A Special Thanksgiving
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CHAPTER 1

Peter Kingsford stood inside the mammoth farm kitchen looking through one of the five windows to the snow-covered fields that sloped gently away from the two and one-half acre expanse of lawn around the house. His mind felt muddled in a confused sort of way and the lines that furrowed and ridged his youthful brow helped only to accentuate the feeling.

"I must not think!" he exclaimed aloud, thrusting his hand containing the letter into his pants' pocket.

Pumpkin, the Persian cat, thinking her master was addressing her, sidled over to where Peter stood and rubbed her body along his leg, purring softly and contentedly.

Totally oblivious of the big yellow cat, Peter continued staring through the window, wondering what good or ill the future held but thankful beyond measure that he didn't know and could not see that far. God, he knew, was too good and kind to allow any of His dear children to see what was to come, of trouble or sorrow, in the days ahead. His grace, Peter knew, was sufficient for each and every one of his todays. This was all he needed.

A northeast wind blew across the fields, sending the powder-soft snow over the land in a wall of white before dropping it and mounding it into marshmallow drifts along the road and around the trees and fence posts. The wind was a restless thing, he
thought, watching its activity from the warmth of the kitchen. And since receiving Philip's letter in the morning mail, his heart felt a bit restless, too, a thing he totally disliked. He was not given to inner restlessness, not since the day he settled things between God and himself.

He leaned over the countertop and watched the driving, swirling, drifting snow as it obliterated his view between the house, the barn and the feed lot, where healthy, fat, well-fed beef cattle meandered contentedly and nonchalantly between the grain bins and the fragrant, succulent alfalfa feeders.

The smell of browning biscuits made him do a quick about-face and sent him scurrying to the oven to check on his buttermilk creations to see if they were ready for the table. Finding them browned perfectly to his liking and his taste, he removed them from the oven. Lifting a skillet lid, he forked tender-simmered steak out of its mushroom gravy and set it on the table. Lightly-browned whole potatoes and sprigs of tender asparagus completed his meal.

Peter sighed, a thing he often did anymore. He missed his parents; oh how he missed them! His mother's fine cooking, too. But he would not dare to wish them back even; they were safe Home, free from the pain and heartache, the hurt and tears, of Philip's straying from the faith--of his sin and eventual exodus out of his and Jean's life.

At thought of Jean, Peter became excited. One week, he thought quickly and joyously, and his young sister would be home for Thanksgiving. How good it would be to have her around again. Jean was sunshine and happiness, a true example of a godly young woman. It was because of her, and her desire to go to Bible School, that he had forfeited his own plans and ambitions of studying law and had remained on the farm, a thing he had never intended doing. Philip was the farmer--Philip and their father. And until he'd gotten in with the wrong crowd, Philip's entire life was wrapped up in the vocation of his choosing and liking.

Thanking God for the good food, Peter ate, recalling how God's timing (of keeping him on the farm instead of going away and following his own desires and wishes . . . his ambitions and pursuits) had been the very thing he needed to bring him into a personal and vital relationship with his Maker. Not that he had been irreligious and unchurched. He hadn't. All his life he had gone to church. It was as much a part of the family as was the family itself. But he had had nothing more than a head knowledge of God until Philip's sudden disappearance and the hastily scrawled note, stating that he was "fed up with farming" and had left to try his wings.

A tear slid from the corner of Peter's eye. He breathed a fervent prayer for his wayward brother. Then he thanked God for the cross caused by Philip, and for the fact that that self-same cross had brought him to his knees and he had been soundly converted and sanctified wholly, too. Today, he was settled, rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus and established solidly upon The Rock.
After the dishes were washed and put away, Peter removed the letter from his pocket. Spreading it before the Lord as Hezekiah had done in 2 Kings 19:14, he poured his inmost soul out to God. What Philip's return home would mean, or do, to Jean's and his Thanksgiving Day he didn't know. But whatever it involved, Peter wanted his brother's salvation at any cost. It had given a new twist to his plans, to be sure... especially since Jean had written she was bringing one of her girlfriends home and a couple who had no place to go. But God could make good come out of it all, he knew. He must believe this. And God could quiet this restless, apprehensive feeling which came with the reading of the letter, too.

