

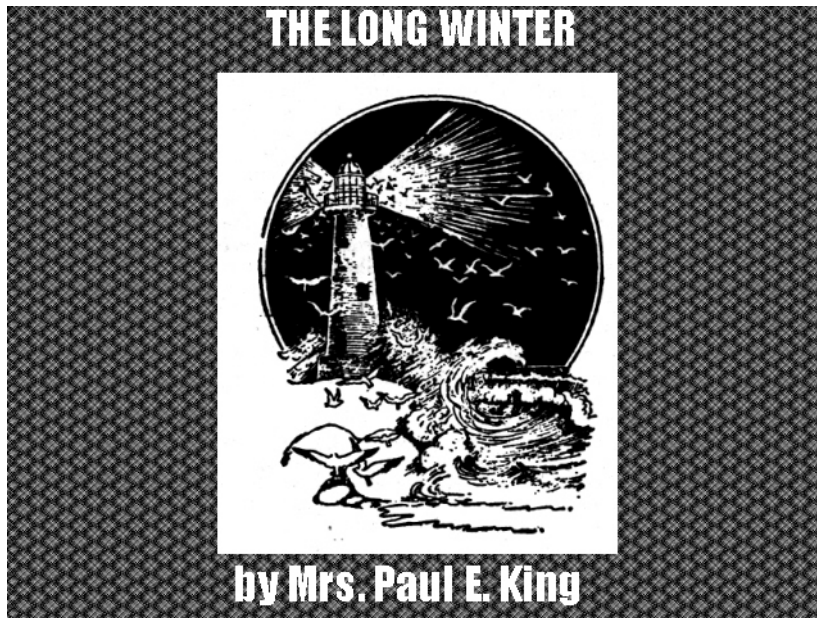
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 11/09/05
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
January 6, 13, 20, 27, February 3, 10, 17, 24, March 3, 10, 17, 24, 1985



THE LONG WINTER
By Mrs. Paul E. King

(Chapter 1)

Joanna Elizabeth looked through the curtained window, beyond Grosmom's and Mom's carefully-planted, carefully-tended monthly roses of the hybrid kind, past the long row of spirea-forsythia bushes, in that order . . . spirea, forsythia, spirea, forsythia . . . down to the triple row of wind-break

pinetrees where Hannah and Abigail were rolling and tossing about in the remains of the first snow with apparent delight and glee.

Tears sprang to her sky-blue eyes. She sighed disconsolately, wondering what was happening to her; what, actually, was taking place inside her. Did Joshua feel what she was feeling and was he, too, kinda' all mixed up inside himself? After all, the only difference between them was that he was a boy and she was a girl. Other than that, they were not different. Oh sure, Josh cut his hair; she didn't. Rather, Grospapa cut Josh's hair. Kept it right short, too -- said it didn't need cutting as often that way.

Joanna smiled indulgently, recalling one of Joshua's haircuts. "Please, Grospapa," he had begged, "don't make 90 many ridges and furrows up my head. I . . . I'm sixteen now

His sentence trailed like a kite string in a strong March wind.

"So-o?" Grospapa ventured unhesitatingly. "You get full of pride if I trim you up nice. Carnal pride! Is not good!" he added quickly in his stammering English-German mixture.

"But Grospapa, Joanna and I turned sixteen. We go to school and, come spring, I'll be seventeen."

"You afraid of getting laughed at! " he exclaimed. "Shame! Shame on you Joshua Finkenbiner. You never make good Finkenbiner; they take persecution and ridicule standing up. They have backbone. Like steel. Backbone like the Lord Jesus: . . unyielding. Strong."

Joshua said nothing more, knowing the utter futility in pleading his case. Grospapa was a Finkenbiner, a through and through Finkenbiner.

It was Mom who had come to Josh's rescue. Saying nothing derogatory about Grospapa and his philosophy about pride in giving Joshua a sure enough manlike haircut, she coyly stated (hinted) to Grospapa that since Joshua looked so much like his grandfather, the image could be one of complete totality were he to have his hair cut the same way. And it worked. From then on, Joshua received the best haircuts Grospapa's scissors and shears could produce and give.

Joanna smiled, recalling the incident. Then a furrow ridged her brow. Not until she turned sixteen (or was it in the middle of her fifteenth year) did she notice the strange unrest deep inside herself. It came ever so subtly. Tears, first of all. An emptiness, too. Then a sort of crazy, mixed-up feeling -- like she didn't belong . . . to either the full-grown teens nor those in their "beginning" teens. She felt like she was on a see-saw that just wasn't balancing properly. She wanted to get off. But how? Where?

Tears rolled down her full cheeks. She fled from the window to the security and privacy of her bedroom. She was ever so grateful that Mom had had the wisdom to give her the spare bedroom as her very own when she turned fifteen.

The small but airy-light and cheerful room beneath the attic stairway was a real haven for her. With her own dexterity, she had quilted a quilt top of snowy-white, the tiny, evenly-spaced stitches of her hand-drawn design so meticulously inserted and placed as to make the best quilter stand back in utter awe and amazement. Beneath the fall of the scalloped-edge, snowy-white showpiece and around the entire base of the bed billowed a ruffled skirt of whisper-pink. Curtains of the same color and fabric hung at the windows their wide, full ruffles gracing the "eyes" of the big house with beauty and dignity as well as with old-fashioned charm. All had been fashioned and made by her hands. She loved to work with her hands.

She saw her profile as she passed the dresser; the big mirror reflected her image back to her. She had changed, radically so, in appearance. And she was still changing, she realized. For one thing (and this was a plus factor, she told herself), her permanent teeth looked "more at ease" in her mouth now than they had looked when she was eight, nine, or even ten years old, and her once rather long-looking nose now fit her face perfectly. It was in perfect proportion to her eyes and her soft mouth -- another plus factor, she told herself.

She thought back to her twelfth and thirteenth birthdays . . . sixth and seventh grades respectively . . . when she was tall and toothy and knobby with popping bones and two long, thick sand-colored braids of such utter unmanageability as to make it totally impossible for the ever-curly strands to stay put for any length of time. Long before the noon school bell rang, the shorter lengths of her fast-growing hair had freed themselves and were

dancing merrily around her cheeks to the music of the errant breezes, much to her chagrin and embarrassment.

"When will I be allowed to put my hair up?" she remembered having asked around the supper table one evening after an embarrassing day at school. "John Pembagast is forever tugging at my braids. I'm fourteen now."

Grospapa had given the answer; "You still a young girl, Johanna," he said without looking up from his overflowing plate of food and calling her Johanna instead of Joanne. "Braids are pretty on little girls."

"But Grospapa," Joanna had protested softly, "I'm not a little girl anymore."

"And you're not a big girl, Johanna," came the immediate reply, which ended the conversation.

Thinking back upon that event now, Joanna recalled that once again it was Mom who had come to the rescue. "I think Joanna would look more lady-like with her hair up," she had stated flatly. "Braids are pretty on little girls; but young women, well . . ."

Grospapa "harumphed" several times, then settled back to clean his plate with a crust of bread, dragging it carefully across the bottom and around the edges to sop up the last drop of gravy and the final bite of food. From that day on, however, she had worn her long hair in a neat way up on her head.

She sat down in the small rocker which Grospapa had made and given to her the day Mom told her that the spare bedroom was to be hers. The chair's cane bottom was covered with a downy cushion of deep pink the cushion's ruffle falling softly in deep, full beauty toward the floor. She rocked back and forth for awhile then she picked up her Bible which lay on a nearby table. Opening it, her eyes fell upon Psalms 45:13: "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold."

Joanna closed her eyes and meditated on the verse. Then the tears flowed from her eyes. "'The king's daughter . . . all glorious within . . .'" She whispered the words in a sort of benedictory way, allowing each word to settle warmly in her heart. "'Her clothing is of wrought gold.'"

Drawing the open Bible close to her heart, she thought back to the day when she was so gloriously converted and then sanctified wholly. Shy by nature she hadn't said anything to her parents that night after family worship, when she was just ten years old. Rather, she had gone to bed and curled her slender body up beneath the heavy quilts and blankets and, for the greater part of the night, she had wept silently. Hannah had stirred uneasily several times in her sleep beside her, but other than that, no one knew of her deep inner struggle and the heavy conviction on her heart. No one but God and herself.

The load of sin and condemnation was so heavy that she was sure she would die unless she could get rid of it. She wept and cried and prayed hour after hour, begging silently for God to forgive her for Jesus' sake. And a short while after she heard the mantel clock chime out three musical chimes, she felt the heavy load drop off like it had never even been there. Jesus had come into her heart; she knew she was forgiven of every committed sin. She was converted. Almost immediately, she fell into a sweet, peaceful sleep.

Her radical heart transformation was so evident the following morning that Grosmom remarked about it before Joanne had kind time to settle herself properly at the table. "Something happen to you," Grosmom had said, patting Joanne's hand. "Something wonderful! I see it on the face."

"I got saved last night," Joanna remembered having replied. "Jesus lives in my heart now and my heavy load of sin is gone. Oh, I'm so happy!"

Breakfast got cold that morning, but no one seemed to care; shouting and praising God, or anything spiritual, always took precedence over anything of lesser value. Even Hannah, tiny though she was then, had sat on her high stool and wept.

Abigail had still been asleep in her crib upstairs and so she had missed out on that early morning blessing. However, the little girl was the benefactor of this new life in Christ, for now, instead of Mom having to tell her to help to care for the lovely and loving Abigail, Joanna took over like a little mother, singing to her when she became fretful and tired and rocking her gently until sleep came.

Between the three of them . . . Hannah, Abigail, and her . . . a strong bond of love and affection was knit and secured. In a way, she felt

responsible for her two younger sisters. Maybe it was because she was older than they. Maybe it was because she wanted them to go to Heaven, like she knew she would be doing when she died. Maybe it was simply because she loved them so deeply.

She rushed to the window and looked across the rolling snow-clad lawn to the windbreak pines. Where were her sisters? Only minutes ago, they had been running and playing on the lawn. Now there was no sign of them. None at all.

Racing like some wild, frightened beast, Joanna almost flew down the stair steps to the hallway closet where she grabbed her heaviest coat off its hanger. Shrugging into it, she pulled boots over her shoes then raced out the front doorway, her long, wool scarf trailing her neck in the wind.

"Hannah! Abigail!" she called as she hurried toward the pines. But no sign of the girls could she see.

"Please, God," she pleaded, "don't let harm come to them. Please!"

She reached the long rows of windbreak pines just as a swirling white mass like heavy smoke swallowed up their big three-story house, the barn and everything around.

"Help me, dear Lord!" she cried aloud just as the tops of the dark, pointed spruce and pine trees disappeared in a white tide of fog.

Then, heedless of her own danger, she raced toward the harbor.

(Chapter 2)

Fog swirled around her. Everywhere Joanna looked, she saw a sea of foamy-white. It wrapped its nebulous cloak around her body, dropping mist on her head. She was near the bay, she knew; the sound of lapping water told her so.

"O God," she cried aloud, "please take care of my two sisters. Please!" Hot tears mingled with the misty fog.

She paused and listened, hoping to hear the merry laughter of Abigail or the soft chatter of Hannah. But the only sound that greeted her ears was the water washing in against the shoreline, slapping moored trawlers, yawls, dories and sloops, and the loud raucous warning of the noisy but necessary foghorn blaring its warning to ships at sea.

Joanna cupped her hands to her mouth and called loud and long, "Abigail-l. Ha-nn-ah." Then she listened for a responding voice . . . or voices . . . but none came.

Panic churned inside her. Like the fog swirling around her, the panic swirled and churned inside her being, threatening to overcome her. She felt totally and completely helpless until a verse from the Psalms floated to her memory and her heart with soothing balm: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

Unmindful of the damply-wet ground, she dropped to her knees and poured her heart out to God in prayer. Then, walking to the water's edge, she called the girls' names again. No answering voice greeted her.

The fog rolled in upon her and around her like billowy clouds. The dense shroud enveloped her, wrapping her securely and surely away from any and all eyes, and preventing her from seeing what or whom may have been but an arm's length away from her. Always, she had been intrigued by the fog. Fascinated, too. It had given her the sensation of isolation; like she was in a great white world all her own and the fog was a mass of billowy-white clouds that were swirling her upward . . . upward. Ever upward . . . toward the marshmallow clouds and the blue sky. But today, she felt none of the old sensation of intrigue and fascination; today, she felt only fear -- fear for her two sisters.

The sound of footsteps crunching their way along the dock where the boats were moored sent Joanna racing back to where the long triple row of pines should have begun. Years ago, her father had bought the long, narrow strip of land that connected the farm to the bay. It served as a grazing strip for the milk cows in the summer months and was a link between the farmland and the water, making easy access for the launching of his fishing boat, The Seaman, whenever her father and Grospapa and Joshua decided it was time for another haul of fresh fish.

Joanna hurried on, trying desperately to see through the fog and spot the stout trunk of a pine, her cue that she was on the path home. But nothing came into view. Nothing but the swirling, churning, billowing fog.

She stood still, trying to get her bearings, her direction, but there were no landmarks visible. Nothing -- absolutely nothing. She was engulfed in a great sea of swirling, moving white. And, suddenly, she realized she was lost.

She decided against walking any farther lest she stray too far distant from the home landmarks and it become even more difficult for her father to find her when they discovered that she was missing and came out in search of her. How she wished she would have told her mother where she was going, and why. But she hadn't. It would have made everything so much simpler and easier for everybody, she thought, if she had called out that she was going out after her sisters.

The foghorn's noisy blare gave her a sudden spurt of hope. She would walk toward the sound, not away from it, as she discovered she had done. The horn's location was no secret; it was located not too far distant from the pier at which her father docked The Seaman. Straight out from it, in fact.

