A PERIOD OF TIME
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Rose Ann stood well behind the ruffled curtains at the window and watched as the new neighbor and her small son dropped seeds into the freshly spaded earth in the flower bed that ran like a straight arrow along the chain-link fence that divided their lawn from hers. A sob caught in her throat as she watched. She felt almost like she was suffocating. John would have had their garden planted weeks ago, she knew; as soon as he had seen the
tender leaves on the trees. The peas would have been put into the cold earth on St. Patrick's Day. Without exception! One year he had to push the snow off where he wanted to plant the peas. But he did it. Even managed to dig the two long rows. Quite a feat, she recalled, smiling in spite of the emptiness in her heart and in the house. And they had a bumper crop of tender green peas that year, she thought, remembering how she had canned and frozen and given them away by the sacksfull.

She watched as the young mother stooped over to help her son. Making sure he's dropping the seeds in a straight line, she thought, recalling John’s fussiness when planting his garden. Everything had to be planted in a straight line. Everything. The garden and flower beds were his special delight and joy. Especially so after his short-lived retirement.

Long after the young mother and her son had disappeared behind the privacy of their back door, Rose Ann stood by the window, thinking and remembering. Remembering, mostly. Then her gaze wandered to the mountains nestling upwards toward the clouds and running almost into the back of her lawn. How she and John loved it here among the mountains. Their entire life revolved around each other and the mountains and the narrow valley. Everything they ever needed was right here: the church, general store, barber shop, post office, small department store, drug store, and school. Not once did the city ever lure them. Out of necessity, John drove daily to it, five days a week -- to his employment. Other than that, it had no drawing power whatever.

Rose Ann looked to the mountains now; the strong, towering, beautiful mountains. She gasped. Maybe it was the long hard winter, with its deep snow and sleet. Maybe it was the late wet spring, with the long days of fog and rain. Whatever the reason, the sun of May had turned the mountains into a tapestry of colors as bright and as varied as autumn. The only difference being the hot colors of fall -- crimson and rich glowing browns.

The colors of spring were cool -- greens of the young hardwood trees and the almost-black green of the pines.

Under the overlay of many-shaded greens was the white of the dogwood, scattered on the steep mountain slopes like old snow.
With the sun shining and the wind blowing, the whole surface of the mountain shimmered with myriad colors, like an opal in firelight, and the great bulk of the hills looked like the surface of a sunlit sea.

She recalled how she and John had walked into those spring-bright woods in the cool of the afternoon; recalled the fragrance of the sweet shrubs in them, and the smell of the sun-warmed pine, and the nameless odors of a thousand different drifting pollens, the life-seeds of the forest.

Everything was astir in the woods then -- the chipmunks and the little brown mice and, when one paused long enough to be silent and listen, the buzz and hum of unnumbered insects made a high-pitched singing. Blue violets, like shy beautiful maidens, grew on the forest floor along with tiny white and yellow flowers, and the old dead gray mosses took on subtle colors of pink and pearl and purplish blue.

Rose Ann sighed. A sad tear perched in the corner of her eye then dropped with a splash onto her folded hands. Everything was so beautiful out there. John would have taken her with him long ago into the woods if he were still living. Anything beautiful had to be shared with her. That was John. Oh, he had been so good to her, and so thoughtful, too.

She recalled a time when they had sat on the back porch swing enjoying the beauty of the mountains. John had had his arm around her, resting his hand lightly on her shoulder. "We'll call this the parade of the birds," he had said softly as he pointed to the nearby mountain. "Look out there, my dear. Did you ever see so many birds?"

And look she did. First a catbird bobbed by. Perching on a tree near the porch, he gave a half-angry, half-plaintive noise like a kitten with its tail being pulled. Then tiny bluebirds flew by, bluer by far than the backyard bluebirds that built their nests in John's carefully hung gourds. Yellow birds, the color of daffodils, dandelions and buttercups, flitted in and out among the bushes and trees. But the most spectacular of all were the scarlet tanagers -- flashes of brilliant crimson with jet black wings, they swirled above the meadow grasses, hunting insects.

