The letter trembled in Marilyn's hand; then it fell to the floor. She couldn't do it; no, she couldn't! It was asking too much. How could Gram do such a thing?
In a swift motion, she retrieved the letter from the floor and shoved it back into the envelope out of which it had come. Then she walked to the kitchen window and stood, trembling, looking down at the houses below.

A wave of nausea washed over her. She leaned her head against the window pane, hoping the frosty-coldness of the glass would alleviate the sudden-sick feeling. It didn't.

Turning, she hurried into the comfortable living room and dropped down on the sofa. Tears, sudden and unbidden, stung her eyes then chased each other in rapid succession down her porcelain-like cheeks. "Oh Gram, Gram," she cried, "I can't come. I can't! Please, please try to understand."

She felt weak and limp all over; much like a wet dish cloth, limp. Drained, too. She had thought she was over the pain and the hurt of the past but she wasn't. No, she wasn't. The letter had served only to open the wound and reveal just how painful the events of the past had been and how acute and keen were her buried feelings.

"Please, Lord, help me now," she cried into her hands. "Don't let this 'flood' overflow me again. I gave it all to You. Keep me more than a conqueror through Your power. Give me grace. . . ."

Lifting tear-filled eyes, she saw the motto on the wall. "My grace is sufficient for thee," it read. A beautiful calmness came into her soul. Much like a gentle, soothing, balmy breeze, it came, washing over her inner being with quietness and peace. His grace, ah, it was a wonderful thing! A blessed thing, she thought silently, hurrying into the bathroom to take her shower before retiring for the night.

The day at the hospital had been hectic with busyness and emergencies -- more so than usual. Marilyn felt the effects of the eight-hour shift with more than ordinary fatigue and weariness and Gram's letter had served only to heighten the drained-out feeling she had.

She showered quickly then readied herself for bed, taking time out to read several chapters from a well-worn Bible on her nightstand and to pray before slipping between the crisply clean sheets and pillowing her head for the night.
Almost immediately, Marilyn's weary body succumbed to sleep and not until the alarm clock sounded in the early hour of dawn did she awaken. Not one to linger in bed and roll over for a few "extra winks" of light dozing, she got out of bed and turned on the light, picking the Bible up as she did so. Her private devotions had top priority on her mental list of absolutely necessary things.

An hour and a half later, her soul bathed with Heavenly dew and her devotions finished, she prepared herself for work. And then she remembered the letter.

Donning a crisp, freshly-laundered and spotlessly clean white nurse's uniform, Marilyn tried to lock the memory of the letter inside the apartment as she turned the key in the door and left for the hospital one block away. She must not allow Gram's letter to occupy her thoughts; she was a nurse . . . a diligent nurse with a record of deepest devotion and dedication to the profession. She would pull her thoughts together in full concentration upon her many and varied duties for the day and tuck the key of memory, holding Gram's letter, in her pocket 'till she was off duty!

Walking briskly, she was soon at the hospital. "Mind if I walk along with you?" a male voice asked as she stepped inside the door and removed her heavy navy blue cape.

Turning, Marilyn looked into the blue eyes of Doctor Sprague. He was smiling. She felt the color mount up into her cheeks. "I . . . I . . ." she stuttered.

"Thanks," the young doctor replied, ignoring her stammering. "I've often wondered where you lived when you were off-duty," he ventured casually-careful. "And now, seeing you coming from the Raines Apartments, I gather you call one of those remodeled places your home."

It was more a statement than a question and Marilyn, in her soft voice, said, "They're really very attractive and also quite adequate for someone like me."

Walking briskly down the corridor toward the elevator, Doctor Sprague matching her steps in unbroken rank, he said quickly, "Why are you so aloof,
Marilyn? Miss Porter, correction! But, since no one's around, Marilyn sounds a bit more intimate, don't you agree?"

Marilyn was non-plussed. Aloof? "I . . . I'm sorry, Doctor Sprague, I . . . ."

"You're too much alone, Marilyn," the doctor continued. "I've observed you for months. Something's bothering you. You're an excellent nurse, the best on the floor. But you need an outlet, some sort of diversion. Are you busy Friday night? I'd like to take you to a fine Swiss restaurant outside of the city limits."

Marilyn opened her mouth to speak but Doctor Sprague quieted her with, "Think about it. You can let me know when you have made your decision."

They parted then; he, turning and hurrying down a hallway to the right wing of the large hospital and Marilyn, straight ahead toward the elevator at the far end of the hall.

She found herself trembling as she stepped inside the elevator and pushed the button for the eighth floor. She had been a "loner," this was all true, and she had kept to herself as much as possible whenever she was off duty. But she hadn't meant for it to be obvious. No, she hadn't. However, there were some things one just couldn't hide and conceal, she felt sure now.

"Good morning, Miss Porter," Mrs. Fielding greeted Marilyn as she stepped off the elevator. "I hope your day's better than our night was," the pleasant woman added with a heavy, tired sigh. "Will I ever be glad to bathe and get to bed!"

"I know how you feel," Marilyn answered with a smile, recalling the previous day with its busy activities and duties. "I only hope you can sleep. Who's taking care of the twins?"

"My sister. She'll be over after them by the time I'm ready for bed. I try to read to them and play with them an hour or so before I finally fall in bed, or on the floor," the woman told Marilyn, laughing in good-natured fashion as she took the elevator down.
The minute she seated herself behind the desk at the nurses' station, Marilyn Porter, head day nurse in the busy surgical wing became the professional, dedicated and devoted being that she was. She set herself to diligently going over and looking through the charts on the patients in each room, taking careful note of improvement, regression and/or failings in vital signs. She became totally lost in her work, so engrossed was she and so much a part of the hospital was she. Gram's letter was forgotten, totally and entirely, while she worked. The patients' well being was her one concern.

The morning passed quickly for Marilyn and not until she was seated in the hospital's cafeteria, eating, did Gram's letter come to mind. Bit by bit she brought the contents out of the attic of her mind and tried to think what she would do, just how she could best reply to Gram, when Doctor Sprague's voice sliced into her thoughts.

"My, my, my, how utterly and totally pre-occupied you are, Marilyn!" he exclaimed teasingly, smiling down upon her bent head and asking quickly, "Care if I join you for lunch?"

Taking a bite of baked fish, Marilyn replied, "That will be fine, providing you have your food."

"Thanks, I do," he answered, lifting his tray from a nearby table and setting it down across from hers. "Busy this morning?" he asked matter-of-factly.

"No more than usual. Certainly nothing like yesterday. That was some day! And Mrs. Fielding told me last night was equally busy. She looked drained when she went off duty this morning."

"I heard you were more than busy yesterday. Doctor Hardemann told me the same was true of the girls in pediatrics. And Mrs. Aronson said they delivered more babies last night than were delivered in the three previous nights. Someone said it's because of the approaching storm, which the weather forecasters say should hit our area by mid-afternoon," the doctor added with a hint of a dis-believing smile on his face.