With racing heart, Joanna hurried toward the direction of the horn. She hadn't gone far, however, when she heard voices. Childish voices. One was crying.

"Hannah! Abigail!" she called, forgetting everything except getting to her sisters.

The crying became louder now. Abigail! Yes, it was Abigail's frightened cry. And then, slicing through the curtain of impenetrable fog, Joanne heard Hannah's gentle, motherly words of comfort and faith. "I told you Jesus knew where we were, Abigail, and that He'd send His angel down to take care of us."

Joanna rushed through the fog to where the voices floated to her ears and, reaching her sisters' side, she wrapped her arms in a tight embrace around them and wept. The girls, laughing for both joy and relief over having been found, nestled their heads in the curve of her arm. For a long time, they stood thus, too happy and relieved to speak, and the fog swirled around them.

Like one coming suddenly out of a state of shock, Joanna said, "And now, until we can find our way home by locating the pines, or until we are found, we are going to play a little game. Hannah, take hold of one of Abigail's hands; I'll hold the other, as well as to yours. We're going to play Ring-Around-the Rosey, only we're not going to fall down, like you usually do when you play this. It's getting colder, and this little game will keep us warm, as well as being fun. Ready? OK, let's go . . . Ring-around the rosey, a pocket full of posies . . . "

In no time at all, color came into the little cheeks and the girls forgot that they had been lost. Joanna, always the little mother, had managed once again to allay fears and bring smiles back to her sisters' faces.

In spite of all of her playing (entertaining) (and the girls' apparent joy over having been found) and her participation in their childish game, in the deep recesses of her mind the thought (knowledge) that she was lost niggled her brain relentlessly.

Round and round she went singing the monotonous ditty in perfect timing with Hannah and Abigail, her mind going round and round in deep circles of prayer and thought over how to locate the pines and, following them, to make her way safely back to the farmhouse, the little girls in tow.

Joanna remembered another winter. (Two years past, was it?) She had started out for school alone that morning. Two miles, it was. Joshua had had the flu and remained home in bed. The sky was overcast when she kissed her mother goodbye and a strong, cold wind was blowing in from the sea. She decided to take a short-cut through a neighbor's woods instead of going the longer road way.

The blizzard had hit almost without warning and the leaden sky seemed to have dropped a heavy, impenetrable shroud of gray over everything. Sleet and snow pelted and pounded her face with such force that it felt like thousands of icy needles jabbing their way into her every fiber until in a very little while, she felt utterly numb.

She had continued walking, realizing she'd freeze to death unless she kept moving. For a little while she was able to see the stark, naked outlines of the nearby tree trunks. But only for a little while; the blizzard increased with

such force and volume and velocity until nothing was visible. Absolutely nothing. The wind whipped the sleet and snow across her cheeks and forehead with merciless force. The trees groaned and moaned and shook, and the wind whistled like some wild demon racing through the woods. All around her, she heard the sharp cracking of limbs as the wind tore them ruthlessly from the trees and tossed them to the earth-floor with no apparent concern or care. It was frightening and terrifying -- eerie and weird, too. Never in all of her life had she felt so frightened and so utterly alone.

She had begun to cry when she remembered a verse from the family devotions that morning: "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: And His children shall have a place of refuge" (Prov. 14:26). Strong confidence, in the fear of the Lord! And His children shall have a place of refuge!

The Scripture was like a warm, soothing balm to her soul, allaying her fears and assuaging her anxiety. Lifting closed eyes heavenward, she had called on God for help, reminding Him that she was His child and that He had promised her a place of refuge. Then she began walking again, not seeing anything but the blinding, driving, freezing snow. Her body felt numb and zombie-like, much like a mechanical toy, wound up and walking with no directional point in view.

She was certain that she was going around in circles, walking with hands out before her lest she walk into the trunk of an unseen tree, but she continued to walk. To do less meant sudden death by freezing. How long she walked, she had no idea. It seemed like eons, however. And when she was sure that she would die, lost in the small woods and blinded by the severity of the blizzard, she was afforded a ray of hope: a brief lull in the storm revealed the neighbor's stubbled corn field and the fence surrounding it.

Like a frightened hart, she raced through the remainder of the woods to the field, reaching the fence just as the blizzard resumed its blinding blows and unleashed its lashing fists upon her. If she kept hold of the fence and followed its length, it would bring her to the neighbor's barn, she knew. Just a few feet below it, to be exact. If she could find the barn and get into it, she would survive. If she didn't . . . Well, she must not think about that.

With a fervency in her prayer and a determined will, she let the fence guide her along. Not once did she remove her hand from the wire. To do so could have spelled death, she remembered. Blizzards could be such deadly

things, she knew, cutting off all visibility and slaying one within easy grasp of one's door latch.

Over and over, she quoted the comforting, never-failing Scripture, " 'In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: And His children shall have a place of refuge.' " And on and on she walked, wondering when she'd reach the place near the barn where the fence made an "L" and started down the other way. When she reached the "L," she knew she'd have to try to locate the barn, which was no easier to find or locate in the blinding snow than if it had not been there. Nothing could be seen, not even in dim outline. Nothing except the ceaseless, unrelenting curtain of driving snow.

She remembered her relief when she came to the "L."

Somewhere nearby was the security of the Pandergast barn. She must find it. She must, she had told herself.

She recalled how she had stood motionless and resolute, her hand clinging to the fence like a drowning man clutching a life-line. She dare not turn loose of it until she knew where to go.

Praying with desperation and fervency of soul, she had once again quoted the promise, ". . . And His children shall have a place of refuge." Almost instantly, the impenetrable snow-curtain in front of her vanished and the barn came into view. She made a dash for it and, reaching the door and hurrying inside, she looked out and saw nothing. Nothing but the blinding, driving curtain of snow.

With a cry of thankfulness and praise she had pulled the door shut and latched it securely. Then she dropped to her knees on the clean, fragrant hay and wept for joy and pure gratefulness to her Heavenly Father for rescuing her from the icy tomb. Truly, He had provided a refuge for her.

Numbed by the cold and exhausted by her struggle to survive the blizzard, she had lain down on a pile of hay. Covering herself with one of Mr. Pandergast's warm horse blankets, she had fallen asleep.

How long she slept, she never knew. One thing she did know however when she finally awakened she was hungry, dreadfully so.

She had sat up, brushed the hay off her coat and opened the lunch pail. Never had a lunch tasted so ambrosial. Not even the 4th of July picnic (which her family had every year) tasted as good. And all the while she ate, she heard the shrieking, whistling, whining siren of the wind racing around the barn, shaking the vents and pounding its icy fists against the doors until they trembled and rattled fiercely.

The day wore on and the blizzard continued. Night fell with a darkness and a blackness such as she had never seen nor experienced. But she was safe. And alive, too. God had provided her a place of refuge from the deadly storm. She had nothing to fear in the barn. The cows and horses and sheep were harmless, and so were the tiny mice that considered the enormous building their home, she told herself as she lay down for the night.

The wind moaned and whined in the rafters above her as the blizzard raged outside. She thought of her parents, and knew their concern for her was causing them hours of worry and anxiety over her safety. But there was no way to let them know she was ensconced snugly and safely inside Mr. Pandergast's barn. She dare not venture outside. She would become a statistic. So she began to pray. No mere "Now I lay me down to sleep," prayer, but a fervent, faith-believing prayer to her Heavenly Father who had so wondrously guided her to "the place of refuge" -- the barn -- to calmly and sweetly send assurance of her safety to her parents. Then she fell asleep, listening to the soft breathing of the cattle and the sound of hay-munching horses.

Morning had dawned, and with its arrival was the knowledge that the blizzard was still raging. Joanna recalled having opened the top half of the barn door and looked outside to see nothing but the swirling, blinding snow as it continued its mad force and angry pace.

The horses and cattle neighed and lowed and the sheep bleated, hungry and thirsty. She located the grain barrel and put scoops of grain into the horses' troughs before filling their mangers with hay. Then she fed the cows and the bleating sheep, speaking softly to them as she worked. She was grateful for their company.

The blizzard blew itself out about mid-afternoon, and when Joanna heard the barn door open and saw Mr. Pandergast enter the barn, she wept for joy. Her testimony of God's great deliverance from the storm fairly

tumbled out of her mouth. Her parents were notified of her safety by phone and the following afternoon, her father had come by sleigh across the drifted, crusted snow and taken her home.

Remembering that great deliverance now, she once more lifted her heart to God in prayer.

(Chapter 3)

"I'm getting tired," Abigail wailed. Her plea sliced into the deep thoughts of the storm-remembering Joanna.

"I'm hungry," Hannah added, stopping abruptly in the ring-around-the-rose game and fixing a pair of enormous blue eyes upon her sister. "Let's go home, Jo," she added, yawning in a tired manner.

Joanna put an arm around each of her sisters. "Let's ask Jesus to show us the way home," she said softly and quiet-like.

"I'm not lost with you here," Abigail attested brightly. "You'll find the way home; I know you will."

Joanna looked into the innocent, trusting eyes of her two sisters; then she said, "We'll all pray and ask Jesus to have His angel to lead us home. He delivered me out of a dreadful blizzard a few years ago and I know He'll help us to find our way to the row of pine trees now. He knows where we are. Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus knows just where we are?" she asked brightly, with tears shimmering in her eyes.

Abigail laughed softly. Then she clapped her hands together, exclaiming jubilantly, "The pines, Jo! The pines! I see them!"

"Jesus sent His angel!" Hannah declared, racing ahead toward the long row of pines.

Abigail and Joanna followed and, just like that other time, when God gave a lull in the blizzard and Joanna saw Mr. Pandergast's stubbled corn field and, finally, the hazy outline of the neighbor's barn, so the pine trees became totally obliterated and wrapped in the dense mass of swirling fog once her hands had touched the first tree.

"Hannah," she said kindly, "you will take hold of Abigail's hand and never let go of it until we are at the kitchen door. I will hold on to her other hand. With my free hand, I will maintain my contact with the pines. Now come, we are finally on our way home. Thanks be unto God. Abigail, under no circumstances, must you let go of sister's hands. We'll pretend we're a little army marching toward home and we have overcome a big giant through Jesus, our Captain."

Joanna marveled at the insight of her youngest sister. She squeezed the small, gloved hand tightly. "This is the 'giant' in our life right now," she admitted. "But our kind Heavenly Father, Who has been looking down upon us all the time, parted the fog long enough for us to find the pines and get started homeward. Okay, let's go!" she exclaimed in her most militant-sounding feminine voice.

Hannah and Abigail laughed with glee, declaring that being lost with Joanna was fun.

They advanced homeward rapidly at first. Then Joanna stopped suddenly, not being able to feel anymore pine branches.

"What's wrong?" Hannah asked.

"I can't feel the pines, honey, that's all. Now let me think," she said, furrowing her brow in concentration.

"Papa had to remove two," Hannah stated matter-of-factly.

"They were dying, remember?"

"That's right!" Joanna declared. "I had forgotten about that. Well, it's time for another prayer meeting, little sisters. Let's ask our Heavenly Father to roll the fog back long enough for us to locate where those healthy pines begin again. He rolled that muddy, old Jordan River back long enough for every single Israelite to cross over it -- dry -- and I know He will help us to find where the pine trees start again. Now, let's pray."

Abigail, who, in simple child-like faith knew that God would do it again and had not, therefore, bothered to close her eyes, remarked emphatically

while her sister was praying, "He did it again Joanna, and this time, we're going to get home."

Tears glimmered in Joanna's eyes as she saw the pines some short distance away. God had indeed answered prayer again. Her faith was strengthened. She realized how very eager and intent her God was to answer her every prayer. Sometimes, like her earthly parents, the answer would be no; but always, He would answer if she would but tell Him everything then leave the decision and the choice-making to Him and to His all-wise wisdom and discretion.

Abigail broke the handhold and rushed toward the pines, laughing with glee and shouting, "I beat you here, Joanna and Hannah. I beat you here."

With tears of happiness streaming down her cheeks, Joanna said softly, "I guess you did, honey. And now, give me your hand. The fog's closing in again."

"But this time we're going to get home!" the little girl declared with a positive ring in her voice. "Know how I know?" she asked. "'Cause I told Jesus to get us back to Mama now. And He's going to do it!"

"With that kind of faith, we're as good as at home," came Joanna's quick reply as she started forward.

Long after they were inside the warm farmhouse and while Abigail was napping, Joanna stood looking through the window, thanking God for His great deliverance. He was such a great miracle-working God, she thought. Oh, if only He would help her in her funny, mixed-up feelings. He could do it, she knew. Where was her faith, the faith that would help to unleash His power that would work this great miracle for her?

She thought of Sarah Callahan then. Sarah and she were only two months apart, age-wise. Yet Sarah never seemed to have a worry in the world. Sarah had told her one day at school that she was too serious-minded. Too religious. Too conscientious. Was this her problem? Joanna wondered now. Could Sarah have been right?

Tears sprang to her eyes. Sarah didn't know the Lord, she remember suddenly. And Sarah dated boys. Many boys. Sarah's standards (or lack of

standards) and hers were actually "poles" apart. So why should she make comparisons even? The righteous and the unrighteous lived in separate worlds; one loved the things of God, the other the things of the world. One hated sin, the other participated in and practiced sin. No, she realized quickly, she dare not listen to what Sarah had to say; Sarah would lead her down the wrong road if she heeded her advice.

Joanna recalled her mother's words then: "If ever you're in doubt about anything, dear," she had said, "search the Bible and talk to the Lord about whatever is bothering you. You'll find the answer in Christ, Joanna. All the answers, my dear. And He'll never lead you wrongly."

With this sound advice repeating itself in her mind, Joanna settled down with her Bible.

