want to make a small contribution toward your new life in Christ. The Testament is yours as a gift from a fellow traveler on the Highway of Salvation and Holiness."

With shining eyes, Sybil took the gift and clutched it to her heart. "Oh, I am so very thankful to you! Thank you, David. Thank you. I am like a small child learning to walk; this Book will be my instructor and my guide."

Leaving Sybil to investigate and pore over the pages of the Testament, David hurried up the stairs to the room of the aging couple. He had been so burdened for them. This was the time to see them, he felt constrained.

The first several times of knocking brought no response; he was persistent and insistent, however. Here was a couple in desperate need of spiritual help, he knew.

He continued to knock, waiting patiently and praying all the while. When the man finally showed his face from behind the partially-opened door and beckoned David with a silent gesture to enter, his heart leaped for joy.
"I don't mean to be bothersome," he apologized as he followed the man into the sitting-bedroom combination, "but my Heavenly Father keeps prodding my soul that you are in need of help and comfort. I've come to pray for you..."

The man's defenses melted like snow in a late spring thaw. David saw his body shake and quiver and tremble.

The wife saw it, too. "Please, Harvey!" she begged and pleaded. "Please, grant him the request. We need prayer so desperately. We . . . we're miserable and..."

With heaving chest and shaking shoulders, he said brokenly, "Go ahead. Like Maude said, we do need prayer. I've been such a haughty and demanding man--dogmatic to a fault. This is the reason, I am sure, that our only child . . . a fine young man . . . took his wife and family and left without so much as a forwarding address to anyone. Oh, I tell you, young man, we are nearly wild with worry and anxiety, Maude and I. But I am to blame. I see it all now. I dictated to that boy like he was a small, irresponsible child..., a sort of puppet. Even dictated to Elaine-told her how much of her husband's salary she should spend on groceries, what amount should be used as household running expense, how much for children's clothes... Oh, Sir, you wouldn't believe how I bossed those two. I'd give anything to be able to have them back or to know where they are. I see how selfish I've been; I'd like to make it up to them..."

"In the Bible we are told that, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins . . .' Do you believe this? It's found in 1 John 1:9."

"Believe it? Why, Sir, I know the Book: Maude and I both used to be real Christians. My business became exceedingly prosperous and, with much money, came materialism. Soon we had no time for God, no time for going to church and no time for anything spiritual. We were living in a whirlwind of social prestige and activity and when this crisis came and the storm broke upon our lives, we had no one to turn to. Knowing that our friends would eventually learn the sad facts about our fine, intelligent and noble son's sudden disappearance and departure, I decided to take a lengthy vacation to some remote and isolated area. That's why we are here."

"And God had me come here so I could help you. Now, let us pray. I'm confident that the Christ whom you once knew stands ready and waiting to forgive your sins and to heal your backslidings. Will you come? Are you ready and willing to take up the cross which you laid down?"

"We're ready and willing and eager!" the man exclaimed strongly. "There is no happiness and peace outside of Christ."

With flowing tears, David poured his soul out to God in fervent, intercessory prayer, and when he finally arose and looked at the couple, there was a look of serene calmness and peace written on each smiling face.
Smiting his chest, the man said reverently, "At last, I have peace! Thank you, young man, for being persistent and . . . and . . . for caring about others. Now Maude and I can face our tomorrows again."

"With confidence!" the woman added emphatically. "Please, do come back again; will you?" she asked. You are about the same age as our Loren, I would imagine . . ."

"I am twenty-five, Mrs. .... ?"

"Keathmoring. Maude Keathmoring. Our Loren turned twenty-six last fall."

"Now that there are three of us to pray," David said, "I'd like to suggest that we unite our efforts and ask our Heavenly Father to make a reunion day possible for you--a family reunion. By the way, you may call me David from now on; and should you ever need me, dial this number."

So! David thought, as he made his exit out of the room--backsliders in heart who thought they could run away from God and drown their sorrows in some isolated and snugly-hidden lodge.

He started for the dining room in the hope of getting a glimpse of Gaff when he remembered that she had told him she was doing waitress duty only because one of the waiters had taken ill. What did she do? he wondered. Where did she work?