"I don't know anything about the effects of a storm on a patient other than the fact that dark, gloomy days tend to make an already gloomy patient even more gloomy and morose, Doctor. Be that as it may, approaching storm
or not, we were swamped yesterday. This is a fact. I have never been busier
nor carried a heavier schedule or load. All of us were eager for a brief respite
which, incidentally, was not possible until we went off duty."

Doctor Sprague sat studying Marilyn. "You love your work, Nurse
Porter, don't you?" he said quickly.

"I really do. It has become an integral part of me. Helping people, what
a rewarding thing!"

"Except those whom not even we can help," Doctor Sprague said
sadly. "Like this morning -- we lost a patient on the operating table. But it was
either let him die in the emergency room or try to save him by operating. We
lost. But we made a noble, all-out effort to save his life. These are the hard-
to-take things. The things that torment and niggle the brain. I'm thankful that
I'm still old-fashioned enough to care about what happens to my patients."

Marilyn listened intently, a sense of admiration growing inside her for
the young doctor.

"Just yesterday, for instance, I faced another one of those painful
situations; a heart-rending thing . . . a young bride with cancer. When I told
Mrs. Carlson and her husband what the lengthy surgery had revealed, she
cried, 'Oh, Doctor, are you certain there isn't any mistake? This can't be! I've
always been so healthy and strong. I'm too young to die. I want to live. I do!'
These are the things that get to me." And tears stood in the doctor's eyes.

"I know we're not to allow things to get to us this way. But I guess I'm
still human enough to care to such an extent that it grieves and pains me
deeply. I can't help it, Marilyn. Believe me, I can't." Wistfully, he said, "Could I
presume on your kindness and ask you to drop by and see Mrs. Carlson?
She's in Room 6009. She needs encouragement -- someone who has faith."

Marilyn felt humbled. Honored, too. "I . . . I'd be happy to visit with her,
Doctor," she replied, recalling the old timidity and shyness that had hindered
her in the past. All her life she had had a battle with this, and not until she
was cleansed from all inbred sin and sanctified wholly, was she able to
witness with power and boldness for Christ. Not that she was now forward
and brash, ah, no, but the Holy Spirit within her gave her the power and
needed courage to speak out for Christ.
"Would it be possible for you to see her today, Marilyn; after you get off duty, perhaps?"

"I'll do it, Doctor. On the way down the elevator, I'll get off on 6, God willing."

Duane Sprague gave Marilyn a look of appraisal then excused himself, picked up both of their trays and empty dishes, carried them to the conveyor belt that moved them into the hospital's kitchen for washing, then strode briskly out of the cafeteria.

Marilyn sipped her milk thoughtfully then hurried back to her floor and the afternoon's work, anxious now to be free so she could drop in on the young Mrs. Carlson.

(CHapter 2)

Marilyn stepped off the elevator on the sixth floor and, clutching the tract which she had found inside her small handbag, she walked down the shiny corridor.

"If it isn't Miss Porter!" A nurse exclaimed brightly as she fell in step with Marilyn. "You mean one shift isn't satisfying enough for your" she teased.

Marilyn smiled. "Yes, Janine!" she answered, with emphasis on the yes. "I'm visiting the patient in 6009."

"Mrs. Carlson?"

"One and the same."

Janine sighed. "That's so sad. Honestly, I . . . I . . . well, I often run to the restroom and cry over her. She's so pretty and so young, and so much in love with each other are those two. I know we're not to become emotional as nurses, but I can't help it. When I see the Carlsons, and know what Mrs. Carlson's prognosis is, it gets to me. And to a lot of other people, too. They've only been married three months. What a blow! And none of us has any
assurance or certainty that we're exempt from this dreadful killer," the young nurse finished emphatically and emotionally.

"No, we don't, Janine; that's so. But we can know that we're ready to meet God after death. If we confess and forsake our sins, and ask the Lord to forgive us and to come into our hearts, He'll prepare us for Heaven. Death loses its sting when one knows Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior. The Bible tells us, The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

"'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' This, in I Corinthians 15:56-57."

Janine was silent for awhile, then she said, "You'll be able to help Mrs. Carlson, Miss Porter. She needs something to latch on to -- something to hold her steady."

"Like all of us," Marilyn answered steadily, "she needs Someone: The Lord Jesus Christ."

"I'm not religious, Miss Porter. Never was. But if I knew how to pray, and what to say, I'd be asking for a miracle for Jeannette Carlson. Well, I'll see you again sometime," she said, hurrying down the left wing of the floor.

Marilyn found the room then entered silently. Mrs. Carlson's face was turned toward the window and Marilyn saw tears on the fair cheeks as she stepped close to the bed.

Placing a gentle hand on the young woman's arm, she said softly, "Mrs. Carlson, how are you feeling this evening?"

The eyes fluttered open. "I . . . I'm sorry," she apologized. "I was crying again. Feeling sorry for myself, I guess. But how can I not cry? Oh, nurse!" she wailed. "It . . . it's awful. Chuck and I've been married only three months. What can I do? I don't want to die! I don't! I don't!"

Marilyn patted the slender arm gently. "Of course you don't want to die," she agreed. "And I have good. . . ."

Mrs. Carlson continued, as though Marilyn hadn't spoken. "Oh, it was dreadful!" she exclaimed tearfully. "'It was over; the surgery was over. I was
waking up, as if from some horrible nightmare. The rattling carts, the clatter of feet, the chatter of voices all were indicative of a world I was a part of and yet removed from. I felt like a foreign object transplanted in a strange place, weak and disoriented, waiting helplessly for the doctor's report and his findings. And then Chuck told me.

"I just couldn't understand it all. I closed my eyes and thought, why is this happening to me? I can't die now when I'm just beginning to live. I love Chuck. I want to live.

"I was frustrated and frightened, consumed by fear and pain. I cried in stifled sobs, recalling the happy months of Chuck's and my courtship, the three blissful months of marriage, the myriad little things we had done together . . . fishing from a neighbor's pond, gathering wild strawberries for freezer jam, hiking in the woods, fragrant with pine, earthy with decaying leaves; our dreams for the future; our peaceful, uncomplicated life-style and our love for each other. O nurse," she cried, "can't you help me? Isn't there something you can do?"

In her soft, soothing voice, Marilyn said, "I'm Miss Porter from up on the eighth floor. Yes, there is something I can do for you, Mrs. Carlson, something I am both happy and delighted to do -- I can tell you about Jesus, my wonderful Lord and Savior. Have you ever asked Him to come into your heart, to forgive you of your sins and to save your soul?"

"I've gone to church all my life and I've lived a good moral life. I was even baptized."

"Have you never told Him you were a sinner, Mrs. Carlson, and asked Him to come into your heart?"

"No. No, I haven't."

"Then, while I pray, you pray too, and ask Him to come into your heart. I John 1:9 says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Now, shall we pray? . . ."