* * *

The church service had long since been over, the hot chocolate had been drunk around the open hearth fire in the big farmhouse living room and the family prayers said -- still Joanna lingered inside the now darkened living room, staring through the curtained windows into the darkness of the starless night outside. Deep thoughts projected themselves to her brain, swirling inside her head much like the incoming fog did -- except the fog as burned away by the sun, but her swirling, projected thoughts remained. Did her mother ever feel so misfit; so neither grown nor child? Grosmom, too, perhaps?

At thought of Grosmom ever having an inner emotional struggle or battle, Joanna laughed out loud. Grosmom? The very thought was ridiculous. Grosmom had stability about her. Her every feature announced as much, and the unwavering gray-blue eyes that could almost pierce one's soul attested to the undeniable fact that Grosmom had purposed within herself that regardless of which way her friends and/or relations went, she was going through with God.

For so long as Joanna could remember Grosmom, she was like this; stable and consistent, refusing to get into the world's mold and take on its habits and fashions and its spirit. Grosmom had told her once that she was twelve years old when she had been converted and taken up the cross and

started for heaven. And she'd never lain it down since, she said. And Joanna knew Grosmom had told her the truth; Grosmom didn't lie.

Joanna sat on the wide window seat and, wrapping her long robe more securely about her, she drew her knees upwards to her chin and rested her head on them, wondering what Grosmom's thoughts were when she was sixteen going on seventeen. She was once young; this the slender, silhouetted girl knew. And, since the young thought young thoughts, wasn't it possible that Grosmom, when she was young, had experienced the same kind of thoughts and questions that she, Joanna, was now being perplexed over? Oh, they weren't sinful thoughts; ah, no! They were, rather, puzzling thoughts. Thoughts like, where do I belong -- with the young ladies or the not-so-young ladies? Shall I prepare for the mission field after I'm through high school or shall I take a business course? A nursing course, even? Or maybe do none of these and just stay on at home and be a good homemaker and some day maybe marry Hans Brodcart?

At thought of Hans, Joanna felt her face flushing. She guessed if any boy was special to her, it was Hans. Hans was rather tall and a bit stocky. He had the bluest blue eyes she was sure she had ever seen, and his smile was one of the most genuine she had ever beheld. He was a senior when she was a sophomore, and although they had attended church together all their lives, it was not until her sophomore year that he took any special notice of her. Then he wanted to date her. But, of course, dating was out of the question; she was far too young for such. And, anyway, Grosmom or Grospapa would have put a speedy end to it if Hans had come around to see her.

Joanna giggled softly to herself at the thought of Hans' daring in wanting to date her. She remembered having told him that so long as Grospapa and Grosmom's watchful eyes were upon her, she was sure there would be no dating privileges until she was nineteen or possibly twenty years old.

Hans laughed amiably and said he was endowed with a full measure of patience, adding that if necessary, he was willing to wait till she was thirty.

"But what if I take up nursing!" she had exclaimed. "I'll be ever so busy studying and working."

"I'll wait," he declared with a positive note in his voice as he gave her one of his heart-warming smiles. "The Brodcarts are noted for finding their girl and then waiting till such a time when they can be joined together for life. No chasing around for us, Joanna! We pray much for God's guidance and His choice; then, we with patience wait. See? It sickens me the way my peers 'play the field.' Very little respect left for girls and women anymore."

"Perhaps the girls and women are themselves to blame for this, Hans," she had replied quickly. "Take my mother and your mother, and Grosmom, too; we respect and admire them because they command our respect and admiration. They dress modestly and bear themselves regally, like women are supposed to do. They don't smoke or drink and they aren't boisterous and mouthy. So, naturally, it is easy to respect them."

Hans had agreed heartily, adding quickly, "I guess we're spoiled for anything less than what we have grown up with and seen displayed in our homes day after day, Joanna. And I'm glad and thankful that I am. The other kind is cheap and . . . and totally undesirable, by my standards. I find it thoroughly repulsive and obnoxious."

Sitting in the darkness now, Joanna thanked God for the standards and the restrictions in her home. Without them, her life would be much like a ship that had no rudder. She was blest, she realized. Yes, she was blest. Everything in her home revolved around the Bible and was centered upon Christ.

She lifted her head from her knees and looked toward the harbor where the light from the lighthouse was sending out its long, slender, far-reaching beams to ships at sea; then she slipped to her knees on the floor and prayed.

(Chapter 4)

The winter thus far had been relatively mild and for this Joanna was thankful. Today, especially; Mom had told her to carry some soup and freshly-baked bread to Mrs. Singamore who lived a mile and a half away.

Immediately after her morning chores were finished, she hurried upstairs to her bedroom after a book. She had promised Frona Singamore the next time she came to her house that she would bring the book. And, true to her word, she tucked the book in the sack beside the bread. Promises

were not made lightly, but were always fulfilled and carried through. With her entire family, Joanna recalled, a promise made was as good as fulfilled. It was a binding thing, a vow to be kept unless hindered by unforeseen circumstances or happenings, in which case the party to whom the promise was made was to be notified and a proper explanation was to be given. Her parents, and Grospapa and Grosmom, too, had taught them that it was sinful and wicked to promise a thing with no intentions of fulfilling and carrying out that promise.

Joanna thanked God for her Christian heritage. It was through the training she received at her parents' knees that she saw her need of being converted and sanctified wholly. Through them, too, that she had had the principles of true Christian living instilled and ingrained into her every fiber and her being, the matter of keeping a promise being one of these.

She took the shoreline road, preferring it to the other inland road which, though it was shorter, was less inviting to her today. On a golden fall day, the inland road would have lured her as it wound its serene way in and out among maples rosy-red with color and scarlet sumac flaming gloriously bright among birches whose copper-gold leaves looked like shiny coins weaving a carpet for a millionaire. She recalled how carefully she always walked over the fallen leaves, even though she knew they would soon be a rusty brown. But until that time came, she always stepped softly and carefully among and over the expensive-looking earth carpet.

Fall! Beautiful fall! she mused silently as she came near the wharf and stopped to look across the water. Winter, too could be beautiful, she mused silently. Today, especially. So very beautiful. This was her land. She loved every part of it: the water and the little fishing boats, the sounds and smells. And the inland, too. Also, the close-up land, like her father's farm. The farm had belonged to Grospapa and Grosmom. For many, many years it belonged to them. Grospapa was a wonderful farmer-fisherman, in that order, and not until declining health and an accumulation of years forced him to change did he ever think of giving up working the farm and hauling in the fish.

Grospapa had wanted to move his and Grosmom's belongings in to the remodeled summer house and live their remaining days out in the small but neat cottage-house a mere stone's throw away from the big farmhouse, when Joanna's father and mother took over the farm and moved into the sprawling house. But her parents would not hear to such a thing. "There's room enough

for all of us," her father had told Grospapa. "You've lived in here the greater part of your life and here you shall stay. There's plenty of room for all of us. You and Mom will be good for our children. And unless the children get on your nerves, they will be good for you and Mother," her father had added with a smile.

So it was that Grospapa and Grosmom kept the same bedroom which had always been theirs. And with Joanna's parents' furniture along with Grosmom's "only necessary pieces, the house was neither crowded nor empty-looking but was nicely and adequately furnished.

The house and the farm were the only places Joanna could ever remember; she was born in the house which now held such fond memories for her. Her father, too, had been born in the house. He was raised in it. Just like Josh and Hannah and Abigail and her, her father was brought up in the ancient, carefully kept house. And, being brought up a Finkenbiner, not a name-only Finkenbiner, but a true-blue, caring, Godfearing Finkenbiner who respected and loved their aged and aging, her father (and mom, too) had insisted on caring for Grospapa and Grosmom until the time of their promotions to glory arrived. So they lived together, one big, happy family.

Joanna saw a trawler make its way toward the wharf as other fishing boats headed sea-ward. The men's voices floated inland to where she stood watching, feeling sorry for them. Theirs was a hard life, she soliloquized. A hard life and rough, fraught with countless dangers and fears. How many of the men would not come back! she thought. Not ever. It was not an uncommon thing for a fishing boat to disappear in a storm, its brave husbands and fathers and men to never again be seen or heard from.

She bowed her head and prayed for the men. This was their living she realized, their livelihood: fishing shrimping and lobstering. Not a bad life when the catch was big, but a different story if it was slim.

She turned then and followed the road, feeling her love for the ocean and just falling in love with it over and over again. Oh, everything was so beautiful and wonderful: the island, the nights of fog, and the mornings when the sun streamed over the sky and water with a rosy, warm power that sent the vapors flying, lifting the moored hidden boats to view again, and woke the seagulls to hungry screaming flight. She loved the feel of morning air touched with spindrift the sound of low clucking chickens awaking, lighting off their

roosts and scurrying over the fenced-in chicken lot, eagerly and hungrily eating the cracked corn and broken oyster shells which Josh had tossed to them.

She walked in silent, deep thought, her footsteps muffled on the earthy road, the chug, chug, chugging of a power boat slicing into the otherwise peace and quiet around her. She noticed the pilings, smooth-worn and black as the heads of seals; the dories, too, some concealed in brush and weeds so thick you had to know where they were to find them.

Joanna smiled. Worn-out dories in the brush, no doubt, she rationalized. Unless, perhaps, some youngsters "smuggled" them into their place of hiding so others their age would not know they were there and could not, therefore, beg for their use. Again, she smiled, turning her head to look at the long-ago fish cooperative plant-owned houses, once as stooped and as gray as rheumatic old women, but all now privately owned and beautifully restored.

She passed old men building lobster pots from red oak, others painting marker-buoys and repairing hogshead bait barrels. Then the face of Abe Cabott came into view. Abe was a tough, bitter man who didn't own a boat of his own but ran a trawler for the port. Long before the early morning work whistle's shrieking blast pierced the air, Abe was miles "outside"-the word fishermen used for the sea beyond their harbor.

"Good morning, Abe," Joanna called pleasantly. "It's nice seeing you in the harbor. Nothing doing outside today?"

Abe grunted and looked angry. "The young'uns seem to be getting most of the work," he declared feverishly. "Nothing much left for an old codger like me to do," he added with a hint of contempt and bitterness. "What's the use in living if one can't work anymore? Might as well be dead."

"Are you ready to die, Abe? I mean, do you know you're ready to meet God? 'After death, the judgment.' You know your soul will live on forever after you die, don't you? It's either heaven or hell, Abe," Joanna said softly. "Which are you ready for? Which will you enter?"

Abe removed his cap from his head and twirled it around on his thumb, surveying Joanna with an air of indifference and cynicism. "Guess that's my

affair," he snapped curtly. "My business, if you please." Turning, he walked briskly toward the trawler.

Joanna called after the briskly-retreating figure that she would be praying for him, but if Abe heard, he gave no indication that he did. Instead, he started the motor of the trawler and headed seaward with a look of fierce determination on his leathery, wrinkled face.

Joanna trembled slightly. She was not accustomed to seeing fierce-looking, angry faces. Her home was a home where love was manifested and kind words were spoken. She knew life was hard for Abe and that he worked long, tired hours for what he earned. Yes, she knew this. Like farming, fishing could be quite a gamble. But couldn't Abe see that the very Person whose love he was spurning and rejecting was one and the same from Whose hand he was eating! The Bible declared that He sent His rain on the just and the unjust; He provided fish for the just as well as the unjust, be the haul great or few. Couldn't Abe realize this?

Shaking her head sadly and wondering why men could not be less irritable and more thankful, she followed the road toward the Singamore house.

The bay lay like a giant asleep, heaving and stirring, while the little waves came up against the patient shore "hand upon folded hand."

The beach grasses, as the wind moved among them, made a continual sighing and murmuring sound. On seeing Joanna, a bird stopped short in its stroll along the water's edge then, shrilling an indignant cry against the trespasser, it whirred off into space. Overhead, beautiful gulls swooped and dipped and floated and stabbed the quiet water with their swift graceful bodies before rising to soar again, their harsh mocking laugh a strange contrast with their effortless flight against the clear, blue, mild, winter sky.

Sudden tears flowed down the young girl's cheeks, so moving and emotional were the sights and sounds. Anxieties and frustration, busy plans, the many thoughts that continually occupied her mind. were still, and over her spirit came a great calm. An indescribable peace.

She paused near a giant boulder and worshiped.

(Chapter 5)

Joanna reached the Singamore house just as Mrs. Singamore was leaving. "Frona's in the kitchen," the middle-aged woman called from the opened window of the car.

"Mother sent you some soup and several loaves of her freshly-baked bread," Joanna said. "I saw her tuck a jar of black raspberry jelly in, too," she added.

"Such a good mother you have," Mrs. Singamore remarked. "Thank her for me, please. I must hurry; I promised to help Mrs. Harney shuck oysters today. You and Frona have a good time now, do you hear? Good-bye."

Before Joanna could reply, Mrs. Singamore drove away. Smiling, she lifted the latch on the weathered gate and walked down the sandy path to the door.

"Hi," Frona said, coming around the side of the house. "I thought I heard mother speaking to someone. Come in Joanna. I'm glad to see you. I was out to the hen house to see if there were any more eggs. I thought I'd bake a few custard pies as a surprise for Mother when she's through shucking oysters for Mrs. Harney. Custard pie is one of her favorites," the slim brown-haired girl said.

"Mother sent some bread and soup, Frona, and I brought you the book that you wanted to read. You're really going to enjoy it. It helped me a lot. We have so many things to learn in this Christian life, don't we?"

Holding the door open, Frona said, "We really do Joanna. And Mother says the best way to learn is to study the Bible. But I appreciate good books, too. Thanks much for bringing the book."

Frona put the freshly-gathered eggs on the table then peeked into the container of soup. "Um-m! Smells delicious!" she exclaimed. "And that bread! Um-m! We'll have a feast for supper! Thanks to your mother. And to you, for bringing it over. Aren't you tired? That's a long way to carry this."

