I came into the kitchen, dropped my armload of books on the desk in the small room off the kitchen and headed for the pantry. Mother had baked cookies, I knew; the tantalizing fragrance hung pungently-sweet in the air and seemed to have invaded every corner, nook and cranny in the house.

"That you, Deborah?" Mother called from the living room.
"It's me, Mom. I was on a scavenger hunt for one of those mouth-watering, fleshly-baked cookies. You couldn't hide them if you tried; the whole house is perfumed with their spicy flagrancy and goodness."

Laughing in her usual sunny way, Mother stood framed in the dining-kitchen archway, a dustcloth dangling from her right hand. "Just one," she said pleasantly. "Vegetables and fruits are far better for you."

Laughing with Mother, I agreed. Doing a quick turn away, I headed for the vegetable crisper in the refrigerator, knowing full well that a piece of crisp celery and a carrot were far more beneficial for my body than were a dozen cookies.

Mother gave me a look of utter appraisal and love then turned back to what she was doing. Munching on the juicy, crisp celery and carrot sticks, I followed her. "Let me finish that dusting job," I said quickly.

"Some other time, Debbie; you'll have to get ready to go over to the Crissingers."


"Mrs. Crissinger called and asked if you'd be able to stay with the children while they go to Pierpoint. Herb's mother is critically ill."

"But what about Katie; she's almost seventeen? And Herb Junior's fifteen. Aren't they old enough to take care of the children? I mean, well . . . you and dad trust me with Mark and Miriam --"

"Mrs. Crissinger said she'd feel so much better about leaving if you were staying there. She said she knows you're trustworthy and dependable."

"Conversely then, that speaks rather badly for Katie and Herb Jr."

Mother made no comment to that; rather, she said, "I told her you'd be there shortly after school. So you'd better get your things together and go over."
With the piece of celery poised in midair, I exclaimed, "Now? Must I go now, Mother?"

"Yes, dear. The Crissinger's left this afternoon. They told the children you'd be staying with them until they returned home."

I swallowed the carrot-celery combination in my mouth and gulped. "You . . . you mean I'll have to stay there over Thanksgiving?" I asked, feeling a sinking sort of sensation ooze over me. "That depends, Debbie."

"You . . . you mean I won't be home for our usual Thanksgiving dinner?"

Mother smiled at me. "Of course you will, the Lord willing. In fact, I'll have the Crissinger children here for Thanksgiving Day if their parents haven't returned by then."

Knowing that I'd have to gather some clothes together, I walked down the hallway to my bedroom, wondering what the next few days held for me and in a sense, dreading the ordeal. Katie and Herb Jr. were exceedingly worldly. Baby-sitting for the smaller children presented no problem; in fact, I enjoyed Bonnie and Becky and Jerry. They respected me and obeyed me.

"I'm sorry about this," Mom said, standing in the bedroom doorway.

"It's the least we can do," I replied. "But I feel kind of stupid... Katie's almost as old as I am." And suddenly, I burst out laughing. Mother joined in. It made packing easier and quite enjoyable and when I got to the Crissinger house Katie met me at the door.

"Am I ever thankful you're going to be staying here!" Katie exclaimed, all bubbly and bright. "Becky and Jerry are almost driving me wild; they couldn't wait until you arrived."

I laughed and followed Katie down the hallway to her bedroom where I hung my few garments inside the closet.

"You still haven't changed," she commented, picking at a fold of one of my dresses as it hung beside hers in the big clothes closet. "Don't you ever get tired of wearing those oldish-looking sort of dresses? Ugh! You're
certainly not 'with it,' Deb," she added meaningfully. "I remember when I used to look that way. I despised the look. Literally despised it! But, of course, when one's parents don't know better . . ."

Katie's unfinished sentence hung emphatically and meaningfully in the air. With a grand flourish of her hand and long, slender arm, she floated out of the room, looking for the world like a tall, graceful human swan.

I smiled to myself, the intended barb of sarcasm sliding off me like water off a duck's back. Poor Katie! She tried so hard to make an impression of 'high society' upon those of us whom she knew and whom she considered to be just very ordinary and exceedingly dull and uninteresting. Ever since the senior Crissingers backslid and left the church, Katie had become haughty and vain, the dancing and singing lessons she was taking only serve to add more vanity to her already inflated ego. I felt sorry for her; I was sure she wasn't happy. (Is anyone ever truly happy who has once known the Lord and tasted of His goodness and righteousness then turned traitor?)

I put my Bible out on the bedside stand, tucked a stray tendril of hair into place then headed for the kitchen.

"Am I ever glad you're here!" Herb Jr. exclaimed, coming in from outside. "We'd starve to death if our meals were dependent upon Katie. Talk about goop and slop, ugh!"

I saw Katie's cheeks turn crimson-red. Anger glared through her blue-green eyes. She raised a hand to strike her brother.