He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he nearly collided head-on with someone coming toward him, an armful of port-folio's clutched to her bosom.

"I'm sorry!" he apologized sincerely. "I was deep in thought and didn't . . . Gaff!" he exclaimed. "I was wondering where you've been. Where do you work? I mean, what do you do?"

She laughed pleasantly. "That's a good question; I do whatever Mr. Statler asks me to do. Basically though, I'm a secretary, a receptionist when necessary, and his bookkeeper. And right now I'm very busy. Work hour, you know. Remember?" And she started briskly toward the stairs.

"When are you free?" David asked quickly, surprising even himself by the question.

"Tonight I work till 5:30--book work for the owner of the lodge."

"Will you dine with me, please? There won't be much privacy, to be sure, but at least we should be able to get better acquainted."
Gaff blushed a rosy-pink. "Thank you, David; I'll be delighted to do so."

"At 7:00 then, Lord willing?"

"Promptly," came the quick reply before she hurried away.

David heaved a sigh of relief. Finally, he had gotten the courage to ask! His heart felt light and happy.

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CHAPTER 7

Promptly at 7:00, Gall met David at the dining room entrance. As at the first sight of her, her modesty and simplicity of dress impressed the young man greatly.

Escorting her to a table for two, David became aware of the fact that something was different in the dining area tonight. Then it dawned upon him: Sybil was at the organ, and she was playing hymns. Actually and truly, hymns!

His heart leaped for joy. How had she managed it? he wondered. Had Uncle Giles been so disgusted with last night's performance and its aftermath of dancing and rowdiness and boisterousness that he had consented and told her to play whatever she chose, just so long as she was the one at the keyboard? He couldn't help but believe that such was the case.

"I can't believe what I'm hearing!" Gail commented as David seated her. "Something's happened to Sybil; she looks different. Her face is shining and she's wearing her hair up. Oh, David, I believe she's saved. There's a holy light emanating from her countenance."

"Yes, she is saved. It happened yesterday. We had quite a visit together this morning. And it sounds to me as if she has won out..."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The hymns. Uncle Giles was cut to the very core of him when Sybil told him about her transformation. She said she could not play the organ or piano any more unless she played music which was to the glory of God. Uncle, bless him, declared he was ruined. In anger and in utter desperation and exasperation, he invited one of the guests to play. And when he heard the up-tempo and heavy beat, he left the room. The guests got to dancing and carrying on in a most unbecoming way. It was disgusting; I, too, left the room."
Gail's eyes remained fastened on Sybil. How beautifully she played and with what feeling! Looking around the crowded dining room she noted that, without exception, the music had created a sort of reverential feeling and attitude among the guests. There was neither bawdiness nor boisterousness present—just a quiet, holy, relaxing air in which the circle of diners moved from the smorgasbord with its heavily-laden spread of meats and sea foods and everything good to eat quietly back to their tables with apparent delight and pleasure in what they were hearing.

In the shadows, viewing and observing each individual guest with a scrutiny born of years of careful watching and analyzing, stood Giles Statler. Noting the calming effect which the hymns had upon his guests, his eager eyes turned next to Sybil. Totally oblivious of what was going on, Sybil raised her eyes heavenward. There was a smile on her face, a smile not of this world but of another. A light, too. It was as if she were looking into the heart of the Eternal City itself.

Trembling, Giles slipped unnoticed down the hallway.

Over the flickering candle on their table, David and Gail looked at each other.

"Beautiful!" Gail exclaimed. "She's beautiful!"

"And wonderful!" David added. "She's a miracle of grace. Yes, indeed, Sybil's a miracle of grace."

"Like each of us, David."

During the period of the meal, David spotted the Keathmorings across the room. They seemed like a newly-married couple, not at all like the two whom he had met only so recently and become so deeply and greatly concerned over, he thought, noticing how tender and kind Harvey was to Maude and how very affectionate she was to her husband.

Nodding in their general direction, David said "Two more miracles of grace. They got back to God today."