Joanna smiled. "It was inspiring," she answered.

"Inspiring? Oh, Joanna, what a funny thing to say. Inspiring, to carry soup and bread and a jar of jelly at least a mile and a half!"

"Maybe the carrying part wasn't inspiring, Frona, but the walk over was. I feel as though my entire being was revived, touched anew by God. Standing, looking out across the water, seeing the sights and hearing the sounds, I talked to God. He drew so near. My soul was flooded anew with a great wave of glory. I can't describe fully what I felt and experienced. It was glorious. Real! I sensed a tremendous awareness of being a part of all beauty: divine, immortal, knowing all things, content to understand nothing. Content to be nothing, knowing that I was a part of the very essence of life and of being, a child of God.

"Oh, Frona, if I know anything, I know this one thing: I am fully and entirely yielded to my God. This inner serenity and peace are what the Lord promised to His children when He said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world . . . My peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' So you see, the walk over here has been truly inspiring."

"I see what you mean," Frona said simply as she cut shortening into the flour for making the crusts for the pies.

"I'll mix the custard filling," Joanna said. "By the time you're finished rolling out the crusts, the egg, milk, sugar, vanilla-almond flavoring mixture will all be ready for adding. 'Many hands make light work.' You know the old cliché."

"It's true, old though the saying may be. And frankly, Joanna, it's lots more fun doing things with your best friend. How long have we been friends? All our natural lives, " Frona said, laughing and answering her own question.

"We're fortunate, Frona; we've grown up here and all our life we've gone to the same church and the same school. We've had so many of the same likes and dislikes. But sometimes I feel that we're poles apart, too."

Frona, in utter shock, dropped the rolling pin. Her mouth flew open wide in shocked surprise. "I . . . I guess I don't understand," she stuttered. "I . . . I thought we were best friends. Always, best friends."

"You're right, Frona. We are best friends. But still we're poles apart on some things."

"Like what?"

"Mainly, it's that you seem so settled and . . . and grown up. So . . . so stable in your thinking and . . . and in your ways. Me? I'm all muddled up sometimes . . ."

Frona gesticulated frantically with her floury hands. "You, muddled up? Oh, Joanna, that is a laugh. If I've ever known one stable, settled, down-to-earth sensible person, it's you. How dare you say such a thing about yourself?"

"But it's true, Frona. Everything I've said is true. Some days, I feel all grown up and mature; the next day, I'm not sure if I belong to either the adult group or the juveniles. Oh, it's the most confusing thing I've ever gone through. How dreadful to go through life not knowing where you belong nor with whom. What age group, I mean."

Frona hurried over to Joanna and wrapped her arms around her neck, flour and all. Then she threw her head back and laughed. "Oh you dear, poor girl, worrying about something so insignificant!" she exclaimed. "Soon this will pass. It's a phase we pass through. Sure as my name is Frona, it will pass away."

"How do you know?"

Again, Frona's ripply laughter rang through the kitchen. "How do I know? I came through the same stage, that's how I know."

"You . . . did?" Joanna's eyes were big with wonder. "Are you sure, Frona? Sure that you felt the way I sometimes do? It's all so confusing."

"I know all about it, Joanna. But believe me, it will pass. Mother explained that it was a part of the growing up process, an in-between sort of stage -- neither little girl nor mature adult. She told me to hold steady and not to allow panic to possess me, but simply to accept it as a transition sort of thing between the little girl I once was the young woman who was on the very threshold of young adulthood. So each time I felt sort of confused and

'muddled up,' as you called it, I'd throw my head back and laugh. Then I'd tell myself to enjoy whatever fragments of my girlhood were left since I'd soon never be able to return to that carefree phase of my life. Oh, Joanna, when I'd look at the lives of some of the mature women here in our little village and its surrounding community, I used to think I never wanted to grow into young adulthood. Their speech and conversation was nothing but one great big woe, woe, woe. Some are habitual complainers. I doubt they've ever seen the 'rainbow' in their clouds."

"I guess I never gave the adult peoples' 'woes' too many hours of my thinking," Joanna admitted frankly. "But what you say is true. So many of these dear people . . . and they are dear, Frona . . . but they never stop to count their blessings. Each one of us has countless blessings, so many lovely and beautiful things to brighten our days. God has no favorites when He sends the rain. The Bible says He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. The sun the same way. Flowers, too. These are daily blessing-gifts from God that all too often are taken for granted and are overlooked. I am sure that if each of us would pause long enough to seriously count our many blessings, all complaining and woe-begone attitudes would become an unheard of thing."

Fitting the flaky crusts into the pie pans, Frona said, "Fortunately, you and I don't have a complaining, whining, woe-is-me kind of mother. This to our advantage. Honestly, Joanna, I don't know how I'd have made it with a mother like some girls have. Take Marguerite, for example. No matter what she does, she receives nothing but criticism from her mother. Her father, too. Yet she's a perfect homemaker. And her grades are excellent, as each of us knows. But does she receive praise for her achievements and her tidiness? None at all. She has told me many times that it is us and Miss Lux and Miss Smith, who have inspired and challenged her until she realized that, after all, she could excel in her studies. And that to God she was truly someone very special, a unique person and personality created by Him for His own special service. I am so thankful for our good teachers. And then I am 'pleased as pudding' to know you and I have had a part in winning her to Christ."

"I almost shudder," Joanna answered, "when I think how different Margurite's story may have been had you and I not been genuine and lived God-like, consistent lives before her day after day in school."

"One thing is certain," Frona exclaimed, "sinners know when someone is genuine and real. They can spot a phony in a minute."

"That makes me want to live just as close to the Lord as I can," Joanna said seriously. "And speaking of Miss Smith and Miss Lux, we are fortunate to have two such wonderful teachers in Cranberry High. Christian teachers! God favored us. It's because of Miss Lux's gentle 'you can do it, Joanna,' that I made that super grade in French. And Miss Smith it was who inspired me to learn to cook foods other than our usual table fare of meat, mashed potatoes and gravy and salad. Grospapa turns his nose up at some of the dishes I serve; says they're 'too fancy' for his palate and they don't have that 'stick-to-the-ribs quality' in them. He calls my ham and cheese souffles 'froth and air.' " And Joanna laughed softly.

Frona threw her head back and joined in the laughter. "These German men!" she exclaimed pleasantly. "Mountains of mashed potatoes and fountains of gravy' with plenty of homemade breads and pastries. No souffles. Positively, no souffles! Too airy-light and 'citified.' Always, they want to 'eat hearty.' " Again she laughed pleasantly. Turning suddenly all serious, she said, "But oh, Joanna, I'd make all the mashed potatoes and gravy and meat Daddy wanted, if only he were here to want it! Mother and I miss him dreadfully. You can't begin to imagine what life without a father is like. Poor mother wouldn't be hiring herself out for oyster shucking if Daddy were still living. Nor would she need to do other peoples' housecleaning either."

"I'm sorry, Frona. I know life must be hard on you and your dear mother . . ."

"Oh, I'm the one who should say she's sorry, Joanna. Sorry for even the slightest hint of complaint. I should not have said what I just said about mother having to work. God has been too good to us for me to complain. Forgive me, dear Lord!" Frona cried. "The ladies for whom Mother cleans house are extremely kind and good to her, paying her well and giving her things beside. Food included. And even though Mother's fingers get cut and bleed while shucking oysters, Mrs. Harney always sees to it that besides the pay, Mother has plenty of oysters for freezing. Mother feels this is another of God's 'fringe benefits,' as she calls it. And it is," the dark-haired, brown-eyed girl added on a note of thankfulness. "Why, Joanna, even in the months when the average person doesn't have oysters, like the summer months, for

instance, we have all the oysters we want . . . Mrs. Harney's gift for our freezer."

"And your mother's oyster pie and oyster dressing are yummy!" Joanna declared.

"Don't I know it!" Frona exclaimed, pouring the custard filling into the neatly flute-edged pie shells.

The day flew by on silent feet and by the time Joanna started for home, a strong northeast wind had come up and the sky was a heavy leaden-gray.

(Chapter 6)

The slender figure of the girl, bracing herself against the force of the now icy-cold wind, was silhouetted against the dark backdrop of the sea and the lead gray-green sky. A lonely looking figure, indeed. The shore road was totally deserted. Joanna felt like a lone figure on a mammoth stage without an audience. How she longed to see just one familiar face. Only too well she knew how suddenly a blizzard or a storm could blow in from the sea and in a very short space of time paralyze all activity and reek havoc to both individuals and buildings. More than once she witnessed the devastation of a fierce hurricane and the deadliness of an unrelenting blizzard.

She hastened along the road, running and walking intermittently. Then her thoughts raced to the men out at sea in their fishing vessels and her heart cried out in an agony of prayer for their safety and their heart salvation. Abe Cabott's salvation, especially.

Abe was such a self-willed man, she thought, panting for breath as the strong wind fought fiercely to push her back. Proud, too, Abe was. Always (for so long as she could remember, that is), Abe had made a good living running the trawler for the port.

But Abe was aging, and with the addition of the slowly but surely on-coming years, Abe's agility and ability had waned. Not that he wasn't good at what he did, but simply that what he did took longer to do. He knew the sea "routes" like a book; the "map" was fixed indelibly inside his head. It would never leave his brain, Joanna was sure, but would remain there until he died.

Abe was a sure enough real seaman; only his hands and feet could no longer keep pace with the want-to-do of his alert mind.

Poor Abe! Joanna thought, breaking into a brisk run as she felt the icy ping of sleet strike her cheeks, stinging like needle pricks. Abe was once young and agile and full of vigor, she realized. Did he ever think about God back then? she wondered Or had he never given God any thought? Well, the past was past, she reasoned sensibly, and since that was the case and nothing could be altered nor changed for that part of Abe Cabbot's life, she must concentrate on the present . . . the now . . . and do everything she could to help the old man to see his need of God.

Her most powerful and forceful weapon was prayer, she knew. Maybe Abe wouldn't listen to what she said, but she knew he would never be able to get away from God's voice. Not even by running "outside" in the trawler, like he had done to her this very morning. She must supplicate and intercede to God for Abe's soul. And she would, she purposed in her heart.

Looking out to sea, she saw a great wall-like sheet of gray heading rapidly her way. She knew what it was. Many times she had stood inside the warmth and security of their house and watched the great wall of either snow or rain make its way shoreward. It had never frightened her then -- not so long as she was snug and safe inside, like a butterfly in its cocoon. Now however, it was different; she was neither snug and warm, nor safe. The wind had reached a tremendous force. It hammered its icy fists down her throat and tore at her coat and head scarf, almost pulling it off her head.

She pulled the collar of her coat up around her neck and buried her face as far down into the upturned folds as she possibly could, realizing that she must get home, and that as fast as she could. Every minute counted. The great wall of sleet or snow, or combination of both, would soon be emptying itself upon her and her immediate surroundings. She should have left Frona's house earlier than she did, she remonstrated silently to herself. But she didn't, and like Abe's past, she couldn't undo what was already done nor change the fact that she hadn't left the Singamore's home earlier; so she would just have to do her utmost now. This she could do; act now.

Move, move, move, her heart seemed to be saying to her running legs and feet as she sped down the long shore road. The reeds and grasses which only that morning had waved gentle greetings to her as she passed

now rattled their ice-coated, naked-looking stem-fingers at her in warning and fury, and the busy little sea birds were nowhere in sight.

"They have better sense than I have," Joanna told herself aloud, speaking of the birds. "At least, they weren't too preoccupied to notice the fastly-changing sky and clouds, like I was at Frona's house. They're safe and snug within the shelter of their roosting places and here I am, victimized by the storm because of being too preoccupied with the enjoyment of being at a best friend's house!"

A thought raced through the young woman's mind. A sobering thought, it was. Heart searching, too. When Jesus returned for His Bride, how many would be watching and waiting for Him? Or would the majority be too preoccupied with the enjoyment of earthly pleasures, not having "scanned the sky for changing clouds," nor having noticed the "shifting winds"? And would they, like she was now enduring physically, be left behind to go through the great tribulation storm?

She knew the answer. How well she knew it! Didn't Jesus Himself say that the way was strait and few would find it! And didn't He say that He would return in such an hour as "ye think not," urging all to "be (ye) therefore ready!"

How very few took heed to the Saviour's words, she thought. Like she had been at Frona's house so the great majority of people were preoccupied with material things, worldly pleasures and earthly riches, gain and prestige and power and would, ultimately at Christ's return, be left behind to go through the great tribulation storm of plagues and opened seals and poured-out vials of the wrath of an Almighty, All-Just God. A God whose mercy of long standing, having been repeatedly rejected and spurned, had suddenly and without mercy turned to wrath and judgment. How terrifying! She thought. How frightening! And to think that God made provision through Christ for escape from the great tribulation and men ignored and even spurned and rejected the provision. This was saddest of all, Joanne knew. A way of escape from impending doom and judgment, and men spurning it. This was the height of folly!

Snow began swirling around her, and the ice pellets falling on the earth and in the bushes, soon had a slick carpet spread everywhere. Joanna reached the beautifully restored, year-round lived-in former fish cooperative

plant-owned houses and breathed a great sight of relief, knowing that now she wasn't too far from home. Here, too, there were people if she needed to find shelter from the storm.

She heard the shout of men's voices, each trying to make himself heard above the crashing waves and the howling, whining wind, and she knew that a fishing vessel . . . maybe more than one . . . had made port safely. She raised her heart to God in a prayer of pure thanksgiving and gratitude, asking Him to bring all the others in safely without harm to either the men or their fishing vessels. They could ill afford the loss of either their fishing gear or their vessels.