A loud knock on the door brought him quickly to his feet. It was Mr. Johns, owner of the farm next to his. "Melissa's sick!" the neighbor exclaimed between chattering teeth. "Her fever's 104. Helen's almost beside herself with fear. Thinks the child has pneumonia. We called the doctor and he said to take her to the hospital immediately. But I can't get out of the lane; it's drifted shut. Do you suppose you could help to shovel it open so I can get Melissa to the hospital?"

"Be glad to, Marvin," Peter answered, hurrying away after his insulated jacket, boots and socks.

"I tried calling you," Mr. Johns remarked, "but your phone's dead. The line must be down somewhere. Better button up tight, that wind's bitter cold."

Pumpkin followed her master as far as the door then backed away when the cold air hit her. Hurrying to the brightly braided rug near the heat register she curled up on its warmth, casting only a casual glance after Peter's retreating figure.

Peter smiled, knowing the cat's dislike for cold weather. She had been a pet of his mother's, coming to the farm years ago from seemingly nowhere. His parents surmised she'd been dropped off by someone who knew his mother's many kindnesses to animals. At any rate, Pumpkin and his mother became fast friends. Without any coaxing whatever, the cat laid claim to the braided rug upon her first visit inside and she had claimed the pretty rug ever since.

Walking beside Mr. Johns, Peter saw the worried look in the man's blue eyes, the lines of concern and anxiety on his face. Pity and sympathy washed up from his soul. Above the whining of the wind, he said, "God isn't dead, Marvin. He can help Melissa."

"You can if you will. 'He that cometh to God must believe that He--God--is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him,' " Peter quoted above the wind's noise, pulling the cap with its warm earflaps farther down over his head.
Mr. Johns was silent for a long while, keeping perfect step with his youthful companion. After some thought, he said, "Peter, I've never been a deeply religious man--as you well know. But your parents and you and Jean, well..." His voice trailed. Again there was silence. "You... well, you folks are different."

He blurted the stammering sentence with such fierce intensity that it almost shocked Peter. The neighbor's next words lifted his hopes high. God was moving, the young man realized. He had "His way in the storm." Indeed He did. . . Melissa's physical "storm" and her struggle for life.

"Let's go by the house and..., and you pray for our little girl. Please, Peter?"

Peter's pulse rate quickened. "Gladly, Marvin. O lady!"

It was hard walking. The snow, mounding and drifting but not yet crusted over to bear their weight and hold them up, broke through with every step they took and before long Marvin was panting for breath.

"Go ahead, Peter," he said at last. "Tell Helen I'll be along. I... I must stop and..., and rest a bit."

"Nothing doing!" Peter exclaimed. "You'll freeze to death out here, Mr. Johns. We'll go slower. I want you to walk behind me. I'll break the wind. You walk in the path I make. It won't be a good one, I'm afraid, but at least the walking should be easier for you. And with the wind not slapping your breath down your throat, well, that'll help the breathing considerably. The walk over here has you exhausted. Now follow me," he ordered, stepping in front of the older man.

The wind was wicked, Peter thought, burying his chin deep into the upturned coat collar as he dragged his feet in an attempt to make some semblance of a path for the weary man behind him.

By the time he reached the John's kitchen door, Marvin was completely exhausted.

"Give your husband a cup of hot tea or broth," Peter said, removing the man's boots and coat before sliding a hassock under his feet near the chair in which his neighbor sat, half-sitting, half-lying down.

Helen's eyes were red from weeping. They had the same tortured look Peter had seen in Marvin's eyes. Melissa was an only child--a much-loved, long-awaited-for child. She had come along late in life for the couple. She was a beautiful child, with an equally beautiful disposition, and was known for miles around as "the little angel of the valley."
Marvin opened his eyes and pushed himself forward in the overstuffed chair. Pointing to a room down the hallway, he said in a weak voice, "Go, Peter. Pray, please."

Relieved at hearing the softly-spoken command, Helen led the way along the hallway of the beautifully-planned, modern, new house to a cheerful bedroom. In her own little bed, her long golden curls the color of burnished sunlight in late afternoon, lay Melissa, her face bright with fever, her eyes closed somberly.

Helen Johns put a cool hand on the hot face then fled from the room, tears gushing from her eyes.

"Oh, God!" Peter cried softly heavenward. "Perform a miracle. Today. In this house. May this be the turning point in my neighbors' lives. Please, God! Please!"