Turning the key in the door of her apartment, weary in body but refreshed in soul and heart over the transformation in Mrs. Carlson's life,
Marilyn stepped inside. Hanging her cape carefully on a hanger she started for the kitchen. Then she saw the letter. Gram's letter. Again the pain and hurt washed over her. She would have to answer the letter, she knew. Yes, sooner or later, she would have to answer it. Answering a letter was no problem. It was knowing how to answer Gram's; what to say. Rather, how to phrase what she'd have to say with the least amount of hurt and pain to Gram. And to . . .

Marilyn shook herself, trying again to thrust the unpleasant thoughts aside. So much of her life was in the past. What was done could never be undone. No matter how hard Gram was now trying to reset the pieces and put them together, the past was past. And gone. Gone forever! she mused silently and with no bitterness anymore.

She dropped into a nearby chair, trying mentally to construct a letter that would not be too shattering on Gram when she received it. Then her mind went back to the night when, weary and tired of carrying the heavy load of a backslider, plus the added burden of bitterness of heart over the inflicted pain, she returned to God with a broken heart. Fully surrendered to His will and yielding gladly to His "whither-so-ever" and "what-so-ever," she confessed her bitterness and her backsliding and found glorious pardon, peace and forgiveness, followed, subsequently by becoming entirely sanctified -- cleansed from all inbred sin.

Only then, after her wonderful spiritual restoration, did she feel she should write Gram and tell her where she was. And she had done so. No lengthy, detailed narrative, to be sure. But a letter informing her that she was well and happy and was keeping busy, and that she was sorry if she had caused her any worry. She wanted her to forgive her. . . .

Marilyn's mind raced back to that night. Was it really eight years ago? she thought, recalling the events that led up to her silent and secret departure from the big familiar house with its brimming-full storehouse of pleasant childhood memories.

The swing; how she loved the swing in the big maple tree on the south lawn! Even now she could hear her father's booming voice as he pushed her: "Hold tight, my little princess," he called as she sailed higher and higher. "Hang on! Tight! Here we go, over the wall."
Marilyn smiled. "Over the wall" was a line in one of the poems her father had taught her. Oh, he was a wonderful father. So kind and loving. So was her mother. The years they had spent together were years of pure joy and delight. She was barely fifteen when the car accident claimed their lives. Joyce was sixteen plus.

She thought of the accident then and about old Ott Detries. Poor old Ott. Was he still living? she wondered. Such a heavy drinker, he was. It was he who had killed her parents. Too inebriated to realize there was a car in the opposite lane of traffic, he had crashed into her father and mother head on. He escaped with only a few minor skin abrasions. Her parents didn't.

Ott was fined heavily and had his driver's license suspended. This, however, could not bring back the two whom she loved dearer than any on earth. Nor could it heal the pain and the hurt buried inside her heart like a ton of bricks, a pain and hurt so deep and heavy that it never seemed to go away. Not for many and many years. Looking back now, Marilyn thanked God that there was no wrong feeling in her heart for the man who was her parents' killer. Praying for Ott was easy and natural... if he was still alive. Yes, in her heart there was nothing but pity and pure Christian love for the man.

The funeral was hardest of all on Joyce and her. Never had she felt so forsaken and so all alone. Their friends stood by them, to be sure. A multitude of friends, it seemed. But the realization that the voices of her father and mother were silenced forever, to never be heard again on earth, almost overwhelmed her. Her one anchor was the Lord. She had had a truly born again experience. Because of her faith in the Lord, she was able to bear the burden and carry on in much the same fashion as always.

Gram had come to live with them then. She had wanted to move in several years earlier, but her father had told Gram kindly that no house was big enough for two families.

Gram hadn't liked it at all. Marilyn recalled how unmoved her father had been over his decision, stating that since Gram... his mother... was healthy and extremely active and in no way incapacitated, he felt it only wise and best that she maintain, and live in, her own home.
Poor Gram! Marilyn thought now. Always wanting her way regardless of whom it grieved or hurt. Gram, who tried (but failed) to run her father's and mother's lives.

Marilyn could still hear her father quoting scripture to his mother when she did her best to run his affairs: "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.

"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

Poor, poor Gram. More than once, Marilyn recalled seeing her stomp out the door and not return for weeks. Her father's and mother's phone calls received no response. The house calls neither. Oh the fervent prayers that went upward from the Porter home for Gram's salvation!

But Gram was proud. Too proud . . . ever . . . to admit and acknowledge that she was a wicked sinner on her road to hell. No, she wasn't wicked, she maintained steadfastly and stubbornly. She wasn't immoral; nor did she drink and smoke or play cards and dance. And she didn't meddle in other people's business, unless, of course, one took her "well-meaning advise" to be meddlesome. She would get to Heaven like the rest of us, she declared hotly; her "good works" would get her there.

Looking back over the years now, those years after her parents' death and Gram's move into the big house, Marilyn was amazed at how sufficient God's grace had been for her. Until. . . . She brushed a hand over her eyes as though trying to erase the pain of the bitter memory. It wasn't God's grace that had proven inadequate and insufficient; it was her lack of keeping up the daily devotions due to discouragement and frustration and disappointment.

Oh, if only she could forget about it. If only. . . !

(CHAPTER 3)

Marilyn sat for a long while in the comfortable chair, thinking, remembering, and reminiscing. Her mind wandered to her sister Joyce. They had gotten along well at home because she couldn't stand quarreling and arguments and always gave in to her sister. Joyce was tempered much like
Gram. She was headstrong and proud and wanted her own way, a thing never granted so long as their father and mother were living. But everything changed when Gram got hold of the reins.

From childhood on, Gram always favored Joyce, declaring without apology that she had "the Porter spunk and pride," and that she'd "go places in the world." Meaning, of course, that Joyce would amount to something and make good. She never told Marilyn that she wouldn't "go places in the world," but she frequently alluded and inferred as much, making sport of her and her old fashioned ideals and ideas and her manner of dress.

That hadn't bothered her, however; she was rooted in Christ and wanted only and always to please Him and to keep His Divine approval and His smile upon her life.

She took Gram's letter now and spread it open on her lap, praying silently as she did so. Then she began reading it again, for the second time.

My Dear Marilyn, Gram wrote.

Imagine my surprise at hearing from you after all these years:

At first, when we received no word from you, I was somewhat concerned. Then I consoled myself in the fact that you were old enough to take care of yourself and manage on your own. I am glad to learn that you are busy and well, even though you made no mention where you are working or what you are doing. Are you employed in a bank there, perhaps? You did very well here, in the City Bank and Loan.

Much has happened since you left eight years ago; some good and pleasant things, some sad and painful things. I will inform you of the pleasant things first: After you left, Joyce and Robert got married. (They were engaged, you will recall. And I suppose I owe you an apology for breaking Robert and you up).

They honeymooned in Bermuda, (as per my good advice) returned home after two weeks and settled down in the old Kurstin homestead. Joyce had the place looking like a showpiece out of the past, with all her expensive and beautiful antiques. (We collected these things together, she and I, for I am every bit as fond of them as she was).
Robert found employment in the city so gave up his less-paying job with Hurriers. With a wife like Joyce, he wanted to give her the finest things possible. And he did.