It was snowing heavier now and Joanna knew that, finally, the sheet-wall which she had seen far out at sea only a short time ago had now reached shore side as well. The foghorn bellowed its raucous warning for all to hear. To men at sea, she knew, the horn was a welcome sound. A blessing, really.

Trying to forget the fastly-falling snow and the remainder of her walk home, Joanna forced her thoughts back into the past summer. What a beautiful day it had been! She had gone to the harbor to meet her father and Josh as they returned from fishing, when into the harbor from the seaward side came Abe and the trawler, lying low in the water with a haul of schooling mackerel for which the fleet had set out early in the morning. Above the shudder of the screws and the long clangor of the anchor going to the bottom, came the incessant screaming of the anxious gulls, maddened by the sight of myriad fish so well protected and kept from their grasp.

Against the horizon other ships had appeared, seeming to rise out of the waves, and from all of the community, people had streamed to the wharf in greeting.

Joanna remembered having thought the wharf was marvelously confused that day as people went forward and backward, dropping over the sides of the pier into waiting dories and climbing up on the pilings to sketch or just to stare. Along the back of the wharf great seining nets had been stretched on spindles to dry, and the always-present lobster pots were stacked to sun. The air was balmy and warm and the sea breezes had fanned her face in a deliciously-sweet and refreshing way.

The ocean had swelled and slid and sparkled, the red buoys swayed and rang. Dorries swung at the moorings and the receding sun hung like a rosey-red ball suspended briefly above the shimmering surface of water before it dropped into the sea. (Or was it behind the sea?) The air was sweet with the tang of bayberry and sweet fern; the land rich with wild currant and grapevines. Everything had been so perfect that day and so perfectly beautiful, too. The day -- all day -- had been vast, warm, and palest blue; the sky too high for clouds. Even the night, when it fell, was beautiful with dancing, twinkling, shimmering stars and cool sea breezes.

Darkness! Joanna was brought rudely but forcibly out of her "summer reverie" by the howling wind, the piercing barbs of sleet and a sudden heavy darkness. Her hands and feet and face felt numb with cold and the driving snow was making visibility almost nil for her. She must get home soon, she told herself, or she would be lost in the blizzard.

Praying earnestly, she plunged nobly onward. A car's diffused lights penetrated the thick darkness behind her. Then it stopped beside her.

(Chapter 7)

Joanna, seeing the dim outline of the car lights, began to run. The car kept pace, its horn honking almost incessantly. Joanna ran all the faster. The car increased its speed. Then, above the howl of the wind, a voice called out -- a woman's voice it was. "Get into the car," it shouted, ordering instant obedience.

Joanna, recognizing Mrs. Singamore's voice, stumbled toward the opened door and fell inside with tears streaming down her cheeks. They were tears of relief and thankfulness.

"You're well nigh frozen to death," the woman crooned softly, stroking Joanna's face with gentle, motherly hands. "And I'd never forgive myself if this storm would have gotten you. Buried alive, you'd be!"

Brushing the cold tears off her frigid cheeks, Joanna said, "But you're not to blame for the storm. Neither for my foolishness in not checking the sky for any weather changes. I've lived here all my life; I know how temperamental the weather can be, especially this time of year. This morning's red sky was warning enough. At least, it should have been. But I

thought that, surely the beautiful, balmy breezes would linger with us long enough for me to get home by the time Mother told me to be home. Oh, Mrs. Singamore, I'm sorry. I'm exposing you to real danger . . . driving in this blizzard. Where is the road? I can't see anything! Nothing but a great curtain-wall of snow." And Joanna shuddered, recalling her harrowing experience in another blizzard.

Mrs. Singamore brushed her hand across the windshield like she was trying to wipe steam away. "Don't you worry, child," she added softly, again stroking Joanna's cheeks. "I'll just crawl along, every foot gained is progress."

Joanna looked at the kind woman with tenderness. Mrs. Singamore worked hard, long hours to keep the proverbial "wolf away from the door." There wasn't a lazy bone inside that slender, arrow-straight body, she knew. And even now the strong scent of seas life lingered heavily on her rough, work-worn hands. Which meant, Joanna realized, that this kind, good woman had rushed home from shucking oysters and, discovering that she -- Joanna -- had only recently left their house, she had rushed down the road in the car after her, taking no time to wash her hands nor remove the heavy rubber apron which she wore for the wet, messy job. A great wave of love washed over Joanna for this gracious woman.

Sitting suddenly very erect, Joanna asked quickly, "Where's Frona? You didn't leave her alone, did you?"

"Frona'll be all right, don't you worry none about that," came the positive reply. "I told her to stay inside and not to venture out at all."

"But . . . alone! Oh, poor Frona! Just look at all the trouble I'm causing you and Frona. And . . . and she's my best friend, too!"

"That's all the more reason we should be helping you. What are friends for, child? Especially best friends?" And Mrs. Singamore laughed softly. "Frona's a capable daughter," she added. "No 'fraidy cat' either. So don't you worry about her. I told her to try to call your mother and tell her not to worry, that I was going out in the car after you. It was Mrs. Harney who called my attention to the blizzard. Working inside like we do, I didn't know it was snowing. That's when I thought about you. I know what time you must leave when you come over. So I asked Mrs. Harney to let me off early. These blizzards can be deadly and, whoops, I almost didn't see whatever it was was

right in front of me," and Mrs. Singamore gave the car a quick turn to avoid hitting the nebulous, dark object that loomed before her out of seemingly nowhere.

Joanna sat upright in the seat, peering into the impenetrable wall of snow which, she noticed, had increased in volume. "If only you could see where the road is!" she exclaimed in what was almost a frightened whisper.

" 'Twould help. Without a doubt, 'twould help," the other answered matter-of-factly. "But since I don't, and I can't, well, there's no point in getting panicky. Doesn't help matters one bit. Fact is, it only makes things worse; you get all frustrated and anxious and worried and before you know it, you're doing just what the Bible says not to do . . . becoming 'anxious' and faithless. The Apostle Paul said, 'Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.' "

Joanna heaved a sigh. How comforting God's Word was. How very comforting.

"It doesn't stop there," Mrs. Singamore continued, her knuckles showing white with the grip her hands had on the steering wheel. "The very next verse, after telling us not to be anxious, and informing us how to overcome anxiety and care . . . through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving . . . says, 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' Now isn't that wonderful, child? Well, since God knows we're down here in a sure-enough real blizzard, I'm just going to ask Him to help us. He knows better than we do what should be done. I mean, had I better stop and just sit here and try to ride out the storm or should I go on." And Mrs. Singamore fell suddenly silent.

Joanna, knowing that the good woman was praying, bowed her head and began talking to her Heavenly Father. She was glad that she had an open line to God, one that was unhampered by any inconsistent living on her part or one which blocked by sin, made no connection or contact at all. Yes, she was glad that her soul was pure and clean and that Jesus was her best and dearest of all Friend.

"Guess I'll keep moving." Mrs. Singamore's words sliced into Joanna's prayer with a confident ring. "My God knows how to keep me on the road. By faith I shall proceed."

Silence settled inside the car. Mrs. Singamore, centering all her attention now upon her driving, fixed her gaze steadily upon where the road should have been, trying to see through the impenetrable wall of swirling, churning snow.

The wind shrieked and howled and whistled. It drove the snow in forceful gusts against the windshield, cutting off all visibility. Not even the hood of the car could be seen. Yet Mrs. Singamore move slowly forward, foot upon slow foot, her face tense, her jaw set and her lips moving silently, forming words heard only by God.

Joanna wondered how late it was, how long since she had left Frona's house. It seemed like such a long time ago. Her thoughts crept back to the morning and her spiritually uplifting time as she walked down the shore road. It hardly seemed possible that tonight -- this early evening with its blackness and storm -- could still be a part of the day; the beautiful, beautiful day, with its balmy morning and its unseasonably mild weather. Why, it was just hours ago that the harbor bustled with activity and with the voices of busy, happy fishermen. Just hours ago that she unbuttoned her coat, allowing the gentle breezes to tug at her lapels and dance inside and cool her body. And now the snow -- the blizzard.

She sat bolt upright on the edge of the car seat. A sudden, very enlightening thought . . . an analogy . . . crept into her mind: Life was much like the day with its sudden and drastic change. One moment the "sun" could be shining and gently-warm "breezes" of all-rightness and all-things-beautiful could be wafted over one's being; then, suddenly and with no warning at all, the "blizzards" of adversity, sickness, death and ill-fortune could blacken and darken the "sun," sweeping away in its path and its wake all things visibly lovely and beautiful and bright. But did the raging of the blizzard, the darkness of the night and the devastation of the storm negate and do away with the fact that, tucked securely and brightly behind those ominous, ill-winded clouds, that great fiery-orbed body was still shining in blazing-brightness? No. No. Never! God saw to its course; to its perpetual light, also. Not until the end of time would it cease to shine.

So, no matter how dark the clouds, nor how bitter and devastating life's storms may appear, Joanna realized that God, in all His Wonder, His splendor and His glory and His All-knowing wisdom, was looking on . . . through those clouds of adversity, heartaches and reverses . . . and with great love and tender carefulness was meting out in measure and proportion to what each one could bear and endure. No more, no less. To some greater; to others less. Each in proportion to his or her endurance. Hadn't He promised "grace sufficient" for His children; and didn't He say that He would succor, sustain and strengthen those who were tempted and tested and tried? He certainly did. And He would keep His promise, too. There wasn't any "shadow of turning" in Him, nor in what He promised.

Joanna's thoughts hurried to her parents in certain times of crisis in their lives. Always, and without fail, God's grace had proven to be all-sufficient for the crisis. And always (she had heard her parents say), they were the better and the stronger in the inner man for having had the crisis-test.

Mrs. Singamore, too, she mused silently, glancing surreptitiously out of the corner of her eye at the tension-filled woman who, with a look of sheer determination etched on her every feature, steered the car bravely onward, mile after creeping mile. When Mrs. Singamore lost her husband at sea that cold, bitter, late winter day and was left with little more than the roof over her head, she bore it bravely, nobly and courageously. She didn't panic; nor did she whine or murmur and complain. With true Christian grace and a calmness borne by years of unwavering trust in God, she set nobly and courageously about the task of raising Frona, then ten years old. And while the two didn't have the best and the finest, Mrs. Singamore declared repeatedly that all her needs were met.

This, Joanna realized, was in accordance with the Word of God. He had promised to supply His children with all their needs. Not wants -- needs. And Mrs. Singamore and Frona were content and happy . . . extremely so . . . at having their daily needs supplied. The "blizzard" of adversity hadn't devastated her nor made her bitter. Ah, no! If anything, it had driven her (and Frona) deeper into the gentle calm of God's enduring love.

Joanna mulled the analogy over and over in her mind and, with the thought, she realized that she was indeed growing up. More and more, childish things . . . childish thoughts, too . . . were dropping off and being "put

away," as the Apostle Paul had written to the Corinthian Church. The change and the transition had been taking place for a number of years, she knew, but only in the last year or so had the deeper truths and thoughts begun to surface and demand her serious attention.

Gradually, she eased her body back against the comfortable car seat and prayed, while her kind saviour concentrated fully on her driving. The storm was like a wild, demented beast, she thought, wondering that Mrs. Singamore kept pushing ahead, not seeing anything but the blinding, impenetrable wall of snow.

(Chapter 8)

Joanna leaned her head against the headrest on the seat and stared into the impenetrable wall of swirling, blowing snow. It was almost as if she were twirling, swirling around in the fastly-falling mass herself, so dizzying was it as she watched it unleash its fury upon the helpless world. Snow. Snow. Everywhere, snow. It seemed to have sucked Mrs. Singamore's barely-moving car into its whirling vortex, making the car more a part of the storm than anything else. But at least there was warmth inside the vehicle, she thought thankfully, warmth and shelter from the frigidity outside.

A warm drowsiness enfolded and encircled her. She closed her eyes. She hadn't meant to sleep but in spite of her good intentions, she fell asleep. For how long she slept, she didn't know. It was the stillness inside and the absence of motion that aroused her suddenly from her sleep and caused her to become alert and instantly wide awake.

"O forgive me!" she cried apologetically to her kind friend as she sat upright. "I slept while you fought the blizzard."

Smiling, the kind woman replied, "No apology needed, dear child. There's nothing anyone can do. And I didn't 'fight' the blizzard, honey. That would be quite impossible, as you can see. There are some things in life we're helpless to do anything about. This is one of those things. Guess we'll just have to sit this one out. I'm stuck in a snow drift and can't do a thing about it. Shoveling's positively useless and totally out of the question. Everything's drifting shut. Tight.

"But don't you worry one bit, Joanna; God is right here with us. He's going to be looking out for us and will be caring for us until help can get through. I had Frona put a stack of heavy wool blankets on the back seat just in case something like this happened, and I tucked a sack of sandwiches and oranges in, too. And there's a thermos bottle of hot mint tea somewhere among the blankets and sandwiches. So whenever you get hungry or cold, well, you'll find all you need on the back seat. I have a tank full of gas so that means I'll be able to give us heater warmth every so many minutes. We'll use the blankets to save as much fuel as possible though . . ."

Joanna thanked Mrs. Singamore then stared into the wall of snow. "I didn't fight the blizzard . . ." The mature woman's statement unleashed a world of thought inside the young girl's head. "There are some things in life we're helpless to do anything about . . ." The words sang a chorus deep in her bosom. How true. How very true was the sentence. Not only were blizzards impossible to "fight," but so were some of life's storms . . . its happenings: its sorrows, disappointments, heartache and heartbreak and, yes, its deaths. Its reverses and "adverses"; its pain and poverty and suffering. Aside from prayer and an unwavering faith in God, nothing else could be done to change some things and certain circumstances.

