SOMETHING TO GIVE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Susanna West pulled up the shades in her bedroom and the warm sunlight of an early morning summer streamed like a soft haloed light through the sheer curtains at her windows. Jacob's picture on the dresser sent a dart of pain into her heart. She picked the picture up, gathered it close to her heart and wept. What an empty substitute for the man himself, she thought,
clutching the picture closer to her breast. "O Jacob," she cried, "I loved you so! Loved you so!"

She held the picture away from her at a short distance and looked long into the finely chiseled features of the man with whom she had shared her life for better than fifty-four years. What a life, she thought, recalling those happy and wonderful years. Every one of them, happy. And why not? Christ was the center of attraction there; the head of their home -- from the day they were married, and through the succeeding years.

Susanna thought of Walter Hutchins then and her eyes shed fresh tears. Walter lived next door to her. Only her own driveway separated their lawns. Walter, too, had lost his companion . . . 53 years for them. His Mildred had preceded her Jacob by four months, one week and three days. And oh, the difference between the two deaths. And the remaining partners, too. Jacob had passed across whispering the blessed name of Jesus rapturously; Mildred had died trying to find God. Walter had become even more bitter and cantankerous since his wife's decease; Jacob's death had helped to give a new thrust and new meaning to her faith in Christ.

Thinking of Mildred, Susanna shuddered as she recalled the many times she and Jacob had tried to witness to their very-close neighbors only to be rebuffed and told not to bother them . . . ever . . . with "such nonsense." But the moment of death had changed Mildred's thinking; she had sent for her neighbors then. Oh, how she did hope that Mildred had found mercy and pardon.

She raised the windows as high and as far as she could to allow all the freshness and clean coolness of the beautiful morning to flow inside. Besides, her gardenia bushes were blooming in a well-mulched bed near the windows and she loved the sweet perfume the little breezes wafted into her rooms. Jacob had been every bit as fond of the fragrance as she. He had planted the six gardenia bushes for her some years ago.

She went into the neat kitchen and started the oats to cooking. Then she decided to bake an apple pie. No, she thought quickly, not one but two pies. Why not four, two apple and two rhubarb. Mr. Hutchins may well enjoy the taste and the goodness of some home-baked pies. Mildred had been recognized as an excellent cook and baker. Her husband, no doubt, missed the touch of homemade anything.
Susanna was humming now, measuring sugar and salt, and sifting flour and cutting in the shortening. Something about baking and cooking always lifted her spirits and made them soar. Jacob, if he were still living, would have told her it was because she was fulfilling, or filling and fitting obediently into God's ordained role for her life, that of being "a keeper at home." A homemaker. Oh, how she had loved and enjoyed her God-given role; wife, homemaker, mother.

As she worked, her mind flitted memory pages backward to the time when Jacob and she had taken a few days vacation into the mountains. It had been upon the insistence of their two oldest children and was made possible by a monetary love-gift from each. They had felt like two young sweethearts again. And Joseph, their oldest, had told them that since they had never actually had a honeymoon, he and Miriam (his wife) had wanted them to consider their share of the money as a belated, long overdue honeymoon.

Jacob was as excited as a child, taking her into states she had never seen before. And, finally, the mountains. Oh, those majestic, beautiful, towering mountains! Never could her wildest imagination have dreamed of anything so spectacular. The small cabin they rented to sleep in and cook in for a few days was like a small corner of heaven, she had thought. But it was Jacob who had made it seem like the piece of heaven. The very atmosphere about him breathed of the higher life. He was so God-like; such a wonderful husband and father.

Nature had so many aspects, she had been made to see and realize on that lovely away-from-home trip, and God was behind them all; but the mass and grandeur, the vast solitudes and deep recesses in the heart of the hills, were, in a peculiar sense, the inner shrine where He seemed to wait for those who, worn and confused from the noise and strife of the world, would come. There the sound of man's struggles were lost in His peace; there the fever of desire and the agitation of emotion were calmed in His silence. She had felt like she was folded entirely in silence and beauty. The great hills, purple with heather and green with moss, rose peak beyond peak in sublime procession; the mountain streams ran dark and cool through the dim and hidden channels, singing a song without words, sweet with all purity and fresh with the cleanness of untrodden heights. Through the narrow passes the two of
them had walked with a silent joy, hand in hand, among the silence of the valley, the grandeur of the towering peaks.

Together they had quoted the 121st Psalm: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

"My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth . . "

Her life was sweet with remembering, fragrant with memories wrapped around Jacob.

She dotted the pies generously with butter, fitted the top crust on, crimped the edges, sprinkled a light sprinkling of sugar over them, then slid them into the oven for baking.