The evening was a time of getting acquainted for David and Gail, and, much to their surprise, they discovered they had many things in common—many of the same likes and dislikes. Each had lost both parents and was fully on their own; each was converted while still very young and sanctified wholly shortly thereafter.

"God has been gracious and good to both of us," David declared when Gail told him how the Lord had led and directed her in her present employment.

"My one big drawback was the fact that I knew there was no church here. But God worked that all out for me. Old Mrs. Wamseur assured me that there were services
held weekly in her cottage living room—which indeed is so. And I haven't missed a service. Her husband may be old and well along in years, but he's still an excellent preacher," Gaff declared.

David's eyes were alight with joy. "And all this time I've been getting nothing but crumbs!" he exclaimed sadly.

Gail laughed. "You mean you've been going to the little chapel beyond the lodge?" David nodded.

"It's a beautiful chapel, I must confess, but the chaplain's as dead and dry as anyone I've ever heard. I've gone several times, out of respect to your uncle. He had the chapel erected for the convenience of his guests, should any of them want to go to church."

"Tell me more about this aged minister, Gaff. How come they're here?"

"The Wamseurs? Years ago, before Mr. Statler ever thought of building his exclusive lodge, the Wamseurs lived here. During his numerous pastorates, he was gone, of course. Then, when ill health forced early retirement upon him, quite naturally they moved back into their little cottage home. The man's health is quite improved these days and, like I said previously, his messages are stirring and challenging and God-anointed."

"That does it!" David said emphatically. "I'll be there for the very next service, the Lord willing. My soul has felt as if it's been in a very dry desert, sermon-wise. Frankly, I've often wondered about some who claim to be preachers; don't they wait for God to do the calling? Or is it just another occupation for them? Something which they decide to pursue and do?"

"I'm afraid this is the case, David; it becomes just a regular job for all too many who have never had God's call."

"David! Gail!" a familiar voice called, breaking in upon the conversation. "Oh, I'm so glad you're still here." It was Sybil.

"Hey, is it closing time?" David asked, totally unaware that the music had ceased and the diners, for the most part, had long since left the dining room.

"I'm afraid so," Sybil answered, laughing. "And I was so worried that you'd leave before I finished playing and could get over to see you. How do you like my hair, Gail?" she asked, moving her head slightly so the other could see better. "I tried to remember how you put yours up and..."

Gall reached over and took Sybil's tiny hand in hers. "You dear, dear girl!" she exclaimed. "You look like an angel tonight--so heavenly and...and new. It shines through
you, Sybil, this new life in Christ. Oh, I am so happy for you. Being born of God is a most wonderful and glorious experience, as you know."

"Does my hair look OK? I mean, I tried to make it look as much like yours as I could. This is all so new to me. But I want to allow the beauty of Jesus to shine through me, and I felt the only way I could do this was to keep self as far in the background as possible. I'm so embarrassed with this horribly awful bleached hair. But I'll have to live with it until my own natural color comes through again. Isn't pride a disgusting thing!" she exclaimed ruefully. "It spoils and impairs God's natural beauty by trying to improve upon it. Ugh!"

Gaff spoke softly, "Yes, pride is disgusting. This is why one needs the Holy Spirit to sanctify and cleanse his heart after he is saved, or converted. Pride is only one of the many traits--or roots--of carnality which are still remaining in the heart after one is born again. And, unless the roots are taken out by the purging, refining fire of the Holy Ghost, these same 'roots' will spring up from within and cause the individual to go back into sin."

"Oh!" Sybil gasped. "You mean I have this . . . this . . . awful thing in my heart? Even though I am saved?"

Gaff and David nodded.

"Well, I don't want it!" came the immediate reply. "Do you have any free time tomorrow, Gaff? If you do, I want you to come to my room and show me what to do to get rid of this dreadful thing. Honestly, I never knew what peace and joy was until I found Jesus. And I don't intend to lose Him; I told Him I'd go all the way with Him. This is a promise!"

Gaff was misty-eyed, and David felt he had never heard sweeter words. Here was sincerity and openness through and through.