Tears shimmered beneath the heavy eyelashes of the girl. That's why God had said to "Be still, and know that I am God." Through all of life's storms -- its blizzards -- He wanted a "stillness"; a being "quiet," from His children. Only in their "stillness" and their "quietude" in the storm could He work out His purpose properly and shine forth in all His splendor and glory through their life. And only then could He solve their problems and fight their battles, too.

Young though she was, Joanna realized that she was guilty of trying to work life's puzzles out by her methods instead of His; that she had tried to solve her problems instead of getting completely quiet and turning them over to Him. And things never did come out just quite right either, she had to admit -- not whenever she attempted to do things in her way. But a thing turned over to God with no reservations and no strings attached always came out right. And perfect, too. Oh, that God would help her to always remember this. She must not take things into her own hands and try to exact a remedy. It rendered the Almighty powerless and helpless to work out His perfect purpose and plan if she did. Had His Holy Word not stated explicitly, "My

glory will I not give to another!" Only as she kept things in His hand could He work.

She sighed, feeling her own helplessness and realizing His ever-available power and ability. His strength too! Had He not calmed and quieted a turbulent, rolling, churning, tossing sea instantly by His spoken words? Indeed, He had. And hadn't the excited, frustrated, fearful and anxious disciples been instantly comforted and consoled that night when, to their awe and amazement, He came to them, walking on the water as though it were a much-traveled, well-known highway? And they, thinking Him to be a ghost or a spirit, heard His words of comfort: "It is I; be not afraid!"

Tears danced from Joanna's eyes, remembering the blessed words from the Bible. For a long while, she was totally oblivious of the raging blizzard; her soul was a great pool of infinite calm and rest, feeding itself on the myriad scriptures she had learned and memorized from her childhood days.

"Don't be afraid of the storm, Joanna," Mrs. Singamore remarked, seeing the tears on the young girl's cheeks. "We have nothing to fear so long as we keep Christ at the helm of our ship. The Bible says, 'He hath His way in the storm.' He's got His eye on us and on our helpless predicament, honey. So there's nothing to fear."

"I'm not afraid, Mrs. Singamore. I'm crying for joy. I've been remembering certain Bible verses which I memorized and they have comforted my heart. My soul is blest and happy. That is the reason for my tears."

Mrs. Singamore reached over and squeezed Joanna's hand. "Nothing better than a Scripture verse to comfort one, " she affirmed sweetly, pulling the folds of her collar more tightly around her neck. "Are you ready for a sandwich?" she asked, in a voice as bubbly-bright as if she were asking Joanna if she was ready for a summer picnic.

Joanna smiled. Mrs. Singamore's optimism was contagious. Suddenly, her stomach dictated a message of hunger to her brain and she began rummaging among the blankets for the food and the tea. With a smile of triumph, she set the bag containing the edibles and the thermos of tea on the seat beside her kind friend.

"I think a cup of hot tea will do both of us much good," Mrs. Singamore declared, opening the thermos bottle and pouring the fragrant, steaming-hot tea into the two cups which she had brought along.

"Um-m, it smells delicious!" Joanna said, sipping from her cup. "Mint is my favorite," she added, holding the cup with both of her hands and enjoying the warmth it provided for her fingers.

"It should help to keep us warm, Joanna. And it will revive us a bit, too. Now, how about a sandwich? Frona made cheese and cold chicken sandwiches. Help yourself."

"Thanks much. You are so thoughtful and kind. Oh, what would I have done without you, Mrs. Singamore! By now, I'd be frozen stiff. And . . . and I'd be dead, too, if you hadn't come to find me!"

"But I did come, dear child! And you are not frozen, nor dead; so let's dwell on that thought and center our heart on the thankful side. God always takes care of His own, my dear!"

"I am thankful, Mrs. Singamore. So very thankful! The Lord said He'd have an angel of His to encamp 'round about us, and tonight, I am sure-sure that you are His angel for this circumstance and this condition. I do hope the fishing vessels are all into the harbor and safely moored, and that their men are safe. I feel especially concerned about Abe Cabbott. Tell me about Abe, will you, Mrs. Singamore? Has he always been a bitter and a hard man? I tried to speak to him about the Lord this morning and he got angry with me. I know he isn't able to do physically what he once did. But why be bitter and resentful about it? He had his good years, I'm sure."

"Many good years, honey! Yes, many of these, Abe has had. But some people never do count their blessings. Proverbs 27:20 says, '. . . so the eyes of man are never satisfied.' It's much this same way with all too many people, Joanna. They're always reaching for more. Abe's worked hard for his money, this is a fact. But if Abe had wanted to, he could have retired years ago and lived comfortably the rest of his life on what he has amassed. But he feels he must get a little more. And after he gets this 'little more,' he'll go after yet another spell of 'little more.' Abe won't quit unless sickness or old age renders him helpless. Money is some people's god."

"But what will he do with what he has saved, Mrs. Singamore? He has no children to leave his money to, and he's certainly not enjoying any of the convenience which the average family is used to. It . . . it doesn't make good sense, does it?"

Mrs. Singamore laughed. "You're a serious thinker," she commented quickly. "And being miserly doesn't 'make good sense,' as you phrased it. I suppose if a miser gets any enjoyment at all out of life, it is in the fact that he knows how to accumulate money and not spend it."

"But, Mrs. Singamore, that would be like coming to the end of a dead end street. There would be nothing to look forward to. Money is to be used as a medium of exchange. Right?"

"For most of us, yes. In fact, many of us get only a brief glance at our weekly earnings, so quickly is this 'medium of exchange' transferred from our hands into the hands of our creditors . . . those to whom we owe bills and debts. Still, it's gratifying to know that our kind Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to keep current with our bills. But people like Abe, who have plenty of money and don't like to spend it, well, their chief delight seems to come in seeing how much they can amass."

"But what are they hoarding it for, Mrs. Singamore? It's . . . well . . . it's stupid, in a way. The Bible says that we brought nothing into this world and we can carry nothing out with us when we die; so why do people hoard and not use their money for God's cause and their own needs? Abe lives like the poorest of the poor; one would think he is poor and extremely poverty stricken. And he seems so very unhappy. Does he ever smile, I wonder?"

Mrs. Singamore was silent for a while. Then she replied, "Coming to think of it, I can't remember seeing Abe smile. No, not in all the years I've known him, have I seen him smile. That's sad, too. The Bible says 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.' "

"Then Abe's bones are really dry!" Joanna exclaimed sorrowfully. "Oh, I do wish he'd open his heart to Jesus! Why, if Abe were to get converted, it would shake everyone down at the wharf."

"God can change him, honey, but only if Abe consents to the change."

"Prayer can move him and melt him, Mrs. Singamore, until he'll want to change and be willing to get converted."

"Yes, prayer is the Christian's strong weapon, dear, and by much use of this powerful weapon, walls crumble and fall and man's defenses are shattered and rendered useless and powerless. God can move upon Abe as we move upon God through fervent prayer and an unwavering faith in Him and in His never-changing promises."

"I feel such a concern for the poor man," Joanna repeated, staring through the windshield into a swirling mass of white.

(Chapter 9)

The blizzard raged on into the night and the two lone people stranded in the car talked and sang and quoted Scripture verses while the wind whistled and howled around them. Mrs. Singamore started the car every now and then to warm its interior, which chilled rapidly when the motor was not running. But the wool blankets, lifted from the back seat and wrapped snugly around their body, kept both Joanna and Mrs. Singamore reasonably warm and comfortable. Several times, Joanna caught herself nodding and dozing. How she longed to stretch out full length on her bed and sleep! She was sure Mrs. Singamore felt the same way. But that good woman would remain diligent and alert until help arrived, she knew.

At thought of help, Joanna's heartbeat quickened. Oh, it would be good to get home, she thought, as happy memories of her family floated back to her. She was fortunate, she knew, to have a family who loved her and cared about her and for her. They cared so much and loved so deeply, in fact, that her home life and manner of living and of conduct was highly restricted in areas of worldliness, laziness and sloth. The reading material was extremely selective also, everything being "screened" carefully by either her father or her mother. Even Grospapa and Grosmom helped in the selections of their reading material. Their companions, too, were chosen with care . . . hadn't the Bible stated that "Evil communications corrupt good manners!" Each member of the household was taught to be a soul-winner without corrupting and defiling himself or herself with the sins and the habits of those whom they were trying to win to Christ. By precept and example, they learned at an

early age the meaning of Jesus' words, "They are in the world, but not of the world."

She must have dozed and slept, for when next she opened her eyes, she saw a faint sliver of light penetrating the wall of snow. Then she heard a tap, tap, tapping on the window outside. Mrs. Singamore rolled the window down a few inches and a man's voice shouted through the howling wind into the car, "Come with me and I'll take you home in my snowmobile." It was Hadley Comer.

"We'll freeze to death in this blizzard," Mrs. Singamore shouted back, hoping Hadley had heard.

"Come quickly," Hadley insisted. "We're not far from the Finkenbiner place and I'll have you there in a hurry. Bundle up tight. Bring a heavy blanket . . ." And without waiting further, Hadley opened the car door and helped a trembling Joanna into the waiting snowmobile. "I'll be right back for you," he told Mrs. Singamore as he slid behind the wheel of the snowmobile and hurried away in a direction that seemed neither east nor west, north or south to the girl.

Going with Hadley in the raging blizzard was much like the Christian's daily walk of faith, Joanna thought, trying to thrust her fears aside. Hadley had said they were not far from her home; so, although she could see nothing that would indicate he was right, she would trust him and his words. By the same simple childlike faith and trust which she had in her wonderful Lord and Saviour to keep her day by day and moment by moment and bring her finally to her eternal Home, so she would place her confidence and trust in this kind man who was hazarding his life for her. And he would get her home.

Conversation was futile and useless; the wind slammed the words down her throat. She wished she had remained inside the car with Mrs. Singamore where she was protected from the actual contact of the snow pinging its icy-cold darts into her face.

She pulled the wool blanket up over her face and snuggled down into the folds of her collar, wishing for all that was in her that she were home and hoping that Mrs. Singamore was warmer than she.

The snowmobile glided smoothly across the trackless, swirling sea of white, its motor muffled by the howling wind. How Hadley knew where he was going was a mystery to Joanna, who sat huddled in the seat like a tired, old man with the weight of the world on his shoulders. But she would trust Hadley and his words. Thus thinking, she burrowed deeper into the blanket, which was already heavy with snow. Faith in God and in one's fellow man brought with it the compensation of a quiet trust and the added bonus of rest and peace, she realized with joy.

With a lurch, the snowmobile came to a sudden halt. Joanna pushed the blanket from her head and looked toward Hadley to see what was wrong.

"I told you I'd have you home in a hurry," Hadley said, trying to untangle the snow-laden blanket from Joanna's feet. "I'll help you to the door then I must get back to Mrs. Singamore. Your folks need you, Joanna. Badly!" he added, leading her down the path to the door. "Have hot tea ready for us when I return with Mrs. Singamore. Now hurry inside," he ordered kindly before turning and walking away.

"Thank you, Hadley," Joanna called after the retreating figure before turning the knob on the door.

It was strangely quiet as she let herself inside and lights seemed to be burning in every room of the big house. "Mom," she called, between chattering teeth.

"Mom, where are you?"

The stillness bothered her, so unlike the usual welcome-home greeting was this entrance and setting. Where was everyone, and why the deathly silence? Shaking the snow off the blanket and her coat, she hung the coat inside a closet leading to the laundry room, stretched the blanket over a few chairs in the kitchen, cleaned up the snow in the hall entrance way, then raced upstairs.

At the top of the stairs, she paused. Her father stood looking out of the window at the end of the hallway, his back to her, his head leaning against the window frame, his shoulders shaking with great sobs.

Rushing down the long hallway, she cried happily, "I'm home, Father, don't cry. I'm safe. God sent Hadley to where Mrs. Singamore and I were stranded."

Turning, his face ash-white, his eyes swollen and red, he gathered Joanna into his arms. "Thank God, you're safe!" he exclaimed. "But it . . . it's your grospapa. He . . . he's dead, Joanna. Dead!"

Joanna felt her body go limp. She wanted to die, too. Tears sprang to her eyes. "Grospapa dead!" The exclamation came out in what was little more than a whisper. "Not my grospapa!" she cried. "It can't be. It can't! He was so much alive when I left for Frona's house this morning. Wh . . . what happened, Daddy?"

"His heart just gave out on him. He said he felt a little bit tired after supper. Grosmom told him to take a nap. He came up to his bedroom, stretched out on the bed and went to sleep for all time in this life. Your mother and Josh are in with Grosmom now. We're waiting for the doctor and the undertaker to come. Grosmom's heart's acting strangely."

"Oh, Daddy, may I go into the room, please?"

"Of course you may, Joanna. Your mother needs you. We've all been so concerned over you. But we knew the Lord would help Mrs. Singamore to find you. Frona called to tell us not to worry, that her mother had gone looking for you. Now go into the bedroom and let your mother and grandmother know that you are home and safe."

"Oh, I will, Daddy. I will. Is Grosmom in your bedroom? Why isn't she in her own bedroom? Is it because . . ."

"Yes, you guessed it, Joanna. Your grandfather is still on the bed in their bedroom. Your mother and I thought it would be best for Grosmom to stay in our bedroom. At least, until the doctor comes. They've gone after him in a snowmobile."

Joanna tip-toed quietly inside the bedroom. Her mother sat beside the bed, wiping Grosmom's face and forehead with a cold, wet washcloth. Josh stood at the foot-end of the bed, looking drawn and hurt. Joanna patted his arm as she passed him to get to her mother. Without saying a word, she

threw her arms around her mother's neck and sobbed on her shoulder until her tears were spent. Her mother wept with her, but Grosmom never opened her eyes. Her face was gray-white and her breathing was strangely different. So different, in fact, that it frightened Joanna. "Is she dying, too?" She whispered the question into her mother's ear.

