Soap suds drained from her long slender fingers while the dishwater grew tepid and cold as Lora stood, statue-like, and looked through the window to the gently rolling hills. Nestled between the hills, and looking stately and serene in its simplicity and its unarchitectural design, stood the country church. Its steeple pointed a solemn finger toward the sky while the myriad poplars and sturdy cedars marched like dutiful sentinels around its
border, guarding both the church and its buried dead in the well-kept cemetery.

Tears mingled with the soap suds. Lora, still in a state of shock, wished she could see the newly-covered grave from her kitchen window. Perhaps, she reasoned, it would ease the pain a bit more if she were able to see her mother's grave as she prepared the meals and washed the dishes. But the cedars and the poplars guarded the place too carefully. They breathed out soft gentle sighs and whispered their sadness over the buried dead as they guarded yet another new-made mound.

Weak and numb with shock and pain, Lora dried her hands then walked mechanically to a kitchen chair and sat down while memories of her much-loved mother flooded her entire being. It wasn't that she felt her mother's passing was premature; eighty-four was a good age for anyone to live. It was, rather, the deterioration of her reasoning faculties the past year or two that hurt so deeply.

A fresh rush of tears washed from Lora's eyes. She leaned her head back against the wall and closed her eyes, not caring that she was sobbing broken-heartedly. Memories, like tidal waves, washed over her, taking her back into the beautiful and pleasant past. Her mother, Mrs. Ezra Archer, was, before her marriage at age 28, a school teacher, county secretary and an occasional court recorder. She was also the pianist in the church which she attended regularly with her parents and brothers and sisters. She was endowed with a brilliant mind. Her gentle manners and her sweet, mild nature and ever-ready smile and helping hand endeared her to all who knew her. She lived in a careful and prayerful way, dying as she lived, steadfast in the faith and true to God. Other names and other faces eluded her but the name of Jesus, never. At the mere mention of His name her face brightened and her lips parted in a radiant smile. "He is my Savior!" she exulted joyously, before adding with emphasis, "And He is my best and dearest Friend. Oh how I love Him!"

The words, so familiar and oft-repeated, rang like a fresh song in Lora's ears. She got to her feet and hurried toward the sink to wash the dishes. Her mother would not want her to pine and sob so, she knew. If only she had recognized her . . . Lora . . . the last time Ken and she had gone to see her, Lora thought again as she had done so often since her mother's passing.
She glanced through the window to the bird feeder on the lawn. Birds flitted and darted from the feeder into the protective limbs and boughs of the nearby Scotch pine and blue spruce trees... cardinals, song and chipping sparrows, juncos, chickadees, English sparrows, finches, and a tit-mouse or two. It was a beautiful sight to behold as they fed contentedly together. A blue jay zeroed in on the bird feeder then like a dive bomber, not silently nor secretly, but noisily. His raucous call scattered the smaller birds like leaves swept by a late fall wind. Disconsolately, they flitted about and scolded from their lofty perches.

Lora watched them. She felt sorry for them as they settled noisily among the needly branches of the evergreens. It was a forced move, she knew, and one which would last only momentarily: Those brave little winged creatures would watch their opportunity and would snatch morsels from the ground.

The words from Ecclesiastics came to mind then: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:"

"A time to be born, and a time to die; . . ." (Ecc. 3:1-2.)

She couldn't quite understand why the scripture verses should have come to mind just then since there was no apparent correlation between her bird watching and the verses; but they were there, nonetheless, and her mind once more went to her dear mother and her "good" years. Truthfully, Lora had to admit, they were all good years. Except. . . .

Again her tears mingled in with the sudsy water. Her mind went back across the years with her mother, whose mental faculties were as bright and as alert as any person Lora had ever encountered or met. She could remember things and dates and times when everyone else had forgotten about them. She had had what many had said was a photographic mind. Once heard or read or related, her mother's keen mind recorded it indelibly. It was a never-forgotten thing . . . until the past several years.

Lora recalled the past few months with pain and a hurt so deep as to be undefined. Her oldest sister, Lenore, had insisted that their mother be cared for in her home. The set-up was perfect since Lenore was a widow and all her children were grown and married and living in homes of their own. Lenore was tender and gentle and loving and kind and delighted herself in looking
after their mother. Their mother, by all standards, appeared to be happy with the arrangement. But then, Lora soliloquized pensively, she could never recall a time when her mother wasn't happy and thankful. She had learned early in life the meaning of, "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

Lora sighed loudly. She was thankful for the many good years which God had given to her mother before the lapse of her memory. She recalled that sad time when she had taken a favorite casserole of her mother's over to Lenore's house two months prior to the time when death brought release to her God-fearing parent. "And who are you?" her mother had asked, her eyes searching Lora's face as though she should have known her but just couldn't quite fit all the pieces of recognition together.

"I'm Lora, Mother, your baby! Remember?" Lora had cried in anguish, feeling as though her heart would burst from the pain of not being remembered or recognized by the beloved one who had given her birth.

"No, no. Lora's asleep in her crib. Come, see." And with that, her mother had taken her gently by the arm and led her down the hallway into the playroom where Lenore kept the toys for her grandchildren when they came to see her. Lying in a tiny crib was a dark haired doll covered to its chin with a warm blanket. "Lora's sleeping," her dear mother remarked in a half-whispered tone of voice, "and we mustn't disturb her. Poor dear; she had colic all night long."

Lora remembered how she had buried her face in her hands and wept. Her mother . . . her very own once normal mother . . . had lost contact with reality and was now living in a world of past memories and remembrances. It cut her to the quick of her sensibilities.

"Why are you crying?" her mother had asked innocently and ever so gently. "Lora's much better now, as you can see. She's sleeping. Come. I'll close the door and let her catch up on the sleep she lost last night. Miserable colic! I tried giving her warm mint tea but she refused it. I do hope she won't keep me awake all night again. . . ."

A stab of pain jabbed Lora's heart with remembering. In anguish she cried out, "Mother, oh Mother, I loved you so! And you loved each of us equally deeply. It is better for you that Jesus received you unto Himself. You
are now whole and beyond the reach of all deterioration. Yes, it is best that He took you Home."

She wiped the tears away and began working on washing the dishes. Death was an inevitable fact. One could not stop it nor escape it. The Bible stated that it was "appointed unto man once to die." It was something each would have to face. It was a divine appointment. Her mother's appointed time had come; she had merely fulfilled her appointment. God had blest her indeed by giving her an extension of fourteen years onto her allotted three score and ten.

The thread of life was such a fragile thing, Lora realized. Fragile, but also strong. So many, many strands of thread were involved in a life. Her mother's life, particularly and especially. Strong, useful threads that went into joining seams and tailoring pieces for character and personality formation -- threads of family and spiritual atmosphere, godly training and character building.

Lora's thoughts took a quick flight back to the carefree days of her childhood on into adulthood's new and more important tasks . . . its challenges of intricate fitting and finishing, all woven and intertwined somewhere and somehow with her mother and her careful, loving but firm Bible based training.

Through falling tears, refracted light from eternity suddenly made the time-strained threads transparent, revealing the comforting words of Scripture:

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept."

It was as though a heavy burden dropped from her heart. She realized with renewed confidence and faith in God that He, in His wisdom and deep love, did indeed do all things well.

Her tears dried up and she began to sing. Death was not the end but the beginning for her mother and those other departed saints -- the beginning of an eternal and immortal life with Christ.