Jolene awoke to the sound of sleet spangling the roof and the windows. Painfully, she worked herself up to a sitting position in bed. A quick glance through the criss-crossed curtains at the windows revealed the gray, dismal-looking sky outside.

"Oh, no!" she lamented. "No again. I don't believe I can stand another cloudy day, Lord."
She lifted the leg, encased in its heavy cast, and wiggled her body to the edge of the bed. Then, using the clumsy and still-unfamiliar crutches, she stood up, looking and feeling more like a clumsy, flimsy, flopsy rag doll than a human flesh and blood person.

Working slowly, she managed to give the bed a semblance of order and of having been made. Or, at the least, an attempt at having tried to make it.

Hobbling woodenly toward the kitchen, she saw Hal's dirty dishes stacked in the kitchen sink. The paper was lying on the floor beside his chair, all askew and in total disarray. So was a stack of "junk" mail, as she had dubbed the myriad pieces of advertisement and farm equipment brochures, pamphlets, and papers that made their way daffy inside the big mailbox at the end of the lane.

She stood for a moment looking at the messy kitchen, then she broke down and cried. Never had her house looked so totally neglected and untidy, she realized; not in all the twenty some odd years of hers and Hal's happy married life together. What must he think of her? she wondered. That she was failing as a housewife, no doubt, and that her "keeper at home" duties and responsibilities were falling far short of the mark.

Leaning heavily on the cumbersome crutches, she sobbed. Some of life's happenings were such mysterious and mind-boggling things, she thought, wondering why she hadn't looked where she was stepping when she was helping Hal mend fences. She hadn't seen the hole; had no idea one was there even. But quicker than she could cry for help, it had happened. Her leg was broken . . . badly, the doctor said . . . and only time and care could heal it.

Dabbing at her eyes with a kleenex, Jolene hobbled unsteadily to the sink and ran hot water over the dishes, hoping to soak off some of the stuck-up, driedon eggs. Readying hot sudsy water, she slid the dishes into the dishpan before she prepared herself a quick bowl of hot oats.

The rest of the morning was spent in trying to bring order back to the chaotic-looking kitchen. It looked more like a hurricane or tornado had swept through it, she told herself, than like a once-orderly and clean working place
in which she had prepared many a delicious and tasty meal for the hungry man of the house and all whom he chose to bring in with him.

Hobbling to the deepfreeze in the pantry off the kitchen, her crutches making a dull, hollow thud, thud, thudding sound, Jolene took a package of ground beef out for thawing before it went into the big cooking pot to make her husband's favorite chili recipe.

She readied the onions and the garlic, then set them aside for the simmering process along with the beans, the seasonings, meat and tomatoes. Then, she prepared a hasty cobbler, shoved it into the oven for baking and hobbled into the living room and sat down.

The sleet continued its relentless tap, tap, tapping against the windows and the clouds looked as gloomygray as her spirits felt. Let's see, she thought, tapping her fingers lightly against the top of one of the crutches, two weeks for the cast, so far, with at least six or seven or eight more to go. She groaned audibly. How could she stand it? she wondered, looking down at the hard, heavy shield encasing her leg from foot to knee. Hal's scrawled message on it, "Broken for the love of helping," elicited a faint smile from the slender, brown-eyed woman. But that didn't alter the fact that she was of little or no help to her hard-working husband, she thought gloomily, her mood synchronizing perfectly with the mood of the clouds.

The loud jangling of the phone roused her from her dark thoughts and, struggling to her feet, she thud, thud, thudded her way across the floor toward the telephone, hoping for all she was worth that whomever the caller may be, they would give her time to get there before hanging up.

"Hello," she said into the mouthpiece, trembling and weak from haste to reach the phone in time. "Jolene Grinley speaking."

"Mom!" It was Betty. "I was afraid something happened to you when you didn't answer for such a long time."

"I can't go at the old speed, honey," Jolene confessed with tears. "And you can imagine what this is doing to me, Betty. Speedy, you and your dad used to call me. Not anymore: I'm as slow as the poor turtle. Almost. But I am
glad you kept ringing. It takes a while to get up, when I'm sitting, and then dragging this heavy cast around isn't exactly fun nor child's play."

"I'm sure it isn't, Mom. But, oh, I am so thankful you don't have cancer; that you're not slowly dying and deteriorating from this horrible thing. John's mother can't last the week, the doctors are saying. Poor John! He's taking it terribly hard. You know how close his whole family has been. Just like ours, really. Oh, Mother, you can't begin to imagine the hurt and. . . . and the pain, in standing by . . . totally helpless! . . . and seeing someone you love so dearly dying before your very eyes, a little at a time. And Mother Baldrige is the epitome of patience. Period! But she's ready; this is the all-important thing. I'm trying to keep John's spirits buoyed up, reminding him over and over that death is not the end; merely the beginning.''