Three years after their marriage, Juli Ann and Judi Sue were born. They were identical. Talk about beauties, they were! And are. Quite naturally, all of us were proud of those little heart stealers. None more so than their great-gram, believe me!

Robert was promoted twice with his company, finally being installed as president of the corporation. They never had money problems now. They seemed to be so happy together, and Joyce could shop for antiques to her heart's content.

Coming home from a distant shopping expedition and "antique hunt" one late evening, she complained to Robert that she wasn't feeling well. Nothing much was thought about it since she had driven far that day and walked a great deal. They laid her feeling of extreme exhaustion to fatigue, from having gone beyond her strength.

The feeling lingered, however, and seemed always to be with her. After four months of this, Robert made an appointment with the doctor, insisting that she must go.

She went. They admitted her into the hospital an hour later for tests, X-rays, etc. (I kept the twins, who were now two years old). Ten days later, Joyce passed away. Your sister is dead! Leukemia.

Since we had no idea where you were, there was no way to notify you. Naturally, Robert has been devastated. The twins cried and sobbed brokenly for their mother for several weeks after the funeral, but soon accepted the fact that she would not be coming back anymore and that now Great-Gram would mother them and care for them through the day, while their daddy worked.

This brings me to the point now where I feel I should tell you that you must return home immediately. Since learning that you are still very much among the living, Robert has tried repeatedly to reach you by phone but he has never been successful. The operator says she has no listing for anyone
by the name of Marilyn Porter. (Could it be that you have married?) Certainly, no one these days lives without the use of a telephone in their house!

Robert needs you, Marilyn. More than he needed you eight years ago. The twins, now 5, need a mother. I am getting weary of being a year-long babysitter. You must come home. You owe it to all of us to come back where you belong and help us out. After all, Joyce was your sister. By the way, where are you living? I never have liked just a post office box: certainly you do have a house number and street address.

I shall be awaiting your reply.
Gram

Marilyn finished reading the letter then closed her eyes wearily. Perhaps it would have been best not to have written, she reasoned. But no, she had to do it; to ask Gram's forgiveness for having gone away without telling her she was leaving, and to let her know that she had peace in her soul and was now at peace with both God and man. This was her only purpose and reason in writing. And now Gram was all but demanding that she return home to mother Robert's motherless children.

Tears surfaced and spilled down Marilyn's cheeks as past memories flooded her mind, days when she and Robert were a twosome. They had met at a youth rally and were attracted immediately to each other. Tall, dark-haired, amiable Robert with the laughing eyes and a testimony that thrilled her heart.

They began dating while she worked at the bank in the city and in less than a year they were engaged to be married. Then Joyce came home from college. At Gram's insistence, she came. Gram arranged "convenient" meetings for the two while she, Marilyn, boarded in the city near her work. And one week-end when she returned home, Gram and Joyce told her what was going on.

She refused to believe what she had heard, saying she'd have to hear it from Robert himself. "But we're in love!" Joyce had insisted positively, in a tone of voice which Marilyn recognized as being the truth about herself.

"Robert loves me," Marilyn remembered having told her sister.
"Not any more, Sis; he's in love with me. He told me so. And we . . . we . . . O forget it! He'll tell you soon enough."

"But . . . but you're not a Christian, Joyce! Robert is. The Bible says not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

"So I'm an unbeliever!" Joyce had exclaimed, laughing mockingly. "For your benefit, I've converted Robert to my way of thinking; to my philosophy. Gram's and mine."

"I . . . I can't believe this, Joyce. I can't. I won't. Not unless Robert tells me it's so," she had cried, feeling like her world was crumbling about her.

That very night, when Robert arrived, she knew the truth; he was different in every way. In front of both Gram and Joyce, he had told her he was "sorry to have to hurt her," but he was in love with Joyce and not with her at all anymore, stating that the engagement was canceled . . . was off., and that he and Joyce were getting married in the fall.

Marilyn remembered having stood as one frozen to the spot. Then, without a word, she left the room, feeling Gram's smile over the success of her little scheme, following her, mocking her.

It was so cruel. So very cruel. That's when the bitterness began to drip, drip, drip in her soul, like a drip coffee pot, drop after slow drop, drip after drip. And that's when she lost her peace of soul too, when the blessed Savior turned and walked sadly away from her heart. Oh those desolate, lonely and empty years, she thought now. How utterly meaningless and purposeless they were.

Gram's words slammed back in her face then, right in the midst of her remembering things spiritual. "You must come home. You owe it to all of us . . . Robert needs you . . . more than he needed you eight years ago. . . The twins need a mother. . . . You owe it to all of us, to come back where you belong."

She sat for a long while, eyes closed, pondering over Gram's letter. She hadn't changed, Gram hadn't. She was still the same demanding person as always: giving out orders, barking commands, expecting the lowly
"private" under her to halt, come to full attention, salute, and reply, "Yes ma'am. Order's as good as carried out and fulfilled."

But Marilyn knew in her heart she couldn't do this. God had made her an individual too much like both her father and her mother. She must find God's will and get His directive and direction and go from there. If Gram were spiritual and Spirit-filled she would give diligent thought and deep attention to the letter But she was neither. The opposite was true. Her Gram cared nothing about God, choosing, rather, to make light of Him and His followers and declaring such as being "weak and needing a crutch to stand on, or fall back on." Gram's words verbatim

She thought of Robert then, and of the love they had declared to each other before Joyce came home from college. Theirs was a courtship beautiful. Pure, too. Her ideals and morals were too high and lofty to allow for the more modern way of courting with its close body association and free-handling and much petting.

By modern standards, she would have been considered both dull and unexciting. This, however, didn't bother her in the least. She knew she had the smile and approval of God. This far exceeded and surpassed what her peers and counterparts thought or felt about her. What's more, she knew that down the blissful road of matrimony, she could look her husband in the eye with no remorse, guilt, shame or condemnation. And the further benefit of such courtship between two people was the solidarity of the marriage This was the sum total of keeping oneself pure and clean and was worth it all . . . husband-loving and respecting wife; wife-loving and respecting husband.

And now Robert was wanting to locate her, Gram's letter stated and declared. "He needs you now more than he needed you eight years ago . . . .

Tears stung her eyes. Did he, perhaps, love her? she wondered. Was this why he was reaching out after her now?

She searched her heart diligently. Did she love him? Was there any feeling left for this man who had, in such a short time, cruelly deserted her for another? What about his spiritual life; was he now born again and sanctified wholly? Gram had made no mention of such things in her letter. Why, if he really wanted to reach her, hadn't he written to her personally?
The answer to the latter question came easily to Marilyn: Gram. Gram was coy, and shrewd and sly as a fox. If she didn't want you to have a thing, she didn't give you that thing. No matter how badly you may have needed it. And, if she were working on another plot . . . another scheme . . . well, she would do the manipulating. Robert would be her little puppet.

In that very instant, Marilyn knew. Oh she knew!

She was free from Robert forever. The hurt and pain which she had been experiencing over the years was gone. Gone!

Feeling more light hearted than she had felt for months, Marilyn got to her feet and hurried to the kitchen to prepare supper.

