Midge leafed through the seed catalogs for the third time in two days. Visions of blooming marigolds, irises and nasturtiums stood out in beautiful design in the flower bed outside her kitchen windows. She even visualized the brightly-colored butterflies flitting gracefully from flower to flower, adding their exotic beauty to her mental picture.
She leafed to the bushes, flowering bushes, to be a bit more specific. She had bent the page down. Oh, how she longed to buy two dozen spirea! They would make a magnificent hedge for the west side of the lawn, she thought. And that wisteria would cover the trellis back near the patio. What pleasant times the grandchildren would have, when they came to visit, playing house beneath the trellised vine with its clusters of beautiful flowers hanging gracefully through the lattices! she thought dreamily. Why, they would have a house whose ceiling bloomed real, live flowers for them.

She smiled as she leafed from page to page, bright visions of the beautiful summer just ahead floating through her mind. She paused at the dwarf fruit trees and the chestnut trees. Two chestnut trees at the end of the lawn would not only provide an abundance of shade but they would yield their goodies each fall, as well. She had them on the order blank with the other items. And that new, hardier apricot, well, two of them should give Rog and her all they would need, both for eating and for canning.

She mused silently, checking the order sheet to make sure that the apricot trees were listed properly. Then she turned the pages until she came to the mountain ash and the maple trees, adding two of each onto the order sheet. Oh, how she loved the seed catalogs! She felt like spring was not far behind the arrival of the welcome seed catalogs. Even the pussy willows in the yard had given her encouragement that Spring was on its way; their buds were there, marching up the limbs and branches in jackets of brown, waiting for the warm sunshine to open the jackets and let the soft silver-gray catkins shine out in all their splendor and their glory.

Midge totaled the order. Oh, she hoped Rog would give in and allow her to order the things listed on the order blank. He had lashed out at her something fiercely and harshly when she told him that she had put the money which she had saved for the spring order of trees and bushes and plants and seeds into the church for missions.

"So you're not satisfied with the tithe, huh?" he had all but shouted. "Guess that preacher thinks money's my middle name. Well I'll show him a thing or two. I always did say that's all a preacher cares about . . . money!"

"But Rog," Midge answered softly, "the preacher doesn't get the tithe money. Nor the offerings for missions and. . . ."
"Who do you think you're kidding!" her husband had exclaimed, breaking into her sentence. "They're a lazy bunch, preachers are. And I'm sick and tired of you giving them your tithe. And now, all that money that you saved for the new spring shipment of nursery stock and plants!" And Rog had stormed out of the door, muttering something about preachers.

Midge folded the order blank and inserted it into the envelope with a prayer. It would take a miracle, she knew. But she served the God of miracles. This she knew also. True, she had saved for this order; saved for months and months, putting aside every penny she could spare out of the egg money. And it had mounted up to a nice sum, too. But she knew the voice of God too well to ignore His gentle, "I want you to give your egg money savings to missions." And she had obeyed, and given it all. It was a willing and a cheerful offering which she gave. There were no "buts" and no "what ifs." Neither was there any "What will I do for plants?" questioning. God had spoken; she obeyed. Instantly, immediately, and cheerfully. And what a blessing she had received in her soul for obeying! It was worth everything.

She mixed a ham loaf together then slipped it into the oven for baking, with a dish of au-gratin potatoes baking beside it. Cole slaw was chilling in the refrigerator and the frozen apple sauce would be thawed just enough to still have some icy crystals through it by the time Rog got in from the woods. A dash of cinnamon would top it off delicately and deliciously. The green beans were ready for a gentle simmering on the stove and lemon sauce stayed warm in the double boiler, ready to be poured over the freshly-baked gingerbread, brown and spicy and still very hot in the oblong pyrex baking dish.

Midge looked through the west kitchen window towards the woods. A sudden, strange fear seized her heart, like something was wrong with her husband. It frightened her. Rog was not ready to meet God. He wasn't ready to die. His anger and outbursts over preachers and what monies she gave into the church was only the "tip of the iceberg" of what lodged and lurked inside his heart. He had a real heart need, she knew.