Tears spilled from Rose Ann's eyes as the lovely long-past memory replayed itself with vividness and detailed accuracy. Life would never again be the same, she realized. Not with John gone. The mountain was beautiful
and spectacular, she had to admit; but it was the sharing it with John that elicited its maximum beauty for her.

She thought of the nights then. How they enjoyed the spring and summer nights together on their back lawn! The birds had their vesper service all around them. Their sweet music-songs floated out on the still night air and filled the entire valley with a medley of indescribable beauty and glory. A mixed chorus, it was. Always, a mixed chorus: robins, song sparrows, field sparrows, larks, blue birds, indigo buntings, red wing blackbirds, cardinals and sweetest of all singers, the wood thrush. From down by the creek came the lilting, trilling, soul-inspiring notes of the shy but beautiful thrush.

Even the sparrows song, she recalled, and all the little birds that do not sing but just make cheeping, chirping, chipping noises -- they added their part to the vesper services too. And for all the variety and mixture and differences in tone and sound and pitch, there was not a single discordant note among the singers, she realized.

She walked away from the window, trying to push the once-pleasant memories from her. They were past and could never again be repeated. Thinking and recalling only added to her pain and loneliness.

She opened a drawer in her buffet to get a luncheon cloth out for the kitchen table and there, looking at her from the picture, was John. It was one of her favorite pictures of him. Almost, she lifted it from the drawer and clutched it to her heart. Then she steeled herself and quickly shut the drawer. She should get rid of it, she told her heart, to help heal the hurt faster. Put it in the bottom of the cedar chest where she wasn't apt to go looking for anything for a long, long time. But she couldn't do that, she knew. No, she couldn't; she loved him too much.

A loud cry from her front lawn eased the painful memory momentarily. Rushing outside she saw the little boy pinned beneath his overturned red wagon. His leg was bleeding and a long gash on his forehead revealed blood too.

Picking him up carefully and turning the wagon right-side-up, she asked, "Where do you live? Where is your mommy?"
Crying hard and snuggling close to her breast, he pointed to the house beside her own. Rose Ann felt ashamed. Of course; it was the same little boy whom she had seen earlier in the yard with his mother, planting seeds. She had been so wrapped up in her grief that she hadn't bothered to be neighborly with the new woman who had moved into the house.

"Now don't you worry," she crooned into his ear. "I'll have you home in a jiffy. Then your mommy and I will clean you up and plaster you with bandaids. Do you like band aids? My little Johnnie used to like to wear them. I'd put them on his knees and on his forehead and one time I even put one on his nose. Oh my, but he did look funny."

"Will you put one on my nose?" the boy asked.

"If your mommy says I may, I certainly will. And now, here's your house. Can you reach the doorbell and push it for me? My my, won't mommy be surprised and happy to see you again!"

By now the little boy had forgotten about his overturned wagon. He reached for the doorbell and pushed it. And then the door flew open. "Chad!" the young woman cried anxiously. "What happened to you, dear?"

"I . . . I had an accident," came the honest reply, followed by a flow of fresh tears -- a deluge of tears.

"Come inside," the young woman said, lifting Chad into her arms. "I'm Mrs. Beebe -- Helen Beebe," she said by way of introduction.

"And I'm Mrs. John Kendrick -- Rose Ann Kendrick. I'm so glad to meet you. I promised that fine little chap of yours we'd put a band aid on his nose if you didn't mind."

Immediately Chad's crying ceased. Wiggling out of his mother's arms he cried, "May I, Mommy? Please, may the nice lady put a band aid on my nose?"

Winking at Rose Ann, Mrs. Beebe replied softly, "Yes, dear. As soon as your cuts are bathed and cleaned we'll put band aids on them and then you may have one on your nose, too. Now won't you look grand! "
Chad smiled at Rose Ann. Then, passing a framed picture on the end table, he exclaimed as he pointed, "My daddy! See my daddy? I love my daddy very much. He was a brave man, Mommy says. When I grow big I'm going to be brave, too, like my daddy was."