"Is my dress becoming to my new title--Christian?" the musician asked seriously. "I sorted through my wardrobe and made many changes; hems were let out of dresses and necklines are in the process of being changed. Oh, I feel so chagrined; to think I ever thought a low neckline was both beautiful and becoming. Why, from the moment the Lord Jesus forgave me of all my sins and changed my heart, I felt ashamed when I thought of some of the clothes I'd been wearing. God seemed to impress upon me that, now that He had come to live in my heart, I must be clothed modestly and properly if He was to continue living within me. And I am so happy to do anything He tells me to do, just so He remains with me and in me!"

"What a dramatic and radical change!" David exclaimed as tears flowed down his cheeks. "I'm sure this will have a tremendous bearing and effect upon my uncle, Sybil. He has not been totally averse to the ways of God. Ah, no. He was brought up and taught
by the same wonderful and godly mother as my father was. And I am expecting God to do a miracle in Uncle Giles' heart. I truly am.

Overcome with joy at hearing the good news, Sybil exclaimed, "Oh, I have been praying for this. He has been so good to me. And now that I know he had spiritual training and upbringing, well, that will make it even more easy for me to intercede for him."

"And you may be sure that we will be praying, too!" Gaff exclaimed before they all parted and went their separate ways.

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CHAPTER 8

A month went by after David and Gail had their first evening together, and now it became a common thing to see them share two meals together weekly. Chuck Lansdowe not only flew supplies in to Hidden Lodge but he did "overtime" there, too, taking time off to get better acquainted with Sybil, to whom he was immediately attracted upon first seeing her.

Giles Statler, meanwhile, remained the constantly-congenial and perfect gentleman that he had ever been; but to David's observant eye, the man was deeply troubled. Beneath the surface of apparent joviality and congeniality was an aching, yearning heart--a heart that was not satisfied with the air of pretense and sham.

David watched his uncle carefully, never allowing him to know what he was doing, and one beautiful day in late February as the tall, kind man stood in front of the wall-to-ceiling windows, staring out upon the rugged landscape and the jagged, towering mountain peaks in the distance, David approached him.

"I never cease to be amazed at God's handiwork, Uncle Giles," he said. "No wonder David the Psalmist declared, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.' There's something durable, for the present at least, about the hills."

"What do you mean, David, by 'for the present, at least'? Why, those hills and mountains have been there for centuries and centuries, and they'll still be there for countless ages after you and I have ceased to be here."

"Not according to God's Word; the day is coming when every mountain and hill shall be removed, when the islands and the sea shall flee away. It's going to be a terrible day, this day when the Lord's wrath is spewed out upon the whole world."

"But how can this be, David?"
The Word tells us, 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.' This seems like an utter impossibility in man's way of thinking and calculating. But we must remember that God is not like man; He is all-powerful and almighty, and what He declares and says He will do will certainly come to pass in His time. The prophet Haggai, Chapter 2:6, realized this when he declared that God would indeed shake the heavens and the earth. And it will happen, Uncle Giles. Yes, just as surely as we know that God cannot lie, so surely will these majestic and magnificent mountains' be shaken down and disappear from sight.

The man continued staring. After a while he said, "David do you have a bit of spare time?"

David smiled. "Basically, that's all I've had since I came here. I'd still appreciate being hired to do some sort of employment while I'm here. I was not brought up to be a 'freeloader,' Uncle Giles."

Giles Statler patted his nephew gently on the shoulder. "You are not 'freeloading,' my fine young man; you have repaid me in manifold ways--ways in which you have had no idea. But come into my office, I want to talk to you."

Once inside the office, Giles sat facing David. Without preamble, and not wasting any time, he said, "I'll come directly to the point. I'm a wretchedly-miserable man. On the inside, I hurt. I've been hurting like this for years. But always, until you came here, I was able to drown the hurt and the pain by keeping busy here at the lodge. Since your arrival, however, and your father's letter to me, the hurt and the ache inside has nearly killed me."

David sat deathly still and silent. God was moving mightily upon his uncle's heart; tears were swimming in the deeply-set, sky-blue eyes.