"I hope she's not," her mother replied in an equally hushed tone of voice. "But this is something none of us has any power over; our times are indeed in God's hands."

"Shall I wipe her face, Mother? You look tired. Go and rest for a while."

"Thanks, Joanna. But no, I'll stay right here. She may need me. I could drink a cup of hot peppermint or spearmint tea, though. You may make some tea and bring it up. I'm so thankful you're safe. Grosmom was quite upset when the blizzard blew in and you weren't home. She was afraid you had died in the storm; 'a double tragedy,' she had said."

On an impulse, Joanna bent and kissed Grosmom's cheek, whispering softly in her ear, "I love you, Grosmom, and I'm home, safe and sound."

With an effort, the tired eyes made a feeble attempt at fluttering open. But it was a momentary thing only.

Joanna squeezed the limp, wrinkled hand lying so very still on top of the covers and for a second, she thought she felt a gentle pressure-response. Then she hurried from the room, down the long hallway to the stairs and the kitchen.

It was while she was heating the water that she thought about Mrs. Singamore and Hadley and, dropping on her knees, she prayed for their safety and protection.

The water in the teakettle bubbled merrily. Joanna brewed the tea in the big crock teapot, savoring the deliciously-delightful aroma of the mint-fragranced kitchen. She opened the cupboard to get cups for her mother and Josh, and her father, as well, and there stood Grospapa's mug, looking for the world like it was just waiting for Grospapa, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, to lift it from its prominent place on the cupboard shelf and wrap his enormous hands around its ancient body and sip its contents. Almost Joanna

thought she could hear the usual, pleased and satisfied "Ah-h!" of Grospapa after each first few refreshing sips of hot tea.

It started a flow of fresh tears down her cheeks. Never again would the kind, warm, work-worn hands of Grospapa hold the so-long-as-she-could-remember, old mug. It would sit in its usual place on the cupboard shelf as a pleasantly-painful reminder to all its beholders that once a man had drunk from its lip each and every meal of his life; a kind, big-hearted, generous man with naught but love for his fellow-beings. A man whose voice was now silenced in death and whose existence, to the curious onlookers in the cemetery, would be attested to merely by a stone marker giving the date of his birth and of his death.

How soon one's life was ended and gone, the young girl thought as she heard Mrs. Singamore's voice calling from the front hallway.

(Chapter 10)

At her parents' insistence, Joanna had gone to bed after Mrs. Singamore's arrival. But, tired though she had been, sleep eluded her. She rolled and tossed and tumbled and turned, trying with all that was within her to convince her heart that Grospapa was indeed dead. Dead?! The word seemed unreal where Grospapa was concerned. He was always too vibrant and too much alive to imagine being dead. But she had seen him; yes, she had, lying still and lifeless and cold on the bed, the heavy afghan which Grosmom had crocheted only two winters ago, drawn up beneath his chin in mock pretense of trying to keep him warm.

Joanna buried her face in her pillow and sobbed. Maybe she should not have gone into the bedroom and looked at Grospapa. But she could not have done otherwise; Grospapa would have wanted her to see him lying as peacefully-sweet in death as she had remembered him in life. He was merely asleep . . . in Christ. Someday, like him, her heart would cease its beating and she would fall asleep in Jesus to wake up standing inside God's celestial, eternal City. The Bible said it was "appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." This was one appointment no one would escape, she realize. Grospapa had just had his appointment, and Joanna knew he had not feared its coming. Hadn't he stated repeatedly that death held no fear for him since he had "washed his robes white in the blood of Calvary's Lamb." (His words).

How long before the undertaker could get through to take his dear body to the mortuary for embalming? she wondered. And, would Grosmom last through the night? Oh, how dreadful if she should die, and there would be two caskets in the living room. How could she ever explain this thing called death to Hannah and Abigail who, in the unconscious world of sleep, were totally oblivious to what had happened to their beloved Grospapa? Abigail, with her simple, unwavering faith in Christ, would no doubt suggest that, "Jesus will make Grospapa live again." Hannah, of more mature years and thinking, would retire to a corner somewhere and weep her grief and hurt out alone. She was like that.

She would stay close to the girls, Joanna decided, and not allow Hannah to grieve too much alone. The little sister needed an arm supporting her when she wept and sobbed, and Joanna decided she would be that supportive power, broken through her own heart was. How better could one sympathize than to experience the same sorrow or pain as the one sorrowing.

Sleep was slow and long in coming to the weary girl, and when it finally overcame her, it was only to bring with it, deep in her subconscious realm, the haunting dreams of Grospapa's death and bodily absence in their home. In her dream she was sobbing and calling his name, calling it so loudly as to get her wide awake.

It was not a mere dream, she discovered, but stark reality. She had been crying in her sleep and she was, indeed, calling for Grospapa. Her cheeks were wet with the tears shed and she remembered having called loudly for the man who had helped to raise her from her days of infancy. When her father and mother had been deep into the harvest-time and could devote little time to the children, Grospapa and Grosmom were there to give love, attention and discipline. Many a nap she had had, and enjoyed, in the creaky, old rocker on the big, front porch on Grospapa's lap. While she slept, he napped and slept. Oh, Grospapa would never be dead so long as her vivid and beautiful memories of him were kept alive in her mind.

Sleep was impossible for her. She lay staring into the darkness, listening to the wind as it rounded the corners of the farmhouse with a scream and a moan. It sounded sad, Joanna thought, sad like her heart felt.

Getting out of bed and wrapping a heavy, warm robe around her slender body, she slipped into a pair of fleece-lined house slippers and made her way out of the pretty little room toward the big bedroom near the far end of the hall. Seeing no one in the hallway, she tiptoed quietly into the room where Grospapa lay. She took his now-stiff and lifeless, cold hand in hers and brushed her lips gently over it. He didn't know, of course. But it was love pouring from her heart that made her do it. Then she knelt beside the bed and, burying her face in the folds of Grosmom's heavy afghan, she prayed silently, vowing that she would stay true to Jesus and His cause and meet her grandfather in Heaven.

For a long while she remained in the room, realizing that it would be the last time she would be afforded the privilege of seeing Grospapa and being alone with him. Though he was dead, she derived comfort in being in his presence. Were he alive, he would have reached over and patted her on the head, telling her how much Grosmom and he loved her. Almost, she thought she felt his gentle hand resting on her head in a quiet benediction and blessing. But no, she was merely imagining it.

"Joanna! Why aren't you asleep?" It was her father's quiet voice. His hand, much like Grospapa's rested ever so lightly on her head.

Lifting tear-filled eyes to his, she said, "I can't sleep, Daddy. I . . . I loved Grospapa so very much. Oh, I shall miss him dreadfully."

"I know, honey. We all loved him deeply."

"How . . . how's Grosmom? Did the doctor get through?" she asked anxiously.

"She's not good. The shock's been too much for her. And, no, the doctor hasn't arrived as yet. Mrs. Singamore's in the room with your mother and Grosmom. She's almost as good as a doctor. We wanted her to rest a bit, but she insists upon keeping vigil with your mother over Grosmom. And in a way, I'm glad she is; I feel greatly relieved in knowing she's here with us."

"I told her I was sure she was God's angel sent to rescue me out of the raging blizzard. And I really believe she was. And now she's with us again in this time of sorrow and sickness. Surely she's an angel in human form."

"I agree, Joanna. And now, would you like to go in and see your grandmother? I'm going to check on her again and see if your mother needs me to do anything for her. I sent Josh to bed. No need for all of us to stay up when there's nothing we can do."

Giving Grospapa a last, final kiss, Joanna followed her father from the room to where Grosmom lay, alive but barely so. She couldn't get over the fact that this once lively, ever-energetic, small human dynamo lay so very, very still and pale and unmoving. This was not like Grosmom! No indeed! Always, it was she who was with Mom by the bedside of the sick and the ailing. Perhaps this was what bothered Joanna so much; she could never recall seeing either Grosmom or Grospapa seriously ill. They had been healthy for so long as she could remember. And now, seeing Grosmom's pale face and her unresponsiveness to any verbal communication, well, it was almost more than she could bear. Maybe if she didn't love them so deeply and so greatly, it wouldn't hurt her so much. But she did love them. Oh, how she loved them.

She looked at her mother's tired face and felt like crying. "Please Mom," she begged in a whispered tone, "lie down beside Grosmom and rest awhile. Or sit in the chair by the window and try to get a little bit of sleep. This has been a hard and long evening for you."

"Thank you, Joanna, but I'll stay here beside Grosmom. She may need me. I thought you were in bed, honey."

"I was, but I couldn't sleep. Oh, Mother, I'll miss Grospapa ever so much! He . . . he's always been a part of us; a . . . a part of me and of my life. Oh, Mom . . .!" Joanna sobbed.

The pale form on the bed moved slightly. A tear shimmered on the eyelash.

"Sh-h, honey," Mrs. Singamore cautioned. "Grosmom hears. We must not upset her further. She's in shock. "

With an arm around her daughter's waist, the mother led Joanna from the room, closing the door after her. "I know how you feel, honey," she said softly-close to Joanna's ear. "Yes, I know how you feel; my heart, too, is broken to slivers and tiny pieces. I can't imagine this house without either

Grospapa or Grosmom. We all loved them greatly. But God is all-wise; He knows why He called Grospapa Home. We must do everything we can now to help Grosmom to get well. Her heart's beating erratically and strangely" . . .

Mom's sentence trailed meaningfully. "Do . . . you think she . . . she'll die?" Joanna asked fearfully.

"None can say, honey. God holds our breath in His hands. But the possibility is there. And the probability, too."

Joanna gasped. Then she hurried away. The thought of losing both grandparents was just too much for her to imagine.

Once back in her own lovely bedroom, she turned a light on and, drawing her Bible close to her heart, she wept unashamedly. Then she opened it at random, intending to turn to the marker that marked the Book and chapter where she had left off reading the day before. But the words on the opened page caught her eye: "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?"

"As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work:

"So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.

"When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day . . .

"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, . . ." (Job 7:1-4, 6).

Could it mean that God wanted Grosmom in Heaven, too? Now? That He was going to take her also? Joanna buried her face in the pages of her beloved, much-read Bible. Then she said an unwavering "Amen" to whatever the Almighty deemed best and, turning the lights off, she crawled beneath the covers. Her heart was at peace and at rest; whatever God chose to do would be for the best, she knew. He saw down the road of the future whereas she could see nothing.

It was Mrs. Singamore's voice that awoke her sometime later, how much later she never knew, for everything seemed unreal and dazed to her as Mrs. Singamore held her close and, with a broken heart said, "Grosmom just crossed over, too. They're together again, Joanna . . . your grandparents."

Joanna felt herself go cold with shock and disbelief. "No! No!" she cried. Then, remembering her unwavering "Amen" to God's will and to His appointments, she dried her tears and said softly, "I must go to Mother and Father. Will you come with me?" And once more wrapping the robe around her shaking body, she made her way down the hallway toward the light in her parents' bedroom.

(Chapter 11)

Dawn came late that morning; late, and wearing a shawl of gray over its shoulders. It was a keen reminder to the tired girl of the two beloved and now still forms lying on two separate beds in two different bedrooms. The blizzard which had raged in fury for hours spent itself before the first gray streaks of the new day had become visible in the east. Only the fragments of the storm lingered behind in the form of a lightly-falling snow and the much-lessened but still-blowing Arctic air.

Joanna looked through her bedroom windows to the world outside. Everything was wrapped in snow. Everything! Seeing the enormous drifts and the deep snow, she understood fully why neither the doctor nor the undertaker had been able to get through. It was a miracle indeed, she mused silently, that God had sent Hadley to where Mrs. Singamore and she were stranded. A modern-day miracle, for sure.

Going to the attic after spearmint tea, she wondered how Mr. Tabbs the undertaker would be able to get through to the farm to pick up dear Grospapa's and Grosmom's body for embalming. And how would Hannah and Abigail take the shocking news? Of all the members in the house, the two little girls were the only ones to get a full night's sleep. And even yet, they were still asleep.

Joanna reached the top landing of the attic stairs and in the dim light of the gray and eerie storm-lashed dawn, she saw the creche standing in its place beneath the eaves just as Grospapa had put it after Christmas was

past. It was as though it were waiting for the touch of those gentle hands to carry it downstairs once more, where it would have the most prominent place in the large living room, Grospapa's voice giving credence to its importance with his every-year speech of, "This is the reason for Christmas -- Christ! If He had not come, there would be no Christmas." Then, one by one, he would place the figures around the Center of attraction, Jesus the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Joanna walked over and lovingly touched the creche. It was especially beautiful and lovely because Grospapa had made it with his very own hands. Oh, how real it looked! One by one, she picked up the figures and held them tenderly in her hands. How very, very smooth they were and how intricately fashioned! To the smallest and finest detail, Grospapa had carved and whittled until he had produced the desired stance, position, and look . . . a half-upraised hand, kneeling, bowing postures, awe and amazement on faces.

"O Grospapa! Grospapa!" Joanna cried softly to herself, holding and caressing some of the beautiful little wooden representatives of the portrayed nativity scene.

The realization that Grospapa and Grosmom would never again be a part of their many activities tore Joanna's heart to pieces. Nothing would ever seem quite the same anymore. Grospapa and Grosmom were mixed up in a happy, little, pleasant way in each and every thing that went on in and around the farmhouse and the farm itself. They were old, to be sure, and they had lived a full, rich and wholesome life; but for all their years, they had maintained a delightful zest for living, counting each day as an added bonus-blessing and, at heart, they were still young.