Getting on his knees beside the spotlessly-clean bed with its critically-ill treasure, Peter cried aloud to the Lord for healing. It was not a lengthy prayer, by his usual standard of praying, but he knew he had reached through to the ear of God. That was his prime objective. His only objective, to be sure.

Confident that his prayer was heard and expecting a miracle of some sort, he hurried out of the room. Kneeling beside Marvin's chair, he offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God for Melissa's healing and one for his neighbor as well.

"I don't believe you'll need to go to the hospital," he told the couple. "But if it will make you feel better, I'll shovel the lane. You'll not be needing it open, though, until the snowplow can get through. I believe God."

Marvin Johns looked at his wife. In a weak voice he said, "Better try opening it, Peter."

Smiling confidently, Peter said, "You won't be needing it open, Marvin. But, to satisfy you, I'll begin. Wave for me from the kitchen door when Melissa gets up."

The wind tore at his coat and whipped around his legs as he headed for the lane with a shovel.

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CHAPTER 2

Snow swirled dizzily around Peter as he made his tedious way to the lane. The wind, having risen considerably since Marvin and he entered the house, seemed more angry than ever as it hammered his back and smashed its icy fist down his throat, almost sucking the breath out of his lungs. There was no need for his shoveling, he knew; in the
room, on his knees, God had assured his heart that Melissa was going to be healed. He knew this. But Marvin had asked him to do it, nonetheless.

Poor Marvin! Peter thought, plunging the shovel into the deeply-drifted snow. His faith was nil. But, then, Marvin Johns was not a Christian either. His utter reliance in any emergency of sickness had been upon his doctor. He had had no idea of the power and might of his heavenly Creator.

Peter groaned with the wind, asking God to make a believer out of his neighbors. . . through the miracle of healing.

He turned every few minutes and looked toward the kitchen door, which was now little more than a blurry haze because of the drifting snow. His effort at opening the lane was totally futile; the shoveled part drifted over, full and smooth and even, almost as fast as he dug it out. His feet felt numb with cold, much like they were two hard stumps upon which the rest of his six-foot-three frame was resting.

Thanking God for the promised miracle, he turned his gaze once more toward the farmhouse door. This time, he was rewarded. Helen, looking for the world like a blurry, gyrating puppet in full motion, was waving frantically, trying to get his attention.

Lifting the shovel skyward and swinging it above his head in understanding, Peter answered her summons. Then, dropping it lightly over his shoulder, he started for the house, praising God as he went.

He wasn't fully inside the door when Melissa came running to him with open arms. "I'm not sick anymore," she said, laughing and looking the picture of health. "You told Jesus about me, Peter. I heard you; only I thought it was an angel talking to God. Feel my head," she said. "It's not hot anymore. And my head doesn't hurt either. Nor my chest. I felt it when Jesus put His kind hands on me and made me well. Oh, He is so very kind! And Peter, if Daddy and Mommie will let me, I want to go to church with you. I love Jesus very, very much..."

In an emotion-packed voice, Marvin Johns said, "We'll all be going to church, Melissa. Yes, we'll all go... you, your mother and I. We owe so much to God and I mean to begin paying Him."

"Money can't buy--nor pay--that debt, Marvin," Peter stated kindly. "The greatest thing you and Helen can do is to get saved. Be converted. Give God your heart and life."

Marvin's face brightened. "I did that Peter. Half an hour ago I confessed my sins and asked Him into my heart. He heard my prayer; I'm a new man... a forgiven man. I've never felt so happy..."
A premature dusk enveloped the land by the time Peter reached home, tired, numb with cold, but extremely happy. Checking the steers in the feed lot and gathering the eggs in the hen house, he made his way into the house, thankful beyond measure for the warmth of the house . . . the blessing of automatic heat.

He ate a quick but hearty supper of reheated food ... bits of this and that from the refrigerator.., then he fed Pumpkin, showered and went to bed, forgetful entirely of the disturbing letter from his brother.

All night the storm raged. On and on it went. By the morning of the third day, Peter, not used to being house-bound so long, decided to take a walk to the woods. So long as he followed the fence to the north of the big-forty, he was safe; the field (and the fence) snuggled up tight against the woods’ back. So, donning his heavy insulated clothes, he set out. The smothering storm swirled around him and, looking back, he saw that even in a few minutes the wind had blown snow smoothly over his tracks, leaving no trace whatever to show that he had passed that way.