(CHAPTER 4)

Days passed and Marilyn, busy as ever with nursing, still had not answered Gram's letter. It was because of her uncertainty as to whether it was the right thing to do or not that kept her from replying. No matter what she wrote nor how kindly and full of compassion the written words were meant to be, Gram would retort hotly and fiercely with her own volume. Marilyn knew this.

There was no way she would go back to the big house. Nor to Joyce and Robert's house. Robert was nothing more than an old acquaintance to her now. She had no ill will or bitterness for him; nothing but pure Christian love like she had for all her fellow beings. But she would not be going back there to live. Not ever. She had prayed until she touched through to God. His promise came as a deep, sweet calm to her soul: "Be still and know that I am God." That settled it all for her.

Not that she had thought of returning; she hadn't. Only if God ordered it. Then she would have obeyed and gone to live nearby to help take care of Joyce's children, knowing that God had a plan and purpose in it all. Now, however, with clear direction to "Be still and know that I am God," she resumed her duties with renewed vigor and dedication.

She had repeatedly refused Doctor Sprague's offers to some elegant restaurant for dinner (in their off-duty hours) because he was not a Christian and she was. He was a great doctor, this she knew. And he seemed
possessed with a set of equally-great morals. But this was not enough. The Biblical injunction remained firm: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers .... "

There was no mistaking the meaning of something so plain and explicit Marilyn thought, when one of the younger nurses chided her for not accepting the offer, which she had overheard when Doctor Sprague came up to the desk where Marilyn was working busily on some charts and asked her out again.

Mrs. Carlson was released and went home. She departed with faith in God, expecting a miracle in her body since the greater miracle of salvation had taken place in her heart. Marilyn had told her that God was well able to heal, but instructed the young woman to be completely resigned to whatever He chose to do or not to do for her, since He was all-wise and wanted only the best for His children. Mrs. Carlson smiled and said that was all she wanted for her life now, the will of God and whatever He chose for her.

She was busy at her desk, as usual, one afternoon when a tall, dark-haired man stepped up and asked would she kindly follow him to his mother's room down the hall.

Marilyn matched his steps when he gave the room number. Mrs. Knisely was a very sick woman, she knew.

"My mother's not going to live," he said with concern. "She's going to die, isn't she?"

"She's gravely ill," Marilyn admitted. "As to whether or not she's going to die, this rests in the hands of a Power higher and greater than mine. He alone knows the allotted time of your mother's days. The Book of Psalms tells us, 'My times are in thy hand.' "

A faint smile creased the man's mouth, a pleased smile.

They entered the room together. Marilyn checked the woman's vital signs then called her name softly. "Do you want a sip of water?" she asked kindly.
The blue eyes on the pale cheeks fluttered open. Then a smile broke out on the woman's face. "Oh it's you, Miss Porter," she exclaimed in a weak, barely audible voice. "I'm so glad you've come," she added. "You're such a busy young woman. But I wonder if you'd pray for me again. The Lord came so near the last time you were in and prayed for me." Opening her eyes wide then, she exclaimed joyously, "Josh, is that you? Is that really you? When did you get here?" A look of wonder and utter bafflement was on her face.

"I arrived a short while ago, Mother," the young man replied, picking up the tiny hand on the bed and caressing it fondly as he added, "I'm glad to know you have a nurse who knows how to pray."

"Oh, Josh, Miss Porter gets a hold of God when she prays. But tell me, how are you?" Turning to Marilyn, the mother said, "We gave Joshua to the Lord before he was born, my husband and I did."

"That's wonderful, Mrs. Knisely. And now I'll get back to my desk and leave you and your son alone," Marilyn said. "Remember, not too much talking for you, Mrs. Knisely. Let your son do the talking."

"Please, Miss Porter," Joshua said, "Pray for my mother before you leave."

"Thank you for reminding me," Marilyn answered, laying her hand on the patient's head and leading out in prayer, a thing easy to do since she had a present and personal relationship with the One Who had said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

"Thank you. Miss Porter, did Mother say?" Joshua asked.

"That is correct. And now, I must be going. I'll be out at the nurses' station if you need me," Marilyn said, turning and leaving the room.

She finished her work just as the new shift of nurses began flowing down the halls, fresh and vibrant and very much awake. She was tired, and even a bit hungry, she admitted, as she started down the corridor for a final check on Mrs. Knisely. She hoped the son's visit had not over-taxed the frail little woman's remaining strength.
She walked into the room and stood beside the bed. Mrs. Knisely was sleeping peacefully, she noted as she checked the IV solution flowing into her veins. Then, as quietly as she had entered, Marilyn slipped out of the room. Another day's work was now history for her. She was glad and happy that she could look back upon it as a day well-spent; a day in which she had given it her best . . . her very best. She had no regrets; she had not been slothful, unconcerned or uncaring. Knowing this made coming to the end of a day both rewarding and satisfying, as well as feeling completely fulfilled.

She picked her mail up at the post office, not bothering to go through it until she entered her apartment. Seeing a letter there from Gram, she opened it and began reading. This time (unlike the first letter from Gram, which had caused her to tremble and fear) Marilyn read with an inner calmness and total peace.

Dear Marilyn, the letter began.

Why do you hesitate to write? Do you think that by delaying your reply we will forget what we are asking of you, Robert and I?

What a foolish, foolish girl you are, if you suppose (for one moment even!) that I will cease in my attempt to bring you back where you belong. You must come home. I demand this. Robert's children need a mother; a day-in, day-out mother. And, since you were once engaged to him and loved him, I do think it's the least you can do to help him out and to let him know that you have no hard feelings toward him for falling in love with, and marrying, your sister.

And what about Joyce? Does it mean nothing to you that her twins are left motherless in the world. Where is your Christianity now? (Not to mention your humanity.) If your sister meant anything to you, you will come home immediately. Oh, I know you were poles apart . . . literally and truly . . . in your actions and your ways, your thinking and your temperament. But can her children be held accountable for the fact that you didn't agree nor see things in the same perspective, you and Joyce? Should they be made to suffer for this? Must they be deprived of a mother's love because of it? Like I stated in my first letter to you, you are needed here. Here! Do you understand?
Unless I hear from you within the next week or week and a half, Robert will fly to your city and search for you in every bank. He'll find you, Marilyn; don't try to hide. You must come back!

Gram

Marilyn folded the letter and tucked it in the little drawer of the end table with the first letter from Gram. She could visualize the look on Gram's face as she penned that letter: determined face, set jaw, harsh, unrelenting lines around the mouth and a will like steel to carry out the carefully schemed and pre-arranged plan she had formulated. That she would carry said plan, or plans, through, Marilyn had no doubt. Gram was tireless in her efforts to bring her plans to fulfillment and fruition.

What a blessing she could have been to the cause of God! Marilyn thought. But Gram had no desire for God. At least that's what she declared. Always, and every time, when anyone tried to speak to her about her soul and where she would spend eternity without Christ, she flew into a rage that frightened Marilyn.