"Please don't," I said softly, stepping between the two and taking the blow meant for Herb Jr.

"I hate you!" Katie hissed in Herb's direction. "Now look what you made me do to Debbie!" she cried, throwing her arms around me and apologizing profusely.

"It's all right," I said calmly, avoiding any contact to my smarting cheek lest Katie realize just how much the slap really hurt and pained me. I was thankful that it was me who had gotten it and not Herb Jr. It hurt; really hurt.
Herb came over and stood beside me. "Thanks, Debbie," he said, near tears. "You took my blow. And she knows how to deliver them!"

"Please, Herb, no more. I want you and Katie to get along and love each other the way you used to before . . . before . . ." 

"Before we changed and took this wretched way," Herb Jr. said fiercely, finishing the sentence even better than I could have done.

"Nothing's the same here any more," he added sadly, leaving the room with a droop to his shoulders.

I went to the kitchen window and searched the yard for the twins and Jerry, asking, "Where are Bonnie and Becky and Jerry?"

Katie flew into a frenzied dither. "Oh my!" she exclaimed, rushing out the door. "I told them they could play in the snow for half an hour . . . but that's been almost two hours ago. I forgot all about them."

I rushed down the hallway and grabbed the coat off its hanger then followed Katie . . . whose real name was Kathryne Evangel . . . outside.

We searched the sprawling back lawn but found no trace of the cherubic little girls and their year older brother. No footprints even.

Katie's face looked the color of death; her eyes were great pools of sorrow and anguish. "Oh, Deb, what'll I do?" she cried. "Something dreadful's happened to them and I'm to blame. I've almost hated them at times, but suddenly I realize how precious and dear they are to me. What'll I do?" she cried, looking wretched and humbled. In fact, she seemed more humbled than I had seen her or remembered her in months.

"First, we'll have to remain calm," I admonished. "A frenzied heart and mind can't think clearly and coherently. You told them they could play in the snow for a half hour, right?"

"Right. But there aren't any signs that they were out here even. Not a single, solitary footprint!" Katie exclaimed animatedly and in utter exasperation, flinging her long, graceful arms outward in a gesture of total and complete frustration.
"If it were snowing," I said, "we could assume that their footprints were covered. But it's not snowing anymore . . . quite an obvious fact," I added, pointing skyward to the clear canopy over our heads.

Katie wrung her hands nervously. "But where could they be? I mean, well, I buttoned their coats and put their caps and mittens and boots on them."

I walked around the house, followed by Katie. The front sidewalk was shoveled clean of any snow and the lawn bore no trace of a single, tiny, booted footprint.

"See!" Katie exclaimed in near hysteria. "They've vanished. Vanished. And I'm to blame. What will I do, Debbie? Oh, I do wish I had been more civil and kind and loving to them when they were here," and she sobbed bitterly.

"Get calm and think, Katie. If there are no footprints, that means they weren't out here."

"Not really, Deb; they could have marched down the steps and the sidewalk and gone anywhere. But where? That's the big question. And it's every bit my fault: I'm always so glad to get them out of my way . . .

"Katie!" I exclaimed, breaking into her unfinished sentence. "You can't mean that! Why, they're sweet."

"I know they are," came Katie's broken reply, "I just now realized how sweet and wonderful they've been. But it's too late; I'll perhaps never see them again. Someone's kidnapped them, no doubt."

I sucked my breath in quick-like, never having given that a thought even. Then, quickly, I collected my senses and said, "Are you sure they came outside, Katie?"

"Well, they asked to go out and I dressed them." "But did you see them go out?"

Katie stopped to think. "No, I didn't," she finally answered. "But I was deeply absorbed in a book."
"They could be in the house," I remarked, heading for the porch and the living room door.

Once inside, we searched the rooms thoroughly, looking behind couches and chairs, beneath beds and inside closets, hoping to find the three little ones fast asleep and perfectly safe. But such was not the case. Like Katie had exclaimed in the yard, they did seem to have vanished.

I thought of the basement then and almost ran to the door and stumbled down the steps. What I saw made me tremble. Huddled around the colored television were the three children, still in their coats and boots, with their eyes glued to the screen from which came blood-curdling screams and foul, filthy language.

"Bonnie! Becky! Jerry!" I called, "Come away from that. Please!"

If they heard me, they gave no indication of it. Like three innocents, totally mesmerized and captivated by the horror picture before them, they sat, huddled together, watching.

I hurried down to them and snapped the button off. "Come," I said softly but firmly. "No more of that. Your little minds are going to be so contaminated and filled with violence and horror and wickedness that it will be a miracle if you'll ever recover from it. Now go upstairs, all of you."

Jerry resisted my touch. "I want to watch it!" he declared defiantly and flatly, snapping the set on again.

