He entered the large iron gates and drove slowly along the narrow, tree-lined road, looking from left to right; right to left. Among a clump of old-fashioned roses and peonies, he spotted the site again . . . the old-fashioned flowers his marker.
He braked, then stopped and shut the motor off. Walking slowly from the car to where the old-fashioned roses and peonies grew and blossomed in wild, unrestrained profusion and beauty, he stood, face toward the ground, and wept. Then, reverently, he placed the dozen long-stemmed red roses in the urn (which he had embedded in the ground a week earlier), went to the old-fashioned hand pump in the middle of the "Silent City," pumped water for the roses, filled the urn, then stood again, with head bowed, eyes closed.

In the pine and evergreens above him and around him, doves cooed mournfully, robins scolded noisily, song sparrows sang. And the breezes, all the while, soughed through the trees, whispering, whispering, over her grave. Keeping her company. Whispering of peace. Peace.

He was on holy ground. Instinct told him so. Instinct, and fact. Or maybe it was knowledge. Yes, he supposed it was knowledge. Knowledge was what one knew. And he knew. Yes, he knew. How well he knew! She was a righteous woman. And holy.

The robin ceased his scolding and, flying in a branch above him, sang lustily, melodically, beautifully. It was becoming. Over her grave nothing but singing should be heard. Singing, and praise.

He shed silent tears, knelt on the ground where her feet where in dust in their coffin tomb, kissed the ground where he figured the bottom of the casket rested, then got to his feet and sat on a stone nearby. Thinking. Remembering. Memories. Memories. Sad. Sweet.

From a nearby clump of bushes, the old church sexton watched. Strange, he thought. She had died childless, hadn't she? Who was this tall, well-dressed, refined stranger gentleman? And why was he coming to her grave day after day? Where did he come from and where did he live? He was no son; could he be a nephew?

He lifted his old straw hat and scratched his head, his forehead knotted in thought, his face a study of contemplation.

She had been poor, as he remembered, a widow for forty some years. She lived alone in her small cottage near the fringe of their small town. A pious woman, she, as he could remember. Yes, extremely pious. Never
missed a church service, either, unless she was sick in bed, which was seldom.

Again the sexton scratched his almost-bald, gray-white head. Perhaps she had had a son and he had not known about it. Let's see, he'd been the sexton for how many years? Twenty-two? Yes, it was twenty-two. And she had died about twelve-thirteen years after he had taken on the job. So she could have had a son and he had just never known she had.

But where would the boy have been all those years, he wondered? And why would he not have visited her sometimes? And helped her out financially, too? She was extremely poor. Yet her little cottage home never once announced its poverty through an uncared-for yard or exterior deterioration. Ah, no! Always, the little house seemed to wear a smile, as bright hollyhocks nodded their gay little heads across the fence and roses wove their fragrant blossoms in and out of the big arbor with its dainty little white-washed gate and adjoining paling fence. Here flowers of every color, description and fragrance danced and frolicked in their well kept beds inside. Butterflies frolicked; bees hummed; birds sang.

He watched the man from his vantage point. Still scratching his head, he came out from behind the bushes. No better way of finding out than by asking, he decided, his curiosity having gotten the better of him.

He cleared his throat in sort of warning way, a signal to let the stranger know that he was not alone. Then he advanced. "Pardon me, sir," he said, clearing his throat again, "but I never knew she had a son . . ." There. That should be a good opening, he decided.

The stranger sat, eyes fixed on her grave site, weeping.

"Pardon me, sir . . ." Again, the old sexton tried. "Uh, I'm sorry. Son? Did you say son?" The stranger wiped tears then stood to his feet. Again he said, "Son! Did you say son?"

"Yes. I . . . didn't know that she had a . . ."

"No, I'm not her son. How I wish I could lay claim to that title! She was childless."
"That's what I had thought," the old sexton replied, wiping perspiration from his head beneath the lifted-up straw hat. "That's what I thought," again he repeated. "You live somewhere around here? In the next town, perhaps? Or the city far away?"

"No," came the soft reply. "I'm vacationing."

"In a cemetery?" The sexton was incredulous. "You've been coming here every day for better than a week. Staying all day, too. I... I... well, you'll have to pardon me, but I must say this is the strangest vacation I've ever heard anyone tell of."

"If you knew..." The stranger's voice trailed. Tears sprang to his eyes then chase each other down his cheeks. Pointing to the grassed-over grave, he cried, "She changed my life!"

"Only God can do that, stranger," the sexton declared.

"God did it, but it was through her,' the stranger avowed solemnly.

"And how was that? I never knew her to go anywhere but to church and the little store in our town. She never went out of town. So how did she meet you?"