Joanna sighed sadly. They were gone, those two very dear people. She guessed she had just never given any kind of serious thought to them dying. Had she expected them to live forever? she wondered. The more she pondered the question, the more convinced she became that, yes, she guessed she hadn't thought her grandparents would die. And even though they were now dead, to her they would still be very much alive. Always.

She put the beautiful little hand-carved replicas back in place, then turned to get the dried tea, hanging and tied in an up-side-down fashion from the rafters, when her eyes fell upon the coarse garment bag hanging from a

higher rafter. Trembling with grief and sorrow, Joanna very tenderly and carefully lifted the hand-made bag until Grosmom's wedding gown came into view. The sight of the very, old gown brought a fresh flow of tears to her eyes. How very beautiful Grosmom must have looked as she held Grospapa's hand and repeated the sacred marriage vows; she thought, as she caressed the tiers of heavy lace, yellow with age and rotting with time.

She recalled how Grosmom had told her about meeting Grospapa in a revival meeting. "He looked at me in a strange way," Grosmom had said with a twinkle in her eye, "and I didn't know what he was thinking; so I hurried out to the wagon where my father was unhitching the horses from the hitching post. "

He learned Grosmom's name during that meeting, Joanna remembered having been told, and where she lived. And right after the meeting closed, he came to see her, and then began to court her. They were married a year later, in the church where they met. She was 24; Grospapa 26. They had had such a good life together, Grosmom had always said, such a happy life; and she "couldn't imagine living without him." (Grosmom's exact words).

Tears coursed down Joanna's cheeks. Only for a few hours was Grosmom without the support and the love and the fellowship of Grospapa! It was almost as if God had taken pity on her and called quickly for her, too, the young girl thought as she fingered the once-lovely, hand-sewn wedding gown, every stitch in it having been put there by Grosmom's mother. How very slender Grosmom must have been; Joanna soliloquized, holding the yards and yards of lace outward until the tiny wisp of a waistline was better seen. She could almost visualize Grosmom in the gown: tall and slender and straight as an arrow with a shy but genuine smile on her face and a light in her deep-blue eyes.

How happy she must have been to become Grospapa's bride!

She pressed the gown to her lips then pulled the coarse garment bag cover down over it carefully. It had been hanging in the attic all these many long years, and Joanna was sure that so long as Mom lived, it would continue to hang there.

She untied a bunch of tea from the rafter then made her way downstairs, shivering from the cold.

Breakfast was served and eaten in silence, the two empty chairs grim and factual reminders of the departed loved ones. Mrs. Singamore, after phoning Frona to see that she was all right and to tell her the sad news about Grospapa and Grosmom, set to work with a will. She baked pies and cakes and made bread and rolls in abundance.

It was late afternoon before a snowplow cleared the way for Mr. Tabbs to get through and pick up the two bodies. Abigail and Hannah watched in silence as the beloved forms were carried through the doorway, and the minute Mr. Tabbs disappeared and the door was closed, the little girls ran upstairs, sobbing brokenly. With eyes much washed by tears, Joanna followed them. She found Abigail standing by the window and crying openly and unashamedly; Hannah, however had retired to a closet and there, muffling her sobs as best she could in her hands, she poured her grief out alone.

Gathering Abigail close to her heart, Joanna said, "Come, we must help to comfort Hannah. She must not grieve alone." and with those words, she gently opened the closet door wide and, finding her sister huddled in the corner on the floor, she threw her arms around her sobbing form and held her close to her breast.

"O Joanna, Joanna!" Hannah moaned. "How can we live without Grospapa and Grosmom? I love them, Joanna. Love them. Who will whittle me chairs when I need them for my tiny doll house that Grospapa built for me? And who will make me cornhusk dolls and tiny brooms for the doll house? And . . . and who will ever whistle all the time, like Grospapa did, when he was happy or when he was sad?"

"And . . . and I'll never feel Grosmom's hand on my head again when I say my bedtime prayers!" Abigail exclaimed brokenly. "And Grosmom always made my hot chocolate for breakfast, Joanna . . ."

Abigail left the sentence trailing, as if it were too painful a subject to pursue or talk more about even.

"I know how each of you feel," Joanna remarked in understanding sympathy. "My heart hurts, too. Dreadfully so. But do you think Grospapa and Grosmom would want us to feel this badly because they're in Heaven?"

Hannah lifted her big, brown eyes to meet Joanna's. "N . . . no," she stammered. "They would want us to be happy. But . . . but is it wrong for me to cry? I mean . . . well . . . I can't help it. It hurts me Joanna. "

"Of course, you can't help it, honey. I realize that. And no, it's not wrong to cry, for even Jesus wept. But we must not forget that those we loved so dearly are now at Home with Jesus and the holy angels, and they are so very happy. Imagine it, they have seen Jesus now. Really and truly, seen Him. And now they will be with Him forever. Grospapa will never again need to go out in the cold and shovel snow, for it never snows in Heaven. And they'll never need lights up there; Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the everlasting and perpetual Light. Oh, we can't begin to imagine how beautiful and glorious and wonderful Heaven really is. And now that our dear Grospapa and Grosmom are up there, well, it only helps to make it that much more wonderful."

The two little girls were silent for a while, their minds trying to imagine what the glory of Heaven would be like; especially, what was Grospapa doing, now that he was with Jesus and would never again be separated from Him!

"Will Grosmom cook in Heaven?" It was tiny Abigail who broke the silence with her elementary question. " 'Cause she like to cook," she added, as an explanation to her question.

Stooping and drawing her sister into her arm, Joanna said, "No, Abigail, Grosmom won't cook in Heaven."

"Then will she be happy?"

"Very, very happy, honey. For, though Grosmom loved to cook and to bake and to clean house, no one does those things in Heaven. Heaven's a place of rest and unending joy and singing and happiness. The Bible says, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.' (Rev. 14:13). Grospapa and Grosmom worked hard all their life. Often they were tired and weary. They wanted to rest but couldn't because the work had to be done . . . plowing and sowing in the spring, cultivating and haying in the summer, harvesting in the fall. Those kind of things. And always there was the care of the cattle and of the chickens and ducks and geese and the

upkeep of this lovely, old, big house. So that meant that Grospapa and Grosmom didn't find much time to rest. Always they had to work. So our kind, loving Heavenly Father, knowing how tired they must have felt, and seeing how old they were, sent for them to come Home to Him. Now they'll never have to work again. Because they were faithful and true to Jesus, they will now have one grand and glorious never-ending camp meeting."

"Well, I'm glad for Grospapa and Grosmom," Hannah decided sweetly and submissively, "but I'll miss them terribly, Joanna."

"We'll all miss them greatly, to be sure; but if we stay true and faithful to Jesus and love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, then we shall see Grospapa and Grosmom again. In heaven!"

The little girls dried their tears and decided to go and play. Joanna, marveling at the sudden change which understanding the Scriptures had brought, hurried down to her over-tired parents to see what she could do to help them.

(Chapter 12)

The big house became a mortuary of sorrow and mourning as neighbors and friends from miles around came to pay their last respects to a couple who had become a sort of legend to the entire community, John and Amanda Finkenbiner. Mr. Tabbs, in accordance with Grospapa's wishes and his request of long standing, had brought both bodies back to the farmhouse where they reposed in the living room until the day of burial. Hannah and Abigail on tiptoes made their way to the caskets and looked upon the forms of those they loved so dearly, once active and busy, now still and lifeless and silent.

"Hello, Grospapa and Grosmom," Abigail said softly as she stood on a stool looking down into her dear grandparents' faces. "I love you. Can you hear me?"

"They can't hear us," Hannah informed her little sister kindly but factually.

"Well, then I'll have Jesus tell them for me; He listens to everything I say and He see all I do. So I'm going to ask Him to tell Grospapa and

Grosmom that I love them and I miss them." And away Abigail marched to pray.

The day of burial dawned bright and clear and not nearly so cold and frigid as the day on which the dear ones passed away. Joanna thanked God for the moderation in the temperature. The church was filled to capacity with many who could not get inside standing in silence outside.

Again in accordance with Grospapa's wishes, their bodies were laid to rest beneath the pines which his own hands had helped to plant so many years ago. The pines would now whisper and sigh and keep watch over the two who had so carefully tended and cared for them down across the years of time. It was most fitting then and only proper that they should be buried there, Joanna mused silently to herself. In the summer, she and her two small sisters and Josh, too, could keep fresh flowers on the graves. And the birds would sing endlessly in the branches above them. In the long winter months, the pines would whisper over them and act as earthly sentinels, keeping watch over their departed dead until the day of resurrection of the dead in Christ.

She stood inside the kitchen looking through the window to the new-made graves. "February," she said silently. "February the 25th!" Grospapa and Grosmom were buried so near to the beginning of March, she thought as she remembered how eagerly and fondly each of them had welcomed spring's arrival when they were living.

March entered like a grande dame, coming in like a lamb, and Joanna welcomed the first warm day by hurrying outside to find the many crocuses which Grosmom had planted years ago and which she hoped were up. She found only a few and even they weren't blooming, but were still in a tight, little fist of a bud. Little matter -- at least they were up. Spring time would soon be here; the long winter was almost past. Soon the birds would begin singing joyously and lustily and "staking" out territory in trees or bushes for nesting and rearing a family; soon the sun would be hot, the air redolent with the fragrance of blooming flowers and the scent of new-mown hay and lawns. Soon, yes, soon . . .

Joanna paused in her excited musings. Something came suddenly to mind. A tear slid from beneath her eyelashes and a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. She rejoiced. She praised God. Through Him, she had

triumphed. The nagging questions were gone. She had seemed to have grown into the full stature of young adulthood the past few weeks. Not once had she been bothered with the troublesome thoughts. She guessed, like Frona had informed her on the day when she took soup and bread to the Singamore's home, that the growing-up phase had finally passed. A song of praise filled her heart.

March skipped along on sun-warmed feet. The earth began to awaken and come to life. Occasional bird songs drifted houseward through partially opened windows and the yard was a riot of color with Grosmom's myriad crocus plants in full bloom. Anxious, industrious fishermen, wearied by long, cooped-up days indoors, set out to sea in the fishing vessels, their laughter and light banter drifting shoreward as they pushed seaward from the dock. Joanna's father and Josh, turning over fresh sod in readiness for planting, worked from early morning till time for the evening milking and barn chores, their faces expressing their great delight at working God's good earth again. The big house, too, experienced a change as Joanna, along with her mother, gave it a thorough from-attic-to-cellar-nook-and-cranny spring house cleaning, washing curtains, cleaning windows, painting walls and wallpapering rooms.

April entered shyly and warmly, dropping lilac kisses on a winter-weary world. Going to the woods in search of violets one beautiful April evening, Joanna, overcome by the beauty of the unusually early spring, sat on a fallen tree in the woods to meditate when a strange sound reached her ears. Immediately, she was alert. Bzzzzzzzzp, Bzzzzzzzzp, came the sound. A woodcock, she thought with excitement. Yes, without a doubt, it was a woodcock. A sandpiper courting. A memorable sign that it was spring.

With a smile on her face, and moving only her eyes in the direction of the sound, she spotted the little creature on a sort of island of moss. He was peentzng. Ornithologists, she had read, claim the insect-like noise, called peenting, was made by first swallowing air and then forcing it up the throat through the bill.

Fascinated, she watched the little fellow peenting, making military facing movements at 90-degree angles, north, east, south and west, or in whatever order he chose. Then, fluttering suddenly straight into the air, after 60 or more peenting repetitions, he began to fly in concentric circles just over the treeline.

The winnowing of the woodcock's wings fell on the early evening breeze like haunting organ music through the corridors of a cathedral, Joanna thought. With each spiral, the bird climbed higher and the circles widened until the woodcock was a mere tiny speck some 300 feet up against the evening sky. She felt her breath drawn up and her body tighten with anticipation as the woodcock appeared suspended for an instant at the pinnacle of its flight. Then, when all sound had ceased, the little bird began to glide silently toward the center of its spiral course before tumbling, bill down, wings tight to its sides like a cliff diver, toward the earth, breaking only in time to land on the precise spot from which its flight had begun.

Again and again, the bird pranced and flew, oblivious to its audience, until at last the music from aloft seemed to be carried not from nearby, but from each in turn of the rising, early evening stars.

Long after the sound was lost on the evening sky, Joanna sat as one spellbound. How diverse, but wonderfully so, were each of God's creatures and His creation, she thought. The woodcock, she knew, were squat little birds with long, pointed bills. The color of dead leaves in fall and called timberdoodle, they teased the hunter, whistling and flying like corkscrews after breaking from swales of alder and poplar which they favored for cover.

Tears filled Joanna's eyes. How great and wonderful was her God. How carefully and wondrously He "equipped" each creature with "weapons" of self-defense and the knowledge of where each could locate their kind of food. What a caring, loving God she served!

Walking homeward in the cool of the evening, the fragrance of blooming lilacs heavy in the air, Joanna looked upward at the twinkling stars. Somewhere up there, beyond the sky, the moon and the stars, was Heaven. Grospapa and Grosmom were there. Countless other saints were there, too. They had weathered life's storms, endured its trials and testings and, through Christ, they had been more than conquerors. They had triumphed. They were Home, in God's Eternal City. Their "long winters" were past.

Dropping to her knees, she prayed. Then she praised. So long as she lived, she knew, she would have "storms" to face. There would be other "long winters," without a doubt; but as sure as winter came, spring followed close behind. She had nothing to fear she suddenly realized; for the Christ who

allowed the long winters always tempered the cold with the springtime-summertime of His presence.

Feeling greatly encouraged in the Lord, she walked homeward by the light of the stars, the trials and questions of the long winter all forgotten and buried in her quest of "reaching forth unto those things which are before," and pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

THE END