Suppose Robert did come into the city in search of her, then what? the young nurse wondered, wondering what peculiar power Gram had over him. He was in no way related to her. True, he had married Joyce, Gram's granddaughter. But still, he had no reason to do her constant bidding, no need to fit so snugly into her schemes and plans. She had never remembered Robert as being a "yes" man; one who would come and go on command. He had had a mind of his own, as she recalled. Could it be that he and Joyce had become "beholden" to Gram? Could it? Gram had money; Joyce was her favorite. Joyce liked "pretty" things. Antiques. Expensive things. Fancy and fashionable clothes.

Exodus 23:8 flashed into Marilyn's mind then: "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous." Could it be that Joyce and Robert had so taken "gifts" from Gram until he felt obligated to carry out her slightest wish and plan; to come to her aid every time she beckoned and commanded?

Marilyn shuddered. In the inner recesses of her heart, she was thankful to God for not being Gram's favorite granddaughter: She would have angered Gram by refusing to accept the many "things" which she would have
showered upon her. Things that were not God-like and which did not tend toward spirituality, things of the world. She could never have accepted some of the "gifts." Furthermore, she was aware of Gram's tactics. The Holy Spirit had revealed it to her after Gram came to live in the big house.

Again the nurse shuddered. She recalled a time, shortly after Gram's arrival into the big house, when her grandmother had met her at the door as she was returning home from school. "A present for you, Marilyn," she had said, handing her an enormous box, beautifully gift wrapped.

"For . . . for me, Gram? Who is it from?"

"From me, of course!" Gram had answered, a hint of impatience in her tone of voice. "Now go to your room and try it on. . . ."

"Th . . . thanks," Marilyn remembered having stuttered.

Inside her room, she carefully removed the gorgeous, giant bow, shaped so much like a football chrysanthemum that she plunged her nose into its folds to see if, perhaps, it may have smelled like the flower. Then she opened the box and caught her breath. Inside lay the most beautiful pale orchid 2 piece suit she had ever seen.

"Do you like it?" It was Gram. She was watching from the doorway.

"I . . . Thanks. It . . . it's beautiful. Beautiful, Gram!" she had exclaimed, rushing over and hugging the neck of her always well-groomed, fashionable Gram. "Why'd you do it?"

A pleased smile crossed Gram's lips. Then she said, "I need you to help me, Marilyn. Mrs. Commering's being a bit stubborn about that acreage. I want it. And she thinks the sun rises and sets in you. . . ."

Marilyn's arms dropped from Gram's neck. In that instant the Holy Spirit alerted her. Warned her.

"Gram," she said, speaking kindly and softly, "I can't help you in your plan. I . . . I'm not for sale. Please don't feel badly toward me. I love you. I do! But . . . but I won't be bribed into doing something wrong. Mrs. Commering's a wonderful Christian. If she doesn't want to sell that land then you shouldn't
insist upon buying it. You remind me of a wicked king in the Bible who wanted to buy a good man's vineyard and the man wouldn't sell because it was a part of his inheritance. So. . . ."

That's as far as she had gotten, Marilyn recalled. Gram had rushed into the room, slapped her soundly across the mouth, grabbed the box up in her arms and rushed from the room, livid with anger. She had never again seen the lovely suit. For this, she was thankful. It saved more unpleasant scenes with her poor, dear Gram.

Well, she would have to answer Gram's letter, she decided, getting up to prepare herself something to eat before writing the letter.

(Chapter 5) Missing

(CHAPTER 6)

Marilyn ate little for supper that night. The burden on her heart over Doctor Sprague and Mr. Widdemeier took her appetite. She spent a long time on her knees in prayer for the man; one an out-right sinner, the other a backslider and each on his road to a devil's hell; a Christless eternity.

The thought of it lay upon her soul like a great weight. With a heavy heart, she finally turned the bed covers back and crawled down between the sheets, falling into a restless and troubled sleep.

Somewhere along the avenue of sleep, she heard a loud jangling noise. A fire alarm, she thought dreamily. A practice fire alarm bell in the hospital. No, it was not loud enough for that, her half-sub-conscious brain decided. It was one of those little ice cream trucks running up and down the street, tinkling, tinkling, tinkling its merry way, calling the children to come and taste its wares.

Ice cream truck! Marilyn thought, suddenly wide awake. She must be late for work. Yes. Yes, that was it; she was late. Then, recognizing the sound for what it was, she reached over on the nightstand and picked up the phone. "Marilyn Porter speaking," she said softly into the mouthpiece.

"Miss Porter." It was one of the young night nurses. "I'm sorry to disturb you. Can you come to the hospital immediately? It's Mr. Widdemeier. He's
almost hysterical; comes in and out of sedation calling for you. Crying for your"

Marilyn jumped out of bed. "I'll be there as quickly as possible," she promised, putting the phone back in place.

She washed and dressed in record time, wondering what the man wanted, yet almost positive that she knew: prayer, no doubt. Prayer to calm and allay his fears.

On the way to the hospital she checked her watch. She had slept only four hours! She thought of Gram then, and her statement about Robert checking via the operator to contact her by phone. She was thankful she had had the good sense to get an unlisted number, with only some of the hospital personnel knowing that number too!

She hurried in through the emergency entrance and went straight to Mr. Widdemeier's room. Mrs. Fielding met her there. "I'm sorry, Miss Porter," the night supervisor commented. "Some of these 'greenies' don't have a bit of sense! Calling you out, I mean. Now you get right back to that apartment and go to bed. You won't be fit for work when you get up in the morning. I'll take care of Mr. Widdemeier. He's sleeping soundly now. The surgery's on his mind, no doubt."

"He's frightened," Marilyn said in a half-whisper. "Thinks he has only from three to six months of living. At the longest, six, he told me."

"Yet neither of his doctors has told him this," Mrs. Fielding said. "It's something he believes; something so real to him that nothing any of us tells him changes his opinion. And he could be right; I'm not disputing his logic. But up to now, this is something that has not been established by any who are working on his case. Surgery will tell more, of course. But then, who knows that the operating team will not be able to remove the malignancy in its entirety. Now run on home and do finish getting that much-needed sleep."

Marilyn looked at Mr. Widdemeier and, noting that he was sleeping soundly indeed and that she could do nothing for him, she left for the apartment.
It was the ringing of the alarm clock the following morning that sent her scurrying out of bed. She had purposely set the alarm early so she could get to the hospital extra-early and be with Mr. Widdemeier before they prepared him for the operating theater.

She arrived, dressed for work, since she had decided to stay by the man's side for as long as possible. His wife was in the room when she entered, smiling, and inquiring how her patient had slept.

Mr. Widdemeier heaved a great sigh of relief when he saw her. Then his eyes filled with tears. "I . . . I'm so glad you've come!" he exclaimed. "You . . . you'll pray for me again, will you, Miss Porter?"

"That's why I've come so early, Mr. Widdemeier. In a little while we'll be preparing you for surgery. I wanted to see what you've done with Jesus. Have you asked Him to come into your heart and to forgive you of your sins, like I told you to do when I was here yesterday? He's waiting to fill your heart with peace and rest and joy such as you've never known. He wants to go with you into the operating room; to stay with you and to guide the surgeons' skilled hands with His Hand."