"Worst blizzard in a hundred years," the radio weatherman had announced that morning and Peter, keeping hold of the fence as he walked, felt sure the announcement was the truth.

The woods was deathly silent when he reached its edge. Save for the moaning, shrieking, whining, whistling wind through the tree tops all was silent. It was awesome--to a point of intense feeling even--as though the trees were waiting with an air of restiveness, wondering how much more they could take, how much longer the storm's fury would be unleashed upon them and their naked branches.

With his head bent against the bite of the wind now, Peter started homeward, never loosening his hand-hold on the fence, his life-saving link between death and the warmth, the safety, shelter and security of the big farmhouse.

At the end of the fence, Peter followed the row of butternut trees until he reached the zig-zag fence surrounding the lawn. Heaving a sigh of relief, he stumbled up the steps to the enclosed back porch. The snowstorm whistled in thwarted fury outside the door, and the young man thanked God that he was not lost somewhere in the midst of it.

Pumpkin welcomed him inside the house with a louder-than-usual "Meow," an unmistakable declaration that even big, furry, yellow, fluffy cats get weary of long, drawn-out storms. Stooping to stroke her silk fur, Peter was thankful that the cat had been there. She made it her business to welcome him each time he returned inside from the outdoors. She was his welcoming committee of one, to be sure, but she did a good job of letting him know just how glad she was to have him around after he had been gone for some time.
He put more food into her dish, gave her some milk, and prepared a hot meal for himself then left for the barn and a quick check on the livestock, thankful beyond measure that the beef cattle were not out in the blizzard.

He went to bed early that night and awoke the following morning to a room full of sunlight. The storm was over; it had blown itself out, he knew.

He hurried to the window and looked out on a world of white. The land was locked in snow. A snow so shimmering, glimmering white as to dazzle one’s eyes. Peter gasped at the sight—at the ten and twelve-foot high drifts, too. It would take more than a snow plow to dig the lane open, he decided, dressing and making the bed before hurrying downstairs.

By mid-afternoon, he saw the first hint of activity since the storm unleashed its intense fury on the land . . . a lone figure, far in the distance, walking across the seeming endless expanse of white. It was a sad scene, Peter thought, sad and strangely unfamiliar compared to the much-activity and the hum of tractors and the comings and goings of the farmers from early spring to late fall.

Thinking of noise, activity and laughter, Peter remembered that Jean and her friends would soon be filling the house with it. Oh, it would be good to have them all there. It would be much like old times again, times like when his father and mother and brother were all home. He had so many happy memories of his saintly parents. Such wholesome, joyous times they’d all had together until Philip backslid and wandered away.

Peter busied himself with cleaning floors and carpets, polishing furniture and checking the pantry shelves to see what he must buy when the lane was open and he could get to the grocery store. The two deep freezers held all the meat they’d need, even to the traditional Thanksgiving turkey; and the smoke house with its bounty of home-cured hams, bacons, sausages and dried beef would be a most welcome addition—a feast and a treat—for Jean’s friends.

Going to the south window and looking at the white fields..., the one in which he had seen the lone figure walking, especially... Peter saw no one—nothing but the eye-dazzling, shimmering, glistening snow. One of the distant neighbors..., or one of their children... he decided, continuing with the housework until he was finished and knew that it would, without a doubt, meet Jean’s super-clean standards of house-cleaning and pass the inspection of her equally super-critical eye.

Like his fastidious mother, his sister had a penchant for cleanliness total and complete cleanliness . . . not only of the heart, soul, body and mind but of one’s house as well, her mother having been her example and her teacher.
Tired, but satisfied with his work, Peter set the tea kettle on the burner. A cup of steaming-hot spearmint tea would be the very refresher he needed, he decided, spooning dried leaves into a container for steeping.

A knock on the door startled him. Who could it be? he wondered, going quickly to find out.

Upon opening the door, he saw a man--clean, freshly-shaven, but ragged. He started to speak, then clutched the door knob, feeling faint and weak.

"Philip!" he exclaimed in a reverent whisper. "Philip!"

"Peter!"

They fell into each other's arms and wept. "Come inside," Peter said huskily when he had recovered from weeping. "You'll catch pneumonia sure enough if you stay out there too long. Where did you come from?" he asked. "How did you get here? The lane's drifted shut. Tight shut. Won't get anything through for days, the way it looks."