At thought of what he had said about preachers, Midge shuddered. Lazy, he had said they were. Perhaps there were some who were lazy; she couldn't say. But all the preachers whom she had ever known were anything but lazy. They were on call twenty-four hours out of every day, like a doctor. And they were always busy. Sometimes she had wondered when they had
time to take care of their own personal business and affairs. Always, there were those in the church who kept them running for every little thing. Insignificant and childish things, really, some of them were. But the minister went. He was faithful; consoling, strengthening, encouraging, and praying with and for them.

Midge was thankful that the Lord had given her an establishing grace so she didn't need to bother the preacher all the time.

But there would always be those who were "sickly" and "weak" in the church, she realized, and they would need the preacher more.

She went to the door and looked toward the barn. Rog had taken the sled and the gray team of horses to the woods. He was utilizing the winter months for getting as many of the dead, fallen trees as possible out of the woods. Had something really happened to him? she wondered.

She checked the oven, set the table, then grabbed her heavy coat off its hanger inside the closet. Pulling her boots on and tying a woolen scarf on her head, she hurried outside. A stiff wind was blowing in from the northwest, she noticed. With a quick hand, she pulled the collar of her coat up around her ears, burying her chin warmly into its folds.

The snow lay like a clean white blanket on the fields, deep, drifted and crusted over. Oh, how she did love the country! The farm. The woods. Everything. Her love of the land had stemmed from her infancy; her father had been a farmer. His father, too; and so far back as anyone had traced their genealogy, they had been farmers. On her mother's side also. It was as much a part of her as her hands and arms were, it seemed. Whenever anyone asked her what her occupation was, she stood tall and, with a sense of dignity and gratefulness to the land for its bounty of food and fruits, she replied, "I am a farmer's wife, a woman of the land."

She came to the little stream and paused beside it for a moment, thrilling to the distinctly-clear gurgling, purling sound beneath the thin skim of ice, heavier and thicker at the edges but a mere skim of glistening beauty where the water ran the swiftest. The soothing, happy sound was music to her ears and a balm to her entire being. Attuned to the land and its varied, myriad sounds, her entire being thrilled to them all and responded with glad exclamations of surprise and true thankfulness to God each time she heard
them, the little stream being one of her favorites. Over and over she had prayed, asking God to never allow her to become deaf and unhearing to all the sounds and the sights around her. Always, she wanted them to be fresh and new, never to be taken for granted.

She started across the corn field and smiled. The eyes of a stranger would not have known that corn was planted in the field last spring and that they had had a bumper crop right off the very field over which she was walking, for the snows had kept coming, laying blanket after blanket of white upon the stubble until it was covered completely and totally, leaving no telltale trace of what had been in the field. Midge smiled. It was almost as though the field were smiling, too, over its deeply-covered secret. Deeply, literally.

She was thankful when she reached the woods; walking wasn't as easy for her as it was when she hadn't had as many years on her shoulders, she mused mischievously with a smile. It seemed the years had their own special way of slowing one down. And one was never consulted about it either, she thought; it came as surely and as subtly as the years themselves.

She saw where the runners of the home-made sled had entered the old, long-since-gone logging trail, still much-used by Rog when he worked in their acres and acres of forested timberland, nicknamed, simply, The Woods. She followed it, delighted to discover that, so long as she evaded and avoided the ruts, walking was easier and went faster. Birds twittered around her, flitting from tree to tree in a carefree, happy way, and in a thick stand of pines the crows sounded like they were having a free-for-all. Their noise was almost deafening. But still, she admitted silently, it was good to hear them, noise and all. They were making the only sound they knew how to make... a loud, raucous "Caw, caw, caw."

She paused every now and then, trying to pick up any sound at all coming from Rog or the horses. But the only sounds in the woods were those coming from the noisy crows and the gentle, twittering, flitting little woods birds. It was so very peaceful in the woods, she thought happily and joyously. Oh, they were so very blest, Rog and she. If only he would turn to the Lord! Theirs would then be a perfect home, she thought.