"How's your father-in-law bearing up beneath the strain? This must be terribly hard on him, Betty."

"He's broken-hearted, of course. But they're making the most of these last fleeting hours; talking, when Mother Baldrige is able to, and just thanking God for the many good and wonderful years they've had together. Then, too, they keep talking of when they'll be together forever. They're both such an inspiration to me. Never a single murmur nor a complaint. Puts me to shame, really. Well, I must go. These long distance calls have been adding up to quite a bit of money. We love you. The little ones send 'Memaw' bushels of hugs and kisses. I love you, Morn. ''

Jolene sat staring into space for a long while after Betty hung up, feeling shame wash over her for allowing thoughts of self-pity to have the slightest hint of entrance into her mind. What was a cast . . . a broken leg, for that matter . . . in comparison to what the Baldriges were enduring and experiencing and passing through? she thought, bowing her head and asking God's forgiveness for complaining, if only to herself. Didn't the Word tell her, "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" {1 Thess. 5:18}.

She felt guilt and shame over her childish fretfulness. It was God's will and His plan that in all things--yes, even under all circumstances--she should be more than a conqueror. Only yesterday, she had read a sentence in one of Hal's many religious books that had captured and delighted her. "Live," said the writer, "as if Christ had died only yesterday, as if He had risen this
morning, and as if He was coming back to earth with the rising of tomorrow's sun!"

What a blessedly victorious and breath-taking way to live! she thought when she had read it. Christ past, present and to come, immediate, at hand; the whole world basking in His lovely presence; the individual life's transcending its everyday mediocrity, its trials and hardships and sorrows, through His companionship. His fellowship.

Where was this wonderful joy this morning? Had it fled away while she slept? The answer came back loud and clear: No. No, a thousand times no. Moving along in a tunnel of her own making, like a dreary mole, she had failed to pause and look out at the wonder of God's great world beyond her narrowed vision. She had found the sleet because she had looked for it. Above the dark clouds, the sun was shining as brightly as ever.

Perhaps the reason she was not "surprised by joy" was simply due to the fact that, this morning especially, she hadn't bothered to look for surprises. All she had looked for... and at... was the ominous clouds and the rat-tat-tat of the sleet against the windows.

She had gotten herself into quite a state about the condition of her leg--the cast and its offensiveness to her--and she forgot that all around her were wonderful people, bearing burdens, sharing joys and sorrows, loving and living their lives with beauty and God's all-sufficient grace shining through them. People like the Baldriges, the Joscoffs, the Selfrits, to name only a few.

Pulling herself up from the chair, Jolene checked on the cobbler, noting it was done to perfection. She removed it from the oven, and while the chili simmered gently on top of the stove, she began a search through her Bible for all the Scripture verses pertaining to the giving of thanks and the offering of praise. She was amazed at the number and the list.

After reading for a long time, she lifted her heart in thanksgiving and praise to God for blessings which she had never before thanked Him. She even dared to thank Him for the broken leg and the weighty cast; it was one of those "all things" for which to give thanks.
With the giving of thanks, the things which had bothered her so
dreadfully just a short while ago, seemed to slither away into some dark,
obscure corner and not bother her again.

Checking the clock on the wall, she made her way into the sewing
room. From one of the closets, she took out a box of Get-Well cards and one
of Friendship. Sitting down in front of her desk, she began addressing
envelopes, writing words of encouragement and comfort on the cards before
sealing and stamping the envelopes. Then she stacked them. Hal would be
glad to take them out to the mailbox for her, she knew.

Jolene was amazed how fast the time went when she had forgotten self
and concentrated on Christ and others. That was the secret of those self-
less, happy souls whose life seemed ever to abound with joy and fountains of
praise, she was sure now. They had forgotten their own heartaches and deep
sorrows and burdens in doing for others. Lowly servants of Christ they had
become, working and giving and doing those seeming insignificant "In as
much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these" sort of things.

The sleet was still spangling the windows and the clouds were as gray
and heavy with their foul mood as ever, but to Jolene, the sun was shining
and birds were singing. She had had a day of triumph. She would look for
ways to make others happy. And she would look for God's many surprises,
too. They were all around her.

Seeing Hal coming from the barn, she hurried to the door to meet him.