"I... I walked, Peter."

"Walked? It's a wonder you didn't freeze in those ... those clothes." Peter almost said "rags," but was glad he hadn't. His brother looked beat, cowed even.

Philip raised his eyes to meet his brother's. "Pete," he said, addressing Peter in the old familiar way, "I . . . I know I'm not deserving nor worthy to ask this of you, but do you think you can forgive me enough to allow me to stay here? At home again? I know I disappointed all of you terribly. Hurt you even. Morn and Dad especially! But I've changed, Peter; I have. Believe me. Look at me, long and hard, and see what sin has done to me. I left home with money, a good car and fine clothes; I return penniless, ragged, car-less and . . . and friendless, too ... except for Jesus, who is all I need. And you and Jean, if you'll have me back. I've learned my lessons, Pete, the hard way. Satan is a cruel taskmaster. It was his cruelty that made me flee to the Father, begging forgiveness in Jesus' name."

Broken and weeping, Peter asked quickly, "When did you get saved, Philip? Your letter . . . it . . . it didn't sound like you knew Jesus then. You . . . had me troubled. Terribly so. Especially so since it was the first and only time anyone heard from you since you left home. I prayed for you, Phil. O how I prayed! Told God that at any cost you must get saved."

Philip's head was bowed in humble contrition. "A day and a half ago," he said, "in a frigid boxcar I cried out to God for mercy and He heard me. I got saved in that boxcar, Pete. Imagine it--saved in a boxcar! But where's Jeanie?" he asked suddenly.
"In Bible School, Phil. She's due home soon, the Lord willing. Thanksgiving holiday, you know. And will she ever be happy to see you!"

"Do you think so?" Philip asked quickly, his eyes still downcast. "Like I wrote in that letter, I had full intentions of coming home only to give you more heartache and trouble then leave again. But God changed everything. He got me "in a corner" and I had no way to turn but to Him." Philip shuddered, remembering. "In a sealed, locked freight car! I may well have been just another statistic. But God... !" he exclaimed tearfully, joyously.

All Peter could do was weep and say softly, "Thank God, Philip! Thank God! Your room is waiting upstairs. The clothes you left are still in the closet and the drawers. The home is as much yours as it is Jean's and mine. Run along and shower; then get into some clean clothes. You'll feel better."

Philip's shoulders shook with weeping as he started up the stairs.

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CHAPTER 3

Returning downstairs a short time later, Philip looked indeed new. The clothes he'd left behind, when he made his hasty departure three years ago, fit him perfectly and became his "new nature" ideally. His eyes, shining with pure joy and perfect delight, took in the old familiar house and its accompanying familiar furnishings. It was almost too good to be true, he thought, more like a dream than beautiful reality.

Pumpkin uncurled herself from the braided rug then meandered nonchalantly over to where Philip stood. Rubbing her furry head against his leg, she meowed in her friendly way. Then, just as quickly, she left his side for the warmth of the rug again. It was the cat's way of saying she was glad to see him, Phil knew—a thing she had always done when any of the family was out and returned home. He felt warm inside. It was a good warmth.

"Hungry?" Peter's voice brought the brother's thoughts quickly back to the present.

"Food sounds good, Peter. And whatever it is you're cooking smells even better." A faint smile crossed Phil's mouth with the utterance of the words, the first Peter had seen since his arrival.

"Freshly sliced fried potatoes with onions, fried steak, frozen lima beans and buttered carrots," Peter announced, setting the table. "I remember what you liked."

Over the meal, Philip said, "I . . . I wonder if I could bring Jo here . . . if she'll come? Jo and Mark. I'm a married man, Peter, a married man with a ten-month-old son.
I left Jo ... my fault, not hers., because she kept tolling me to change, to stop running around. She's a great girl, Pete. She'll be glad to hear I've changed."

Peter looked at his brother. "You mean you haven't called your wife?" he asked quickly. "When did you leave her? When were you married?"

"Four months ago I left her. Been married two years."

"How is she living and..., and supporting your son?"

Philip's head went down. "I don't know, Pete; I honestly don't know. I've wanted to go back to her, to beg her forgiveness. But my stubborn will and foolish pride have kept me away."

"But you're different now, Phil. By all means, get in touch with your wife. The marriage vow is a sacred, binding thing. A 'for life' contract. You belong to her; she belongs with you and to you."