"It's not a pleasant story, to begin with, but this is one time when there is a truly genuine happy ending. She didn't go out of town. True. I came into your town rather late at night some years ago with wicked intentions. I saw the light had just gone out in her house so stepped onto the porch and was just ready to knock and ask for directions to the next town, planning to force my way inside when she answered my knock, then to rob her. But things went in reverse for me. She swung the door ajar, flicked on the porch and living room lights and said sweetly, 'Young man, God wants you. What are you doing, working for the devil? All he'll give you in pay is heartache and trouble and sorrow and tears. Turn your life over to Jesus, the Son of God. He'll make you happy and fill your heart with perfect peace and inner joy and soul-rest. I want to pray with you right now, son. Don't do what you planned to do. I love you and God loves you. Now you stand still while I pray. God needs you. He wants you! He's waited awfully long for you to come.'"
"I had become restless and nervous while she was talking, that's why she told me to stand still as she prayed. She laid her small hands on my head then and, sir, I tell you, I've never felt anything like it in all my life. It felt like an angel's touch. It did, sir! My arms fell limp and useless by my side. I wanted to run, but couldn't. Cold sweat broke out all over me while she prayed. Talk about power! Electric shocks went through me. I thought I was dying. I did! She kept praying. The longer she prayed, the sicker I got. I just knew I was going to die. And sir, in that moment, I knew that if I did die, I'd go straight to hell and never have the opportunity to get right with God again. That was my night!

"Don't ask me what I did next for I can't remember if I fell to the porch floor on my knees first or began praying, then dropped. But suddenly I heard her sweet voice saying, 'Come inside, and together we'll talk to God, son. It's late, and I don't want the neighbors to be awakened. Tonight is your night. God told me in prayer that he was sending someone by who had to get saved tonight or he'd be lost.'

"Sir, I literally crawled through the doorway, smitten by God the Holy Ghost. She didn't need to prod me into prayer; it literally rolled from within me. I confessed what I had planned to do and begged God's mercy and His pardon. Then, as myriad other sins loomed up before me, I confessed them and repented of them. And I, who had never prayed before in my life! And when the last known sin was confessed, the blessed Lord Jesus came into my heart, washing all my committed sins away in that precious fountain filled with His blood. I was a new creature in Christ. My sins were all forgiven!

"With tear-filled eyes I looked up at her. She had the face of an angel. I kissed her wrinkled hands. 'You're the first person who ever prayed for me!' I exclaimed. 'No one ever cared for my soul before. O I thank God for you!' My happy cry touched her heart. She wept for joy, saying, 'My son, thank God!'"

The old sexton pulled his big red bandanna type handkerchief from his hip pocket and mopped his tears.

"She asked where I was going, who I was, and where was I planning to stay for the night," the stranger continued. "I told her my name and said I hadn't planned where I was going, that I was just sort of feeling my way as I went. She said that had to stop, that I was too fine a young man to be a drifter and so shiftless. She readied her little spare bedroom and made me
stay there that night. And for a full week thereafter, too. In that week's time we did little else but read the Bible together and pray. She expounded unto me the more excellent way of holiness of heart, and I entered into this second rest. It was a glorious week. I, who had never known the love and tender care of a mother, a shifted from 'pillar-to-post' foster home child, felt that for the first time in my life I had a mother. And a home."

"Why did you not remain with her longer?" the old sexton asked brokenly. "She needed you; you needed her. You could have gotten work somewhere nearby, I'm sure."

"We discussed this all. But in that week's time, I knew I would have to do more than become an ordinary working man; God called me to the mission field. With what training I had gotten in vocational school some years previous, I was able to get a good-paying job in the city where I took Bible and linguistic training in a Bible college. I worked my way through Bible college and, through some devout Christian friends, I was soon on the field of my calling. Always, and consistently, she and I were in touch with each other by way of letters. And before leaving for the field, I spent three precious and never-to-be-forgotten days with her. By now we felt indeed the strong tie of mother and son. I went so far as to address her as mother. It came quite naturally. She was the only pattern of real motherhood that I had ever known. And oh, how I loved her! And I love her still. O how I love her! Sir, she shall have a marker before I return to the field of my calling. It is being prepared. I have ordered it. On it you will see the chiseled words, 'To Mother, the woman who prayed for me.' As you care for her grave, read it and remember my story. The story of a wicked sinner saved by grace, turned missionary. All because a little woman prayed for me. The first time ever that anyone prayed for me and cared for my soul."

The sexton blew his nose, brushed away the tears and said, "I will, sir, I will. Always. It's a promise. God bless you and go with you." Turning, he hurried away. Now he knew . . . and understood . . . the meaning of why the price of the little cottage upon her death was willed to that certain foreign mission station and to the "stranger" in charge of the station. Some in the church had thought the church would be the recipient. But now he understood. And in understanding, he was glad. He had met the man whom the church people had described as "a perfect and total stranger to all of us, this man and his mission station. Why would she have willed it to a stranger?"
She had never once voiced the episode of the late night visitor and his subsequent glorious conversion. Not to anyone. Ever. A quiet woman, she was. No trumpets to herald her multiplied deeds of kindness, her myriad sacrifices for the cause of the kingdom, or souls won to Jesus: The Lord Himself would someday make it all known throughout the Eternal City.

"The woman who prayed for me!" The words rang in the old sexton's ears. He dried more tears. He would see that her grave had special care. Yes, from here on, he would take care of it. For the missionary. Because she had "cared for his soul."