On a crepe myrtle outside the open dining room window a mocking bird broke out in a lilting, warbling, lusty song. Susanna, her eyes ever open to the beautiful and her ears ever listening for bird songs, hurried to the window and peeked through. The singer looked like he would explode with happiness and joy, she thought as she watched the upraised head. Lifted in praise and song to God, she mused happily.

She caught sight of Mr. Hutchins then. He was bending over a rose bush, examining its extremities carefully. Looking for aphids, no doubt, she soliloquized. How those tiny creatures did love the young tender growth on rose bushes! and new buds, too.

The man was looking older, she noticed. But maybe she was too, she rationalized. And why not? One who was in her late seventies just naturally couldn't be expected to carry the marks of youth with her, could she? Even those who had had their face liftings weren't fooling anybody; age had its own notices. It told its own story. And what was so all wrong with that? Hadn't the Bible stated in the 92nd Psalm that she would still "bring forth fruit in old age." And in Isaiah (46:4), God had declared, "And even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." And Psalms 48:14 declared encouragingly, "For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death."
Yes, Susanna thought joyously, "unto death," God would still be her guide. Then He would be standing at the river, waiting for her, to lead her gently and safely across the The City where the Lamb is the Light. It was such a blessed and comforting thought.

As soon as the pies were baked and cooled, she hurried across the driveway to Walter Hutchins' neat two-story. She followed the cobble stone walkway along the side of the house till she came to the back door. Then she knocked. Walter was there almost immediately.

"I was baking and thought you may enjoy several pies," she said timidly, offering him her special home baked gifts.

"Well now that's really kind of you, Susanna. I appreciate it. I haven't had a decent piece of pie since Mildred died. Um! They smell delicious. Apple?" he asked with light in his fading blue eyes.

"And rhubarb."

"Thanks, Susanna. Thanks much. Will you come inside?"

"Thanks, Walter. No. I have things I must get done in the garden. Weeds grow faster than this aging body of mine can keep them down. But God has been so good to me, to allow me strength to keep a garden in these late years. When I think of how many of my friends are in nursing homes and hospitals, well, I realize how truly blest I am."

"Wait a minute, till I set these pies on the kitchen table, Susanna. I've been wanting to ask you something. . . ."

She sat down in a lawn chair.

"You always bring God into everything," Walter Hutchins said, coming out on the porch. "I'm sure you know how bitter I've been since Mildred's passing . . . ."

"It need not be, Mr. Hutchins."
"That's what I want to talk to you about. How can you be so calm . . . and so resigned to . . . to your husband's death? I've watched you; even heard you pray several times . . . ." 

"That's the secret, Mr. Hutchins, staying in touch with the One whose I am and to whom I belong: the Lord Jesus Christ. If it were not for Him the loneliness and emptiness of the house would consume me, I do believe. But I have a Friend. He sticketh closer than a brother. He lifts my burden and fills my heart with song. I've been praying for you. Jacob prayed every day of his life for you and Mildred. I wish you'd seek the Lord. He's waiting to fill your heart and life with His presence and to give you peace. His peace."

"I've rejected Him for a lot of years, Susanna. All of my life, actually. But when Mildred lay dying, she said, "Walter, it's so dark out there. I'm afraid to go. If I only had someone to guide me, to show me what's beyond . . . ." She wanted you and Jacob. Oh, I hope she was . . . was . . . ready. I should have led her, should have gone to church and . . . and cared for her soul the way I cared for her body. But I didn't. Somedays I think I'll lose my mind over remorse and regret for having failed her in the area of the spiritual."

"Yesterday is gone, Mr. Hutchins. Everyone of them, gone. They're beyond our reach and recall. You can do nothing about them. That is sad. But today is yours. Mine. This precise moment, fragile and fleeting though it be, is yours. What will you do with it? Your soul has not departed into the realm where it can never again be dealt with; where it will have no more golden opportunities to get right with God. What are you going to do about it? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Walter Hutchins trembled. Then he sobbed. "Tell me again what I must do to be saved" he cried. "I wouldn't listen when Jacob tried to tell me. But now I'm ready. I want to know."

To the melody of the mocking bird, Susanna told the age-old story of Christ's power to save, transform, and forgive. And Mr. Hutchins, whose heart was ready, on his back porch was born again.

Susanna walked across the driveway to her own small house. Her heart was singing with the mocking bird, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."
Jacob was rejoicing too, she knew. He had "planted" and "watered" while he lived, and now she had seen God give "the increase," in her neighbor's salvation.

She felt many years younger. She was still able to do; still able to give something to a lost and bleeding and dying world. She hummed softly as she worked in her garden pulling weeds.