"Do you mind if she comes here, too? If she'll take me back, that is! I thought I could fix that house up back near the woods. Jo and Mark and I could live there, God willing. I... I want to get back to farming," Philip confessed. "I love working the land and helping take care of livestock, and Jo'll love it, too. So will Mark when he's older."

Peter leaned back in his chair. "That's great news, Phil; really great news. I need farm help desperately. We'll be partners again, like we used to be. As to the house near the woods, well, unless you just insist, I'd much prefer that you live right here with me. This is a big house for just one person and a cat to stay in. Furthermore, it was built for a family. It will be good having a mother and a baby in here again."

Philip's eyes brightened. Then he spoke again. "I feel so unworthy of any kindness, Pete. Truth of the matter is, I don't deserve it. It was downright rotten and mean of me to do what I did. I, who had one of the finest families that God ever put on this earth!" "You're forgetting something, Philip, . . .."

"Am I; what is it? I'll never be able to forget how badly and wickedly I treated you all."

" 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;' " Peter quoted softly, " 'And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' All of us were rebels against God at some time in our life. Take me, for instance; I felt almost bitter when you left. Bitter because I was forced to remain home and keep things going here and couldn't pursue my earthly ambitions. I see it so clearly now. Working the land and living close to it was the thing that drew me to God. I had plenty of time to think and to listen . . . to God's voice. The very thing that I thought had dealt me such a hard, cruel blow was God's instrument and way of showing me my heart's need."
"But, Peter, you've always been a Christian! So long as I can remember you've been saved."

"Not really; I assumed I was. And, being of a congenial, amicable disposition, I'm sure I had a lot of people fooled. But not God. Never. And since He dealt with me, and I turned the reins of my life over to Him . . . totally, completely and entirely . . . well, I'm a different man, Philip. Saved and sanctified wholly. I wouldn't trade places with any of the best lawyers in the world. I'm where God wants me and I've never been more content and happy in my life. The will of God! Ah, blessed joy and bliss! Filled with His Spirit! It's glory indeed."

Tears were spilling down Philip's cheeks when Peter finished speaking. "That was step number one down for me," he told his brother; "I didn't go on and get my personal Pentecost; die out to me and my desires and ambitions. But this time I'm going on 'to perfection.' Heart perfection, Pete. Yes, by God's grace, I am."

"You'll have plenty of time for praying and seeking, Phil; the lane's drifted shut and the telephone line's down. So that means we're cut off from all outside interference and interruptions."

"I don't need prodding," Philip told his brother kindly. "My heart wants the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. After I help with the dishes, I'm going to my room to pray."

"The dishes are my concern today, Phil. Run along and do business with God."

"Thanks, Peter, I will. I'm going to the bottom this time."

Hours later, long after Peter had tended the livestock, fed and watered the chickens and gathered the eggs, a radiant-faced, victorious Philip came downstairs. "It's settled!" he exclaimed joyously. "Settled! Now to get Jo and Mark and make wrongs right with them."

"Seems to me that God's working for you," Peter commented, hearing the phone ring and hurrying away to answer it.

"Marvin Johns here," the voice on the line said, "Just wanted you to know Melissa's doing well and is so active and full of life that Helen says she'll have to bury herself in a snow drift to stop answering questions. Talk about chatter! Just wanted you to know, Peter. Thanks . . . again . . . for coming over and praying for us. Helen's sure been reading these days ... in the Bible. She's changing, too. It won't be long..."

Peter knew what his neighbor meant by his last statement . . . "It won't be long..." Helen was going to be converted.
"I have a bit of good news for you, Marvin," he said quickly. "Philip's home. Got in today. Oh, but it's good to have him here. To stay, you ask? Yes, the Lord willing. He's a married man now, a married man with a ten-month-old son. Isn't that great! No. No, Jo isn't here just yet. Yes, that's what I told Phil, that it would be great to have a mother and baby in the house again. God is so good to us, Marvin. Thanks for the wonderful report on Melissa. On Helen, too. I'll be praying, you can be sure of that..."

Peter was smiling when he put the mouthpiece in place. "Mr. Johns," he said to his brother. "God healed Melissa this week. Quite a miracle. Marvin called to let me know how she's getting along. And now, Philip, does Jo have a telephone? The line's are in working order again..." His sentence trailed.