Mr. Widdemeier's eyes opened wide. "I've been a mean man, Miss Porter. Ask my wife, she knows."

"'All we like sheep have gone astray;'" Marilyn quoted from Isaiah 53:6, "'we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

"'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' This last is taken from Isaiah 1:18. It's for you, Mr. Widdemeier. For your wife, too. For all of us."

The patient lay, silent, staring at the ceiling. "Do you think He'd want me?" he asked suddenly. "As... wicked and . . . and as mean as I've been? Would He, Miss Porter?"

"He came 'to seek and to save that which was lost.' Yes, He wants you. This glorious salvation is for 'whosoever will.' Rev. 22:17 says, 'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him
that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' This means you, Mr. Widdemeier!"

"Wh . . . why should He do it for . . . for me?" the man asked with tears running from his eyes.

"Love, Mr. Widdemeier. Love.!

"I . . . I see," came the simple, awe-filled reply. Then, softly, he said, "Quote that about sheep going astray for me again, will you please? And about being white as snow. I'm dirty, Miss Porter. Filthy on the inside. I'd like to be clean and white as snow. I believe I could go to surgery unafraid if I knew my heart was as white as snow."

Again Marilyn quoted the precious Scriptures. Tears fell as she quoted. Mr. Widdemeier's eyes were closed. His lips were moving. God was in the dimly-lit room. It was a Chapel, a holy place.

Silence was the order for a long while after Marilyn finished quoting the precious Word. With bowed head, she prayed. Then Mr. Widdemeier broke the silence. "It's all right, Miss Porter," he announced with a smile. "I'm not afraid anymore; I have Christ in here." And he smote his chest as he made the declaration. "You may go now. I need to fix some things up with my wife before I go down to surgery," he said, adding, "Thank you, Miss Porter. Thank you!"

"Thank God," Marilyn told him as she left the room and pulled the door shut behind her. Mission accomplished; prayers answered, she thought, as she hurried away for a cup of steaming hot chocolate.

The weeks seemed to fly by for her. Always, there was much work to be done in the hospital: new patients arriving, others returning home to loved ones; some to good health and greatly-improved bodies, others to an uncertain future physically, like Mr. Widdemeier.

Marilyn returned home one evening and sat down to sort through her mail when she saw a letter with familiar handwriting on the envelope. What would Gram have to say this time? she wondered as she opened the envelope and pulled out the letter. Opening it, she read the only two words on the sheet: "Disinherited. Gram."
It struck her funny and she began to laugh. This was Gram's way of getting revenge, she recognized. But the funny part of it all was that she hadn't expected to be left any of Gram's inheritance. Not one single penny. She had always been far too plain looking and too old fashioned to suit Gram and her fashion geared clothing.

Like the time when she came home from school and Gram brought her some of the dresses which she had "made more fashionable" (Gram's words) by cutting the skirts off until they would have come far above the knee had she, Marilyn, worn them.

"O Gram!" Marilyn remembered having cried. "I loved that dress. Why did you shorten it? It was perfect the way it was."

"No sense in looking like something from the puritan era," Gram had quipped. "No granddaughter of mine's going to dress like you've been dressing and get by with it. Tomorrow, you will wear one of these dresses."

It was another of Gram's orders, Marilyn remembered. But when she dressed for school the following day, she wore the same dress which she had worn the previous day; the dress which had not been shortened. She would not forfeit her relationship with God and violate His standards of modesty for anyone. God must have His way in her life.

Gram was furious. In spite of her . . . Marilyn . . . trying to explain why she couldn't wear the cut-off versions, Gram remained furious. For days. "You're a religious fanatic!" she had retorted. "And I'm ashamed of you. Why can't you be more like your sister?"

Marilyn recalled how, in her heart, she knew the answer to that question. But she did not answer. The Bible said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." She wanted to be a peacemaker. Always. And, since words only added fuel to Gram's fires, Marilyn kept still, thankful in her heart for God's saving grace and His sanctifying power which had transformed her until that "want to" toward fashionableness and things worldly was taken out. Root and all.

Poor Gram! she thought, getting up and beginning supper preparations. She would have to pray more fervently and earnestly for her grandparent,
that God would soften the callouses on her heart and put a hunger in Gram's heart for God.

(CHAPTER 7)

One beautiful fall day as Marilyn stepped through the hospital doors to the outside, she became acutely conscious that she was being followed. Turning quickly, she came face to face with the tall, dark-haired man whom she had met months before in the hospital. "O hello, Mr. Knisely," she said softly, trying to conceal her embarrassment over having turned and finding him following her.

"You have quite a memory," Joshua remarked. "Remembering my name, out of all the people whom you meet and wait upon in the hospital. A remarkable memory, Miss Porter. And I do want to thank you now, lest I forget, for everything you did to help my mother. You'll never know how much your prayers meant to her. You see, even saints need encouragement. When they're ill and incapacitated, especially. Our enemy, the devil, hurls his heaviest artillery their way then, it seems."

Marilyn listened with amazement. "You . . . you're a Christian then, Mr. Knisely?" she asked quickly.

A smile crossed the man's face. "A most joyous one, I'm happy to say," he declared. "I've been converted since I was in the fourth grade of school. Less than half a year later, I heard of holiness of heart. I sought earnestly after the glorious second work of grace and, needless to say, I became a happy finder. I died to self and came alive to Christ; I lost my way, my desires, my ambitions; I found His way and His perfect will. I've been walking this Highway of Holiness ever since. I took it by choice, Miss Porter, and I have never been sorry. But say, you must be both tired and hungry after another busy day. So why not grant me the privilege of escorting you out to a cozy little restaurant not too far from here? It's not fancy, I'm afraid, but they do serve good food, I am told."

Marilyn was speechless. Mrs. Knisely was a wonderful woman, she knew. But her son was almost a stranger. She heard Josh's voice now.

"Oh, and one thing more, I am not married. Never have been. In case you were hesitating over any doubts along this line."
Marilyn blushed. "Truthfully, it did enter my mind. And of course you know that no true Christian would do a thing like this without the married one's mate or companion. It would be a violation of the injunction to 'abstain from all appearance of evil,' as stated in 1 Thess. 5:22."

"I am happy to know someone who shares my identical conviction and feelings along this line. We're living in such a promiscuous age and society anymore. The 'old paths' are forsaken, the 'old landmarks' are torn down and cast into the dust of the earth as trash and bothersome things, and there is little distinction between right and wrong. I was appalled and alarmed when I returned home from abroad a few months ago. Talk about change! I could do nothing but bow my head and weep. But we can talk over food. Will you allow me this privilege, please?"

Marilyn amazed herself by answering yes. There was something so genuine and real about Joshua that she couldn't refuse. And his speech carried with it the fact that he was, without a doubt, dwelling in Canaan land, too. This all aided her in making the decision.