Was? Rose Ann sucked her breath in quick-like.

Seeing the look on her neighbor's face, Helen Beebe explained the meaning of Chad's statements as she washed the blood from his minor wounds. "Cristopher was a brave man, Mrs. Kendrick. He was my husband, and he was Chad's father. We were so very happy together. We loved each other deeply."

Was there a sob in Mrs. Beebe's voice? Rose Ann was sure there was.

"Chad was only a toddler when Cristopher was sent abroad and was killed in action. Two months before this, my husband found the Lord," Mrs. Beebe said with streaming tears. "He introduced me to the Lord Jesus Christ through his many letters to me. I began reading the Bible and studying the Word. In a short period of time, I became convicted of my sins and, in repenting and forsaking them, I became converted. This beautiful and personal relationship with the Lord is the thing that held me steady and kept me anchored when I received the news of Cristopher's death."

"Oh-h I . . . I'm so sorry," Rose Ann cried, flinging her arms around the attractive young mother. "You see, I know how empty and all-alone you feel. I . . . I . . ."

Mrs. Beebe smiled sadly. "I heard about your husband's passing," she remarked. "You have my sympathy. I meant to come over and get acquainted with you. Then I thought you may feel it to be an invasion of your privacy; me, a stranger. But I've been praying for you, Mrs. Kendrick. Every day."

Rose Ann dried her tears. "Thank you," she replied. "I'm afraid I have become a recluse of sorts since John passed away. I'm ashamed of myself, too, seeing you and how you carry on as though your husband were merely away at work and would be returning any minute. Don't his pictures cause you pain and add to your grief? I mean, well, I've put everything of John's away, or gave it away, thinking by removing what was his I would get over
the pain and the hurt more quickly. But that is not so; the deep hurt is still there. "

"Time alone will efface this, Mrs. Kendrick. In the interim, one must simply cast this deep-cutting pain upon the Lord, Who said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' It works. Concerning Cristopher's pictures: no, they don't cause me pain. In fact, the opposite is true; they are a source of comfort and joy to me. Then, too, I want Chad to hold forever the only thing left for him to remember ... his father's pictures. Cristoper's high ideals, his noble character, are all revealed in the pictures I have of him. I want our son to look upon these pictures until the desire to emulate what the photographs reveal is ingrained upon his heart like indelible ink. The one big comfort I have comes from the very real knowledge that I will be reunited with my husband again. Ours is not a permanent parting; not an eternal separation. It is merely for a period of time. A brief period of time, as God regards and counts time. In the meantime, I'm keeping my lamp trimmed and burning brightly, working and trying to brighten another's corner."

Rose Ann heaved a great sigh. "You've certainly brightened my corner!" she exclaimed. "In fact, you are God's answer to my prayers. I see where I shall have to do some things differently. And by God's help I'm going to begin today. This very minute. Too long I have sat and brooded over my 1099. God makes no mistakes; He had his reason for taking my dearest earthly treasure. Now, by His grace, I'm going to devote my time and efforts to doing personal work among the lost, those who don't know Christ.

Mrs. Beebe smiled. Pushing Chad toward Rose Ann, she said, "He's ready for that bandaid, Mrs. Kendrick."

Taking the little boy's hand, Rose Ann led him to a chair. She must take him with her to the mountains one of these bright, sunny spring days, she mused as she put the band aid over the bridge of his nose.

And then she smiled. Suddenly, some of the hurt rolled away. She could smile again. Yes, she could smile! A part of her was still alive. Very much alive!

She was no longer alone. Never had been. He was still with her; by her; in her. The chasm of grief alone had kept her from being aware of Him. But
now . . . yes, now . . . she raised her hands upward. She felt His Hands still holding hers. And in that instant her topsy-turvy world righted itself. She heard His voice and knew that everything was working together for good. Her good.