Robb drove the big Buick slowly down the dusty lane. Scenes too haunting and familiar unfolded before his view with every turn of the road. Tears stung his eyes. In great disgust, he brushed them away. He must not cry--he must not. Hadn't his college professor told him it was a sign of little courage and great weakness to cry. He would steel himself. He braced himself behind the wheel as he tried hard to concentrate on Jennifer. At times, he felt he couldn't live without her, and at other times, he could scarcely stand the sight of her. Today was one of those days when the thought of her was repulsive and obnoxious.

He stepped heavily on the accelerator and the big car sped rapidly down the road, stirring up the dirt and dust and laying a blanket of brown on every blade of grass and grain nearby. Why did he ever make such a foolish promise? he wondered as he saw the speedometer register the sixty-five mark. Without thinking, he slowed down. Esther's voice seemed to be speaking again.

"Robb, you will take care of Mother's grave? Won't you? Please, Robb," she had pleaded so earnestly, so pitifully as she squeezed his hand. "She was all I had--all you had, really, Robb, and she loved you. Ah! How deeply she loved you! Promise me, dear Robb. Please--will you promise?" and her voice weakened.
He had promised and, in spite of his new teaching in college, he felt he was weakening. He must not [He would not] He had learned "better" -- he had learned differently from what Mother had taught.

Robb had nothing more than a faint recollection of his father. He was but three when a freak accident had wiped the bread-winner's life out. Esther was but a small infant in arms and Robb's mother was left a widow with no money nor insurance coverage. She taught her children at an early age the value of prayer. Weekly, Robb and Esther had seen God work miracles in the humble home through Mother's earnest, faith-soaring prayers. The house payment was met monthly and always there was wholesome food on the table in answer to Mother's intercessory prayers. She had had such high hopes for Robb. "Someday God will be needing you in the ministry," she said solemnly.

"No, Mother. Never!" he had answered the day he left for college. "No preacher--never! I had enough poverty. I shall study law and become a lawyer and you will never lack for money. My own hands shall provide for you and Esther." He said it proudly as he kissed them good-bye.

It all seemed like such a very short time ago. Now he was left alone. Entirely so. Mother was called Home three years ago. Esther remained on at the home-place, always paying special attention to Mother's grave on the hilltop cemetery just to the north of the old homestead until she was hit by a car and laid up for months in Hillvale Hospital where she finally passed away. It was Sam Hope who had called him.

"Robb," he said brokenly, "can you come home? Esther's pretty bad off. Don't know if she'll make it. She's calling for you." And he had gone home that same night. That's when he promised Esther. The thought of his godly sister sent another shower coursing down his cheeks. Good thing his college professor wasn't around or he'd think Robb had had no courage at all. But he wasn't around, and Robb began sobbing bitterly. How he had missed Mother and Esther! The ache in his lonely heart became a painful hurt and wound.

Suddenly the old home-place loomed up before him. It was freshly painted and Esther's flowers were in full bloom all around and on either side of the white picket fence. But then, he might have known things would not have changed; Sam had bought the place since Esther passed away and he would see to it that it remained the way she had kept it. Poor Sam!

The thought of Sam helped ease his own hurt slightly. Sam and Esther would have been married by now if death had not claimed her. A good husband he would have made her, too. He believed just like Esther and Robb's mother. Sam was a deeply spiritual man.
Robb drove leisurely by the dear place. There was no sign of Sam. Perhaps he would stop by on his way back from the cemetery. Slowly he wound up the road to the top of the hill where the neatly kept cemetery stood, guarded on all sides by tall sentinels of Lombardy poplars. As he entered the silent city of the dead, an errant breeze caught playfully in the poplar leaves, shaking them soundly and making them rustle and quake from top to bottom. High in a blue spruce, near to where Mother's beloved form was resting, a dove cooed softly, sadly, as though in mourning for the inhabitants.

Robb parked the car. As he stepped softly and lightly down the grassy road, a covey of quail flew up in front of him. Far to his right, he heard the clear, distinct whistle of another partridge. On the electric light wire to his left, a shiny blue bunting was rejoicing lustily. Suddenly, every fiber within him seemed to come alive; this was where he belonged. College, and the stuffy surroundings of the big city, had made him forget what living really was.