While she showered and changed into a modest looking street dress, Mr. Knisely waited in a nearby park on one of the benches, going to meet her when she came out of her apartment and giving her a look of pleased appraisal.

They entered the small restaurant and found a table for two near a west window. As soon as they were finished eating, the man began talking.

"Please call me, Joshua. Or Josh," he told Marilyn. "And will you mind if I call you Marilyn?" he asked.

"Not at all, Josh. After all, Miss Porter does sound a bit too formal for two people who are out eating together."

"Thank you, Marilyn," he said the name with an almost reverential tone of voice. "You have done me a favor. And I'm sure that what I have to say to you will now be easier because of your answer. Again, thank you. You have a lovely name . . . Marilyn. I once time had a little sister by that name. But they needed her in Heaven; so she left us to join the bright hosts above."
"She's happy, Josh. Oh, so happy!"

"That she is. At first, Father and Mother thought they couldn't stand it without her. But then God performed a miracle and poured the oil of healing into their hearts at the same time. Their grief vanished, their appetites picked up and they carried on like always, working for the Lord.

"My parents were missionaries, Marilyn, in case you are wondering. Father and Marilyn are both buried in Africa. Mother came home two years ago because of failing health. Her precious body now rests in a cemetery some distance from here. But when the trump of God sounds, and the dead in Christ rise first, she and my father and small sister will rise and meet in the air. What a day that will be!"

Tears bounced down Josh's face as he related it. Marilyn, too, was crying for joy.

"I am a missionary," Joshua stated, "a missionary home on furlough. While I was home, God ordered it that Mother should join my dear father and sister in His Home, as you know, since you nursed and cared for her so patiently and tenderly. She told me many things about you, Marilyn. And truthfully, she observed you most carefully. Everything she saw and observed was a manifestation of true holiness, she confided in me when I was able to leave my deputational work long enough to come to her in the hospital.

"When I return, to resume my duties and to take on those added ones of my father's . . . the man who was doing dad's work and filling his three pulpits has been a disappointment and will not be helping any longer . . . well, my life will be one of continual busyness and many duties. Varied duties. I am due to leave the states within 6 months, God willing. In the meantime, I am doing deputational work, traveling from state to state and church to church, presenting the work to our people, hoping, praying and fasting and weeping for God to send us laborers. O how we need godly, Spirit-filled men and women over there!"

"Isn't this our need everywhere?" Marilyn asked. "So few are really dead to self and Spirit-filled. We're in a day of shallowness, Josh. Extreme shallowness, and little or no concern about the lost."
"An end-time sign, Marilyn. This 'falling away' prediction had been fulfilled before our very eyes. Like I said, I am a missionary, a missionary in its broadest and widest and deepest sense of meaning. I am not one to waste time nor mince words. Over there every minute counts. Thousands of souls go out each minute without Christ. That is why many a missionary goes to a premature grave; the cries of the lost ring in his ears day and night. He seeks them out in the villages and in their huts, getting little or no sleep many a night, his main concern the salvation of their souls. I tell you, Marilyn, I can hardly wait to get back home. Back with my people.

"You, no doubt, are wondering why I have been so lengthy and rather detailed, and why I have given you so much information regarding my family. I have a reason, a very personal reason. Please wait until I have finished telling you everything before you answer.

"When I knew I was coming to the States on furlough, I began asking the Lord to help me find and locate His choice of a life's companion. I had asked Him, if it was in accordance with His Divine plan for me, to let her be a spiritual and Spirit-filled nurse. They're needed so desperately over there.

"I was not in Mother's room long before she said, 'Josh, God's got your wife right here in this hospital. I've prayed and prayed for you that you would marry a holy woman. I've found her. I will not tell you who she is, but wait until you too feel this assurance when you meet her.'

"She didn't tell me anything more, nor whether this particular and very special woman was a patient, a nurse, or a common scrub woman. And, strange as it may sound to you, Marilyn, the minute I saw you behind the desk at the nurses' station, head bowed, deep in diligent and earnest work, the Holy Spirit whispered to my heart, 'There's your wife, Joshua.'

"I knew you weren't married because God never makes any mistakes nor tells us something that is not so.

"I stood, watching you for a brief moment . . . the serenity of your countenance, the modesty of your entire being . . . then I hurried along the hall to Mother's room, informing her that I would be taking a bride with me back to the field, if she'd consent to go. And there, too, I trust my God; He does not make known His will to one without the mutual knowledge to the other one involved.
"Mother's face brightened when I told her it was the little nurse with the neat, holiness hair-do and the modest dress. Then, grasping my hand, she said, 'Let us thank the blessed Savior for her, Joshua. This is of God.'

"We prayed together then, and God sent such a love for you into my heart that I have not been able to get away from it. All these weeks, since my dear mother's funeral, I have thought of you night and day, impatient for the time of my appointed speaking engagement in the small town near here. I love you, Marilyn. More than anyone or anything on earth, I love you. I know this is not the conventional way of courting a girl, but I don't have time for this. My days are too full.

"I am not asking for your answer so quickly. This comes as a shock to you, perhaps. But I do ask that you pray about it and then let me know by mail. I will be back in this area one more time before I leave the States, God willing. You will have had time to pray earnestly over this by that time . . . two months. Oh, Marilyn, believe me when I say that you will make me the happiest man on earth if you consent to be my wife. I love you! I have never said these words to another woman, besides my mother and grandmother and sister. Believe me when I say them, Marilyn; they come from the very depths of my heart."

"Thank you, Josh. Contrary to what you have said, no, I am not shocked. I am amazed, however. I . . . I feel like that other Ruth . . . my full name is Marilyn Ruth . . . in the Bible, meeting her Boaz. God, Who witnessed to your heart, has done the same to mine. I will tell you the words which Ruth said to her mother-in-law, 'Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

"'Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. . . .' the ways of God are past finding out."

"How true!" Joshua exclaimed, getting to his feet and moving the chair back for her to follow. "I have a preaching assignment tonight," he said. "Would it be possible for you to go with me? It's only 30 miles out of the city, Marilyn. Or will it make a hardship on you, getting up so early to begin your duties in the morning, God willing? I don't want that! You have made my
heart full and overflowing!" he exclaimed brokenly. "I want to go, Joshua. I'd love it."

"You may be disappointed in the speaker," he said, smiling and hardly able to conceal his joy but refraining from any sort of emotionalism or the show of the love he felt for her. He wanted her to utilize the next two months by praying over the matter until the burden for missions weighed as heavily upon her heart as it did on his -- until her soul became wholly saturated and absorbed in the work for the people to whom God had called him. She would make a wonderful missionary, he thought silently as he walked with her toward the car. A wonderful missionary indeed. And a wonderful help-meet for him. Oh how very much he loved her! Yes, how very much!

Like she had said a few minutes ago, the ways of God were past finding out. And they were always accurate ways. Right ways. With perfect timing, too, he thought, opening the car door and helping her in on her side. Some day soon this practice would be routine, God willing. He raised his eyes heavenward and said, "Thank you, Heavenly Father. From the bottom of my heart, thank You."

(THE END)