"Not while I'm here, Jerry," I said sweetly and kindly, taking him by the hand and turning him stairward while I snapped the set off. "Now go upstairs, all of you. There are far more wholesome things to do than watch television," I declared, following the three up the stairs while an astonished Katie looked on.

"Mother never allows you to watch those soap operas," Katie said sternly to the little ones. "But you do," Becky countered quickly. "I'm older," Katie defended.
"If it's not good for us, then why is it okay for you?" Jerry asked with belligerence in his voice.

"It's just not fit for little people," Katie replied. "Then it's not fit for you either," Jerry answered sensibly and positively. "I can't see that it's any different if you look at it or if we do."

Feeling all weepy and broken inside, I said, "It's helping to send all of you to hell. It corrupts the heart and mind and defiles the soul." Suddenly, I burst out crying. "Oh, how I pray that you'll all get back to God. Soon! He's waiting to forgive you of your sins and to take you back. He wants to clean your mind of all the garbage and rubbish you've acquired and stored there since the television was put into the home."

Katie looked at me strangely; almost compassionately, I thought, then she walked out of the room.

I got supper, then bathed the twins and Jerry and dressed them in their warm nightclothes before telling them a story, praying with them and putting them to bed.

When I returned to the kitchen, I saw that Katie had the dishes all washed and dried and the kitchen in total and complete neatness and orderliness. "Thanks," I told her, hugging her soundly. "Thanks much, Katie. The kitchen looks beautiful. Spotless."

"It's the least I could do," she answered. "Especially after giving you such a sound slap on your cheek. I'm truly, truly sorry about that, Deb," she exclaimed emphatically with tears in her eyes.

I smiled and told her that had been long since forgotten, adding that I really loved her.

"You really do, Debbie!" she declared soberly. "I feel it; so does Herb Jr. It comes through you like a gently-diffused but radiant light. It . . . it humbles me."

Sitting on the edge of one of the counter stools, she dropped her face in the palms of her hands. I saw her shoulders tremble then shake with weeping. I bided my time.
Suddenly she raised her head. "I'm not the best at faking... I'm sure you've noticed it," she blurted. "My little charade's over; I'm miserable. The part I've been playing, and the person I've been trying to be, just isn't for me. It's kind of like squeezing yourself into something so tight that it almost suffocates you. I feel I'm dying... inch by inch... of suffocation. Honestly, Debbie," she exclaimed, looking at me, "I've never been happy since I backslid. I've had some great fun times, to be sure; but what is that compared to knowing one's sins are forgiven and that he's sanctified wholly and ready for Heaven!"

My heart skipped a beat... or more... so happy was I over hearing Katie's confession, made willingly and openly. "You know the way back, Katie dear," I said, with tears rolling down my cheeks.

"Yes. Yes," she replied. "But Debbie, I need my mind washed, too... not just my heart. My mind has things stamped indelibly upon it; things I've seen and heard on the television. Do you suppose God can clean my mind, Deb? Do you? You know, when I came to Jesus as a very little girl, I didn't have that to think about... we didn't have a television set back there.

But now... well, you can't begin to imagine what one sees on the set!"

I sat on the stool beside Katie's. "I'm sure He can do it," I told her. "Clean out your mind, I mean. But first, let's get your heart in order. These other things will fall in place when you get your heart in right relationship with God. Then, too, the Holy Spirit is the Great Cleanser-Purifier when He sanctifies the heart. So I'm sure that He'll cleanse your mind when He cleanses your heart, Katie. After you're saved, of course."

"Thanks, Debbie," Katie said brokenly. "Now, please help me to find my way back into God's fold again." And she dropped on her knees beside the stool.

Needless to say, I prayed; but Katie's repentance was so deeply-thorough and so genuine that I'm sure she'd have gotten through to God all by herself.

When she finally stood to her feet, aglow with the glory of God on her entire countenance, I thought I was visualizing a heavenly being. Katie was
made new in Christ, and with the newness in Christ, the humble, beautiful Katie of a few years ago emerged again. I felt like I had found the Katie who was lost. Instantly, we became fast friends like in other days, the gulf-abyss of worldliness no longer separating us.

We spent Thanksgiving at home with my folks and when the Crissingers returned later that night and saw Katie's radiant, glory-filled countenance, they knew what had happened before she told them even.

"It's quite a surprise," Mr. Crissinger told his oldest child and daughter. "But your mother and I have decided . . . seeing your grandmother suffer so patiently and victoriously through this lengthy illness of hers . . . that serving Jesus is the only thing that matters. We're changing, too, Katie, and this time, it's forever!"

Standing by my window and looking up into a cold but cloudlessly-clear, starlit sky later on that night, I lifted my heart in true thankfulness and gratitude to my wonderful, wonderful Lord. It was the most wonderful Thanksgiving Day I'd ever had.