He paused for a long while, listening to and enjoying the sounds of the country. In his hands, he carried three expensive wreaths of flowers. Reverently, he made his way to the plot of ground where the name "Rockwell" was inscribed on a small stone. All the emotions and pent-up feelings of bygone months seemed to suddenly break loose. His body shook violently from his weepings. "Mother! Oh, Mother!" he cried aloud, then flung himself upon her grassy mound. "I love you, dear Mother! I love you!"

The dove in the tree continued her soft mourning as though weeping with him.

As he lay prostrate upon the cool earth and grass, a voice seemed to be speaking -- a voice from the past, but a voice he would recognize anywhere,

"Robb! Dear, dear Robb. You will give Jesus your heart, won't you? What good is law, and what good is money without my God? I shall be praying for you, yea, interceding, pleading and begging God for your deliverance from sin. God can help you find the path from which you strayed. Believe me, Robb, there is no other way but being born again and then, after the new birth, obtaining holiness of heart. This is the way, Robb. Your new teachings are false and wrong. Someday you'll come to find your mother's God."

"Oh, Mother! How could I have broken your loving heart by believing and embracing something so false! Oh, Mother! I helped put you to this grave with a broken heart. Forgive me. Forgive me, please!" Robb said hoarsely.

"Ask the Saviour to forgive you, Robb," and Sam's hand came down lovingly on the young man's back.

"Sam! Oh, Sam! I'm a wretched sinner. Can Christ forgive such as I? Can He?" and Robb lifted swollen, tear-stained eyes to meet those of his friend. "Can He, Sam? Tell me the truth," he begged.
"'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins; and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'" Sam, who was on his knees, quoted Scripture after Scripture.

"But how does one believe after embracing what I embraced? Oh, Sam, sometimes I fear I'm too far gone," and Robb sobbed loud, broken sobs.

"There's only one way, Robb old boy, and that's to pray clear through. It's the way of the cross that leads Home. Remember how your mother used to sing that song?"

"Remember? How could I ever forget! At night her prayers, and her sweet voice and Esther's, haunted me. They troubled my sleep and dogged my every step in the daytime. Remember? Ah, yes, I remembered! Would to God I could hear them now as then. '

"Someday," Sam began brokenly, casting a loving, tender glance to the beloved Esther's grave, "we shall hear their sweet voices again, but only if you become born anew."

"I want it, Sam. I want it badly. I'm tired of this other way. It has left me with nothing but emptiness and an aching void. I want Mother's God!" and he raised his form heavenward, confessing and repenting from the bottom of his heart.

The atmosphere was pregnant with fighting demons who tried to stop his loud praying with the college professor's rationalization, but to no avail. All the promises he had learned from the Holy Book as a boy kept flooding his hungry soul, imploring, pleading for him to embrace them. Suddenly, like a flash of light from the skies above, his faith took hold on God and, like Jacob of old, he prevailed, and the joy and peace of the new birth flooded his soul. Again he prostrated his body on his mother's grave and, kissing the cold earth, he shouted:

"He's answered your prayer, Mother dear. I'm saved by grace divine. Oh, yes, Mother, God shall have another servant in His whitened harvest field. His call to preach has been on me since I was a boy of seven."

"Somehow," Sam began in almost a whisper, "it seems as though I can hear Esther and your mother shouting and rejoicing."

"The wreaths!" Robb said, noticing the crushed circlets of flowers. "I was in such distress of soul and mind I forgot I had the wreaths."

"Never you mind," Sam said. "They're earthy and would soon have faded and spoiled. You have placed a far greater garland of flowers on these humble graves than
anything you could have bought. See those indentations--those impressions?” and he pointed to where Robb had knelt and had struggled in prayer.

"Why . . . yes," Robb said, noticing the two marks where his knees had crushed and lain the grass low. "Mother will understand. Yes, she'll understand and rejoice." He wept for joy and a vesper sparrow rejoiced with him from a perch high on a leafy maple tree.

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THE END