"Like I said about her financial status, that I didn't know how she's making it, well, I'm equally as ignorant as to her whereabouts and if she does or doesn't have a phone. But I'm going to find out, Peter. Yes, I'm going to find out with the assistance of an operator. And then, if she'll have me back, I'm going after her as quickly as possible. You pray while I dial, will you?"

"Sure will. And know something, Philip? God's going to precede you and that call. I'm as confident of that as I am that I'm here talking to you. In fact, I have the wonderful feeling that Jo's waiting for you to call."

"Then I'd better get busy, Pete."

"I'll shower and get cleaned up while you call," Peter said, heading up the stairs, not wanting to be an eavesdropper on something so sacred as husband-wife conversation.

Forty-five minutes later Philip's voice, excited and eager as a child's, reached Peter's ears. "Pete! Pete!" he exclaimed, bounding up the stairs two at a time. "I got her. I got Jo! She's coming. As soon as she can pack and get things together! She'll be coming in on tomorrow evening's train. Now don't worry about the blocked roads. I walked here; I can walk over to meet her. We'll get a room in the hotel there and you can pick us up when the roads are open and passable again. Guess what, Peter? Jo's a Christian! She said, 'You may resent me even more now, Philip, because I got saved and sanctified. But I haven't been one bit happy since I backslid four years ago. I had to have someone to turn to, and I turned to God.'"

"I told her then about me and where I was and, Peter, she's nearly beside herself with joy. You'll like her; I know you will."

"I haven't the least doubt or fear about that, Philip. But say, will you answer the phone while I finish what I'm doing, please?"
Meeting his brother at the bottom of the stairs a short time later, Philip said, "This is more like a fairy tale story than reality, Peter. That was Jean calling! Said she and Elizabeth somebody will be in on the train tomorrow evening--the same time as Jo and Mark!"

Peter's eyes were shining. "It's God working for us," he said. "What happened to the car?" he asked in concern. "Stop running?"

"The blizzard!" Philip answered. "Everything's closed over there, too. Jean said it would be another four or five days before the roads would all be cleared so she could get through. So, rather than miss Thanksgiving at home, she's coming by train. Was she ever excited when she heard my voice, and when I told her I was saved and sanctified!"

"I'm sure she was, Philip. So am I. Did she say anything about another couple coming? They had planned on being here, too, Lord willing."

"Oh, yes, she did. The man's father took sick and he and his wife had to leave early for some distant state. Now, how will we get all our precious 'cargo' home... with blocked roads?"

Peter was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I know how! Yes, I know what we'll do. Let's see, there'll be the two of us, Jo and Mark, Jean and Elizabeth... that's six. Perfect! You know that big sleigh in the barn? It's in perfect condition. The women will think it's great, Phil. We'll take plenty of blankets, heavy mufflers and scarves and I'll even heat a bunch of bricks and wrap them as foot warmers for our passengers."

"But seven miles one way, Peter!"

"It'll be exciting, Phil. I'll feel like a boy again; going to the store like I did several times with Dad when we were snowed in. Which reminds me, we'll have to leave early so we can stop by the store and get a few necessary items like milk and sugar, flour, cereals and cheeses. With you home again, I think we should rebuild our dairy herd and go back into dairying, God willing."

"I'd like nothing better, Pete. I loved every minute of caring for those cows we used to have. We became fast friends, the cows and I. And we always had plenty of milk and cream and butter, too."

"Know what I think we should do, Phil? Have a really sincere, from-the-heart, prayer and praise meeting before we go to bed. This has been a wonderful day and tomorrow promises to be an equally glorious and blessed one, too, if Jesus tarries."

"I say a hearty 'Amen' to the suggestion," Philip replied, leading the way in heartfelt praise.
The sun was fast sinking in a cloudless but cold sky the next evening when Peter guided the beautiful team of horses into the parking area of the small town's railroad station. The town looked deserted, locked in tight by the eight-foot drifts. It reminded the two young men of picture cards they'd seen.

While Peter checked on the horses, Philip rearranged the groceries they'd bought, knowing they'd need every inch of space. It was going to be a tight squeeze, but he was sure that by careful packing of luggage, sacks, et cetera, they'd get everything and everybody in. His father had built the long sleigh himself. He had built it to accommodate not only his family but an aunt and grandparent who had been living with them at the time.