She followed the trail round a little bend then walked and walked, stopping every so often and calling her husband's name. If only she could
hear the buzzing of the saw, but she couldn't. All was as if Rog had not come into the woods sound-wise. But she knew he had; he had told her he was, and the sled runner marks were silent attestations to the fact that he had come.

Midge called loudly now, knowing that unless she soon found her husband night would swallow him in its darkness and its blackness. "Roger!" she called. "Roger!" No answer. She waited. And listened. And prayed.

From somewhere in the woods, she heard a faint sound. But where? What?

"Rog-er!" With her hands cupped to her mouth, the sound traveled far. The wind seemed to have carried it for her.

Again she heard a sound, this time it was louder and clearer. She ran along the trail, calling, calling. Then she stopped and listened.

"Midge! Midge! Help me! Help me! Help me!" She ran down the trail till she came to another bend, and, there, lying in the woods, was Rog, his pant legs red with blood. "What happened?" she asked, dropping on her knees beside him. "The saw. . . ."

"It slipped." She supplied the answer. He nodded weakly.

"Where are the horses? And the sled?"

He pointed toward a small clearing to the north.

"You . . . you dragged yourself down here." The statement was made with awe and amazement.

He nodded again, weakly. "Bring the sled, Midge," he said. "And the horses."

"I will, Rog. Oh, I will!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

He pulled her down beside him. "I must tell you something," he said, as tears slipped out of his eyes and trickled down his cheeks.
"Tell me after I get you to the doctor. Please, Rog!" Midge begged gently.

"Not after, Midge; before! Some things are more important than getting to a doctor, and this is. I want you to forgive me for being so mean and hateful to you. Lying here on the ground, knowing full well that I could bleed to death or freeze, I did a lot of thinking. And, with my thinking, it was like my whole rotten and dirty past came before me like it was flashing on a screen. I'm ashamed of myself, Midge. Ashamed. I asked the Lord to forgive me of my sins and to come into my heart, and He did it. I'm born again, honey, born of God! Now, can you forgive me? Will you?"

"Oh, Roger! Roger! You know the answer to that question! You are freely forgiven!" She was too happy to say more.

"Thanks, Midge. Thanks much. I don't deserve your forgiveness; not any more than I deserved God's forgiveness. But thanks. And, Midge, I love you. Love you! I didn't realize how much until I couldn't help myself. I've been a real tyrant to you. And a sure enough tight-fisted miser with God and with you. But I'm changed now. I promised the Lord that if He'd save me and forgive me of all my sins, I'd become a consistently-regular tither."

"Oh, thank the Lord!" Midge cried happily. "And give offerings, too," Rog added, pulling his wife to his chest and kissing her. "Go get the team and the sled," he said gently and kindly. "I'd better get to the doctor now."

Midge hurried through the woods after the horses and the sled. Her happy heart was singing. Singing! God had poured out a triple blessing upon her; Rog was born of God . . . saved and forgiven; he was now a tither and an offering giver; he had told her he loved her, a thing he hadn't done for years and years. Softly, she quoted, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm. . ." (Nahum 1:3). Smiling, she added, "And in an accident, too."

She loaded the saw onto the neatly-piled wood on the sled then turned the horses around and hurried to Rog. She would get him to the doctor as quickly as possible. But she knew that he was going to be all right. Yes, she knew it. His bigger problem was taken care of and was settled; that of the heart.
All the way home, her happy heart seemed to be singing a delightful song of "God loveth a cheerful giver; God loveth a cheerful giver." And now, instead of only one, there would be two beneath the same roof who would be giving . . . cheerfully.

Midge smiled. She knew that that nursery stockplant-seed order would be going out in the mail now. Yes, she knew it. God willing. Silently, she praised God for the saw accident, which had been used of God to save her husband and to "open" his pocket book, too. God did indeed move in mysterious and strange ways His wonders to perform, she mused silently, as she guided the team across the crusted snow toward the farm buildings.