Keren stood beneath the dense boughs of the weeping willow, her back against the tree's trunk and her face toward the swiftly-running stream less than nine feet away. It had rained for two days and two nights with no let up and the water was both turbulent and muddy, much like her thoughts, she felt. Tears ran down her cheeks in hot streams and dropped onto the soft soil beneath her feet. Lately, it seemed like all she did was cry. And there was no
beauty in an almost-continuous stream of tears. Happy tears, perhaps; but sad, mixed-up tears, no. No!

"What's wrong with you, Keren?" her mother had asked, her second day from Bible school. "Something happen? You know you have a listening ear in me. Or in your father, honey. Something's bothering you."

"Yes, it is, Mother," she had admitted. "But I'm not ready to discuss it just yet. I want time to think it over."

"Chad?" the wise mother had asked.

"Chad. Yes." With that, she had run to her room and cried again. Tears. Tears. Tears. Was this love? she had wondered. Or was it not love?

She watched the churning water as it gathered debris and sticks and even some logs in its mad rush downstream. In no time at all, they had vanished. How she wished that her muddied-up and turbulent thoughts would vanish as quickly. If only she knew that Chad was for her and that she was meant for him! And now he had issued her an ultimatum of finality: "either you let me know that you'll marry me, Keren," he had told her, "or it's all off between us."

Was he trying to pressure her into marriage? she wondered. If so, why? For what reason? Wasn't love gentle and kind? And wasn't it considerate and patient and compassionate and long-suffering?

Just one more month to go; one more month to decide, she mused in silent torment. One word would decide either her happiness or her fate. Oh, she must know! She must. "Please, dear Lord," she cried upward with the wind, "Please, choose for me. I want Thy will above anything else. Only Thy will! I think I love Chad, Lord, but then there are times when I'm not sure. And, Lord, I . . . I get frightened around him sometimes. Like now, since he told me I must let him know if I'll marry him or not. One month, Lord. One month to let him know. If I say yes. . ."
Keren sobbed brokenly. A horrible fear possessed her when she even thought of saying yes to Chad's proposal.

"Sis. Sis, pull yourself together." It was Mark, her brother. He stepped softly beneath the drooping willow branches and grabbed Keren gently by her shoulders. "You must stop this endless battling or shall I or shall I not marry Chad Knisley. Is he worth all the tears he has caused you? And is causing you? I called Miriam and asked her what was bothering you, and she. . . ."

"You called the Bible school, Mark?" Keren looked at her brother, searching his face.

"I called the Bible school, yes. Is there anything wrong with that? After all, Miriam and I plan to be married as soon as she graduates in spring. Then, the Lord willing, it will soon be off to the mission field. This Chad, Keren, why should you let him upset you so? It doesn't make sense to me. Are you scared of him?"

"Ho. . . how did you know, Mark? Yes, at times I am terribly scared of him. Other times I delight to be in his presence."

"Isn't that all you need to know, Sis? I mean, well . . . I guess I mean that's the answer to your question. Do you want to spend a lifetime of misery with the guy?"

"But he says he loves the Lord! This is what is so confusing to me. Honestly, Mark, he's always witnessing, it seems, or passing out tracts. What is wrong? Is it with him or is it me? He says it's me."

"Oh, so he's gotten that far along as to be accusative. What an eye-opener, Keren! The answer's all but shouting itself to you, or at you, but you are too blind to see. Rather, I should say, too deaf to hear. Did you perchance ask him if he's ever been truly born again? I won't even mention entire sanctification, for the first work must be completed and experienced before the second can take place."

Keren looked dumb-struck. "He. . . he says he's a Christian," she repeated softly.
"But has he ever testified to a real born again experience in his life? Or to being entirely sanctified?"

Keren tried to think. But she couldn't remember of ever hearing him say that he knew the time and the place when he was made all new in Christ, when he was saved and his every sin was forgiven.

"'Not all that say Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.' You know this, Sis. That's the Word of God."

"What did Miriam say?" Keren asked quickly. "She as always felt that he's a phony, that he's not real. And know something, Sis? I feel the same way. In fact, both times that I saw him I felt this way. Have you ever discussed his Christian life with him?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, have you never asked him to pinpoint a very definite time and place when he fully surrendered his life to Christ? I'm sorry, Keren, but I feel your knight in shining armor is a Christian in name only. Could it be that you are infatuated with him and not in love at all?"