The long whistle of the train heralded its arrival and Philip, feeling as nervous and excited as a new bridegroom, hurried over to the platform.

Jo and Mark weren't fully off the train before Philip swept them both into his arms and set them on the plank platform. Peter, seeing Jean and her friend emerge from the doorway of another car, rushed to them, meeting Elizabeth and helping with their luggage.

"It's a good thing you didn't bring everything you own home with you," Peter teased, piling luggage on the floor of the sleigh. "Dad failed to build a trunk on here," he added.

"You mean we're going home in . . . in Dad's sleigh!" Jean asked, all dreamy-eyed and excited.

"Precisely so," Philip answered, reaching his sister's side. "And now, I want all of you to meet my lovely wife, Jo, and our son, Mark. Jo, Jean here in my right arm; her friend beside her..."

"Elizabeth Ardmore," Jean said.

"Pleased to meet you, Elizabeth," Philip said with sincerity. "And, Jo, that's the best brother a fellow ever had . . . in front of you . . . my big brother, Peter. Pete to all of us here."

"I'm really very happy to meet all of you," Jo answered in a soft, beautiful way.

She was a lovely girl, Peter noticed. Philip had made an excellent choice. Her soft voice somehow matched her tiny, petite figure. He liked her instantly. So did the others; he could tell by the look of approval on the girls' faces.

A silver quarter moon hung his lantern in a star-studded sky as the horses drew their happy cargo across the glistening white drifts of snow to the farm seven miles distant. Elizabeth, stepping gingerly off the unusual vehicle in which she had traveled,
declared it was the greatest treat of her life. Jo, too, said it was the perfect setting for
the best second honeymoon she and Philip could ever have had.

After hours of laughter, getting acquainted, and prayer and praise, the house
settled down to quiet and stillness. But when morning dawned . . . clear and bright and
frosty-cold..., the house came alive again. Jo, up with her husband before anyone else,
had biscuits browning in the oven and sausages sizzling in the skillet. Mark, fed, bathed
and into fresh clothing, was exploring the mammoth house, first on all fours-hands and
knees, crawling--next by toddling from one piece of furniture to the next.

"Let's fix that little room up for him," Jean said to Peter at the breakfast table.
Elizabeth and I'll paint the furniture. Mother has the perfect wallpaper up in the attic. It'll
do the room; I know it will. She got it on sale before she died. Said someday she'd use it
on the walls in that tiny room to the right of the bathroom. That will be a perfect nursery
for Mark. Do you mind, Jo?"

"Mind? Oh, I think it's great. In fact, I'd love to help you and Elizabeth with it."

"And what's wrong with all of us helping?" Philip and Peter asked. "Precious little
anyone can do outside."

Jean's eyes brightened. "Oh, that's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "It should be done
before nightfall even, if we begin right after family devotions. And this evening, God
willing, maybe we girls can bake our Thanksgiving pies..., some of them at least..., and
get a few other things ready, too."

"Sounds great to me!" Peter said quickly.

It was a great day. As Elizabeth pasted the strips of tiny rosebud-flowered
wallpaper for Peter to hang, the two learned many things about each other. They felt at
ease in the other's company--relaxed. And when Peter took Elizabeth for a sleigh ride
after the big Thanksgiving dinner, no one was surprised. It seemed the natural thing to
do.

"They're meant for each other," Jean confided to Jo and Philip as the sleigh
departed. "Don't tell them I said this, but that's one big reason I wanted Elizabeth to
come. She's my best friend, true, but I wanted her to meet Peter. And Peter to meet her.
Things are going to be fine from here on out, see if I'm not right."

Jo, squeezing Philip's hand, said softly, "This has been the most wonderful
Thanksgiving of my life. It's so... well, such a special Thanksgiving Day that I'll never
forget it."

"And all because of Jesus Christ and of Calvary!" Philip declared, giving his wife
an endearing look and drawing her to his side.
Jean, grabbing Mark up in her arms and kissing his pudgy little nose, knew that Philip would never again stray. His feet were anchored firmly on The Rock. And with Jo to help him, well...

Jean looked at her sister-in-law. She loved Jo. Oh, how she loved her. She was a God-send and she was proud that God had given Jo to her family. Her brother especially.

She sighed, content and happy. It was a beautiful Thanksgiving. Yes, beautiful. And like Jo said, it was a special Thanksgiving.

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

THE END