"First of all," the man continued, "I want you to know what the 'wrong' was that I had done against your dear father, my brother. He fell in love with an Anna Kiplinger. They planned to be married. And that's when I felt it would be fun to see if I could attract her attention. I hadn't meant it to become serious, David, not at all. It was one of my 'evil streaks' that sort of dared me to do it. Well, before I realized what was happening almost, I was in love with the dark-haired Anna, too.

"I felt I couldn't live without her; so I pursued her and won her away from my brother. We were married a few months after the time set by my brother and her for their wedding. Our marriage was short-lived, however; she died two years later giving birth to our first child, a son, who also passed away.

"Bereft of the woman I loved and the son whose coming I so eagerly (and almost impatiently) anticipated and looked forward to, I began checking brochures and papers
and magazines for a business in some obscure and out of the way place, wanting
desperately to get away from everything and every one familiar and close to me. Your
father, meantime, met and married your godly and wonderful mother.

"I saw a 'for sale' ad in an Eastern publication of some kind, for available land. I
decided to check into it and see if it was worth buying. When I got here and saw the
beauty of these mountains and the glory and majesty of this hidden valley and its
ruggedly beautiful terrain and surroundings, I knew instinctively that . it would be mine.

"I bought the land from the Wamseurs, who lived here for years prior to his
preaching engagements. Both Rev. Wamseur and his wife's parents were natives of this
valley. I saw the potential of Hidden Lodge and, thanks to my dream and many hours of
long, hard and cold work, it has been a lucrative business, a truly rewarding business
venture.

"Having been taught the evils of alcoholic beverages, I decided my lodge would
serve no beverages stronger than hot tea or coffee. To compensate for this, and to
attract tourists here, I decided upon the helicopter as a means of transporting my guests
up to the very summit of the mountains where they could ski in knee-deep, powdery,
puffy, pure virgin snow, free from any and all trails and/or hard-packed runs and slopes.

"Well, David, my ideas have paid off handsomely. Today I am a wealthy man--a
wealthy man with a heavy, guilty and sin-burdened heart, made acutely so since your
coming, and now, more recently, by Sybil's marvelous transformation and heart-change.
It's almost unbelievable, the total and complete change in that girl. She's constantly
seeing if there isn't some little thing she can do for me, to repay me for what help I gave
her. And... and while this is a bit embarrassing to me, she asked would I allow her to call
me 'Dad' in private. Frankly, I like the idea; but I suppose {like I'd done with so many
other things when I lost my wife and our son} I built up inhibitions and prejudices against
anyone ever calling me 'dad' or 'father.' But how could I deny her this simple request! So
now, I am 'Dad'."

"She's devoted to you, Uncle Giles, and her devotion is sincere and earnest.
Sybil's a beautiful young Christian. You can be proud of her as a 'daughter'."

"This I can, for a fact. And David," the man cried suddenly in anguish of soul and
heart, "I feel so all alone--so left out of what you young people enjoy and experience in
Christ. I know what it's all about; I once was a true Christian. I want to get back; will you
help me, please?"

Hardly able to speak because of his emotions, David whispered hoarsely, "Gladly,
Uncle Giles. Gladly! I know Someone Who's been waiting a long, long time to welcome
you back..."
For the first time in the history of the lodge, the walls of the office rang with the pleas and the cries of the sinner and the saint. Prayer was earnest and importunate and when the man finally jumped to his feet and hugged his nephew soundly and happily, saying, "I'm saved! I'm saved! I'm saved!" David knew it was true. The work was done; Giles Statler was a new creature in Christ. The unmistakably beautiful evidence was shining all over his face the way it shone through Sybil's!

The good news spread to Sybil and Gail; from there it went to the Keathmorings and the Wamseurs, reaching, finally, Chuck's ears as he flew into the lodge with a load of supplies on Thursday.

"We need to have a prayer and praise meeting," the young pilot suggested to Sybil and Gail and David as they sat around a table in the dining room eating.

"The Wamseurs would be delighted to have us," Gail volunteered quickly. "But their tiny living room is hardly big enough to accommodate everybody anymore. The Keathmorings wouldn't think of missing anything so important. Honestly, it's amazing how they are growing spiritually since they got sanctified wholly."