Keren sobbed again. "I don't know, Mark. I honestly don't know. This is why I'm praying so earnestly. I want to find the will of God for my life in this. I thought I loved Chad. I really did. But this fear, Mark! Oh, it has torment. Would real love do me this way?"

"Personally, I feel the Lord is trying to tell you something. And you know our parents' saying, 'Give God the benefit of the doubt when and if you are in doubt.' It's the safest thing in all the world to do.

"Again, personally, I think you have a case of infatuation, Keren. Romantic infatuation has a disorganizing and destructive effect upon one's personality, so says Birdie L. Etchison. But real love brings out the best in you."

"I have tried to imagine what my life will be like if I marry Chad. And . . . and some things I would never choose to be a part of my life. He is so demanding at times, and so dogmatic."
"You know this, and still cry over him! I wish I could do it for you, Sis; I'd drop him like a hot potato. If the guy loved you, he'd be considerate of you. Love never insists on its own way. It wants what is best for the other person. We have a beautiful picture of this in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. In essence, it states that one who is filled with divine love is patient and kind. Love doesn't envy nor does it boast. It is not proud, nor rude and self-seeking. It isn't brash nor harsh, either. It is kind! Remember this."

"That's what I know." Keren answered. "I was so lonely when I got to Bible school. Then along came Chad -- handsome, winsome, out-going, and saying he was a Christian. He took me under his wing, figuratively speaking, and I was swept off my feet. He's so likable and personable, Mark."

"Aren't most of them when they see a pretty girl? And a spiritual girl, too! This is crushing Dad and Mother. And I'll confess that I'm not feeling like shouting over the way you are just now. That's why I'm pretty much convinced that this is not of God. Anything with His smile and approval upon it doesn't tear one up like you are torn up.

"My advise to you would be, don't let Chad rush you into anything. True love grows and matures with time. Infatuation does not. Genuine love can and does wait. The real thing will only be stronger because of waiting. Remember, you have a whole lifetime ahead of you, God willing. According to the Bible, marriage is forever. It's not marrying today and dropping him/her a month from now. Or even a year. Or many years later. Marriage is a lifetime contract made by two people, a man and a woman. They take those sacred vows, or should I say, make those sacred vows unto God as well as to each other. It is a 'till death do us part' contract. A life-line's a long, long time to endure a demanding and dogmatic husband, Keren. You'll have years and years to regret your decision, I'm afraid, unless you break off with him."

Keren was silent for a long time. She stood, staring at the rain-soaked ground beneath her feet.

Mark spoke again, kindly and softly. "You can't rightfully judge one's Christianity by mere words, Sis. I mean, do more than take their word when someone says they are a Christian. Jesus said, 'By their fruit, ye shall know them.' Have you ever scrutinized Chad's life at length?"
"I suppose that is what I'm trying to do now," she replied. "I have been doing some seriously-remembering scrutiny -- things that annoyed and bothered me about him when we were together. For instance, he could be so critical, and so full of ridicule. I cringed every time he became this way."

"And this would not change once you were married, Keren; it would only get worse. Chad's putting his best face on for you now; and if this is his best, what will his worst be like? Again, I feel Chad's so-called Christianity is a facade. Do not marry at haste or you will indeed repent at leisure. With tears of remorse and regret, I might add."

"I have been trying, seriously and honestly, to analyze my attraction for Chad and I believe a lot of it stemmed from the fact that I was so lonely and so terribly homesick."

"Is this a good enough foundation upon which to build a marriage, Sis, a marriage with stability and last-ability?"

"That's what I'm beginning to see and to realize, Mark. No, it isn't."

"Then why not put an end to this, Keren? Make a clean break. You can do it and still be a sweet saved and sanctified young woman. In fact, I'm scared for you spiritually and emotionally unless you do put an end to this relationship."

"Thanks, Mark. I'll settle it once for all time. Now. I'll write and tell him that I can never marry him. Not ever. I would not want to live a lifetime with any man who possesses so many of the traits which I can't tolerate and which I abhor."

"Let me pray with you," Mark said wisely. "God can make this an easy thing for you to do."

"Thanks. He already has done this. In feeling the rightness of doing it, then deciding to do it, I felt a great load lift off my heart. I won't need a month to decide; it's settled now. Praise His name! Go ahead and pray, Mark. But let's just make it a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for deliverance."

Shortly afterward they walked together to the house. Keren's face was shining again. The cloud was lifted.