"Look at this tiny gem!" Chuck exclaimed, touching Sybil lightly on the arm. "She's growing by leaps and bounds since she died out to Sybil. I think we should have a 'Leaps and Bounds' Sunday school class for Sybil, the Keathmorings and now Mr. Statler."

"Say, I have an idea!" David exclaimed brightly. "I'm sure my uncle will be in favor of it. Excuse me, please, while I look him up and ask him."

He was gone only a short while, and when he returned his face was beaming. "It's all settled," he told them triumphantly. "The Chapel--from here on out--will have two Sunday services and a weekly midweek prayer and praise service. The newly installed pastor is Rev. Roscoe Wamseur!"

"Really!" the group exclaimed with shining faces. "My uncle doesn't waste time when he once decides how things ought to be. Seems he went to the chaplain right after his conversion and told him what had taken place in his heart. He told Uncle Giles he knew what he wanted and what he didn't want and one thing he didn't want--for sure--was to become a fanatic! Without further word, he resigned. God cleared the way so an old-fashioned holiness preacher could fill the vacancy. Souls will now be able to hear the truth proclaimed from Uncle's beautiful little chapel--the once-formal, now-alive chapel, for God will meet us there."

Sybil closed her eyes and smiled. It was all just like her wonderful Lord.

As usual, spring came late to the valley and Hidden Lodge. But when it arrived it was, as Giles Statler stated, a never-to-be-forgotten event and sight. Water from melting snows gushed in frothy, foamy-white falls down the craggy mountain side and emptied...
into a rushing, gurgling stream that was loaded with tasty, tempting rainbow trout which made many an excellent meal for the guests who chose to remain for the arrival of the warm weather and the pageantry of color and beauty.

Everywhere the eye looked, there was beauty: dog-tooth and regular purple and pink violets wove carpets fit for the fairest lady's dainty feet to walk over; dogwood and mountain laurel decked out in delicate shades of pinks, reds and white, while everywhere the ground seemed covered with buttercups, hepaticas, wild geranium, dainty blue forget-me-nots, trilliums, wild slippers and delicate ferns.

Beneath a specially constructed arch on the back lawn, decorated beautifully in a multiplicity of the freshly gathered fern and wild flowers, two couples joined hands.

"Do you, Charles Lansdowe, take Sybil Statler to be thy lawful and wedded wife...?"

"Do you David Statler, take Gail...?"

It was a most impressive double wedding ceremony, God-centered and God-owned from start to finish. The minister, aging in years but youthful in spirit, admonished and instructed the young couples on God's formula for a happy marriage and the Keathmorings, standing by as attendants, held hands tightly and smiled understandingly into each other's eyes.

Giles Statler, smiling fondly upon his "daughter" and new "son-in-law" gave the couple his special blessings and benediction. Then, hugging Giles fondly, Chuck helped Sybil into the plane and started the engine. He was ready to begin fulfilling God's special calling for his life, and with Sybil working beside him and with him, the many duties would be nothing short of pleasure and enjoyment.

Watching until the plane was no longer visible, David turned to Gaff. "Congratulations, Mrs. Statler. How do you like the name?" he asked.

"It fits me like a glove. And now, how about some lunch? I may as well get used to cooking," she teased. "The table's already set in our small cottage. In fact, I put five place settings down . . . Uncle Giles, the Keathmorings, you and me."

Giles stepped forward. "Nothing doing! On your wedding day? Ridiculous! Into the dining room, all of you. Everything's planned and made ready. Too bad Sybil and Chuck couldn't have stayed, but orders are orders and the missions board was really quite kind and generous to allow him a two day delay..."

Smiling, Gaff slipped her hand into her husband's, happy that David and she would be living in the valley.
Winters would come and winters would go, she knew, but always . . . until Jesus returned . . . there would be spring. And what a spring! Especially now that Uncle Giles was planning on turning Hidden Lodge into a retirement center for truly born again and sanctified wholly people. It would be a little bit of heaven on earth..., campmeetings, revivals and Bible conferences.

She squeezed David's hand. "Happy?" he whispered. "Transported!" she exclaimed.

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THE END