The silence in the house was oppressive and Linda, after sipping her second cup of steaming-hot spearmint tea, cupped her face in the palms of her hands and let the warm tears trickle through her partially opened fingers. Too many things had happened too fast. First, Mers mother had died; two months later his father passed away. The shock of losing his mate of fifty-four years had been more than his heart could stand. Next, her mother suffered a
stroke and finally died. Then Katie, the last of Mers and her five children, married and moved with her husband to a distant state.

Linda reached for a napkin and wiped the tears away. Life had myriad beautiful surprises, she thought, but also had its multiplied sorrows and heartaches. How she did miss her mother and Mel's parents and Katie! Everything had tumbled in upon her in a great tidal wave. She felt that she couldn't catch up with the rapid changes. Mel had said it was because she was exhausted from the long hours of sitting up with both his parents and her mother. And then the wedding, too.

"What a contrast!" Linda said in a barely audible voice. Again, "What a contrast!" as she recalled the long hours of waiting and hoping and praying by the bedside of those dear, dying ones, and then of Katie's wedding.

By Katie's choosing, the wedding took place in the flower garden outside. "Nothing elaborate or fancy, Mother," Katie had said. "I want a simple wedding; one that will bring glory to God. If you can find the time, I'd like for you to make my wedding gown. You are such an excellent seamstress."

Find the time! Linda remembered having thought. Why, she'd like nothing better than to have the honor. And, somehow, between all the months of helping to care for Mers ailing parents and her own mother, she had found the time. Love always found a way, she knew.

Katie's wedding, so simple but extremely beautiful and God-honoring, had for the brief time, at least, helped to ease some of the pain and remove a bit of the hurt which she and Mel had experienced in their parental losses. The weather had cooperated wondrously and the flowers bloomed flamboyantly and extravagantly. Katie looked like a fragile but radiant Dresden don, and Ken, every inch of him a gentleman, looked like a prince in his conservative black suit, shiny-polished black shoes, and black tie.

It was not until the last of the other four children, with their families, drove out of the driveway that she had noticed the loneliness. Then it hit her. Hard! The house seemed too quiet; too still, of happy sounds and laughing voices. She had gone upstairs and into the bedroom where Katie's and Ken's wedding presents were stacked neatly in boxes, ready to be loaded into the
car when the pair returned from their honeymoon. Again, the loneliness almost overwhelmed her.

Seeing Katie's wedding gown still hanging on its thickly padded hanger, she had found a large garment box and folded the gown neatly. Then, placing tissue paper carefully between the folds, she had laid it inside the box along with the head piece and the veil. Tucking a loving note beneath the veil and covering everything with more tissue paper, she had closed the box. Someday, when Katie decided to look at her wedding gown, the note would be found. A love note, reminding her of the vows she had taken.

Linda shook herself. She must stop her thinking and her remembering. There was work to be done. Katie and Ken were extremely happy. The little church they were pastoring was growing, and prospering spiritually. This fact was, in itself, compensation and encouragement to both Mel and herself. Hadn't they taught and guided their offspring into spiritual things! Prayed for, fasted over, and shed many tears of intercession for them also. Like Mel and she had done years ago, their children had, one by one, married and established their own homes. And this was as it should be, Linda soliloquized. It was God ordained and God-honored. Yes, marriage and the establishment of a Christian home was, indeed, instituted by God. And while it left loneliness in the hearts of the loved ones in the snug nest just vacated, it filled another's heart with love and joy and happiness.

Linda sighed. Taking the now empty cup to the sink for washing and drying, she wondered just how many tears her own dear mother had shed when Mel took her away to the modest little home which he had built for her upon their wedding day. She was sure that her mother had experienced the same lonely feeling which she was experiencing and going through. And countless other mothers also. She felt a kindred spirit of sympathy for each one of those other nameless parents whose hearts were feeling their own loneliness.

She looked through the sparkling-clean window panes to the gravel road that joined their small farm with the house on the hill. The white frame, three-story house was once the only house on the farm. It belonged to Mel's father and mother. They had lived in it for all of their long married life. Mel's father had been a smithy. Farmers for miles around brought their horses to him for shoeing. He also farmed the land which comprised his farm. Hard-working and diligent, he worked from sun-up to sun-down until he could no
longer manage. That's when Mel and she had moved out to the farm, built the house in which they were still living, and taken over the bulk of the farm work. It had been an ideal place to raise their family. Now, however, the big white frame house on the hill stood empty. And lonely looking, too.

A wave of sadness washed over Linda as she stood and looked toward the big house. Once its halls had rung with joyous laughter and beautiful song and, once, the sound of agonizing prayer had floated down over the hill to Mel's and her house . . . Grandpa Hillis somewhere in the shed behind their house talking to God and with God. She missed it all. How she missed it! But their voices, silenced forever on earth, to be sure, were rejoicing forever in Heaven.

A longing to visit the house possessed Linda. Tossing a shawl around her shoulders, she let herself out the kitchen door and began the gradual climb up the hill. She had hoped so much that one of their own offspring would settle in the big white frame on the hill. But none of the children had done this to date. William, however, had frequently talked about settling in there. But his work had taken him out of state and so Mel had considered the house a closed issue where this particular son was concerned.

William was the oldest of their five children, and even though his firm had transferred him out of state, he had asked his father not to rent the house to strangers, adding wistfully, "Someday, God willing, I hope to come back to the valley. I'd like to raise my family where I was raised and take them to the same church that I attended and in which I was saved and sanctified wholly."

So they had let the house stand empty. Not the best thing to do, Linda knew. But maybe one day a moving van would move the furnishings of one of the children inside its walls. Meanwhile, she had kept its white ruffled curtains clean and fresh at the windows, which she washed periodically, and she saw to it that its floors were clean also. It had served its purpose well when all the children came home for the holidays and Mel's and her smaller house couldn't hold the rapidly expanding and fastly-growing families. The big bedrooms in the house on the hill had been the perfect lodging place. The inside of the house looked much the same as it did when Mel's parents were still living. The furniture and furnishings remained in each room and the heat was ready to come on at the flick of a thermostat when the weather turned cold.
Recalling those special events and times, when the big house was again in use, Linda felt her spirits lift. She remembered how easily and spontaneously the songs were on her lips as she worked inside her own kitchen and looked through her windows to see the lights shining through the curtained-windows of the house on the hill. The light sliced into the darkness and seemed to cut a path of sunshine from the hill to her and Mel's house.

She paused briefly at the gate that kept the steers inside their pastureland, then walked along the fence row for quite a while and checked the fence for holes. For the most part, they had little trouble with the cattle breaking out of the big pasture. But she and Mel had taken every precaution possible to prevent this, too.

Seeing that everything was in good order, she started back along the fence and continued the climb up the hill. How very peaceful and serene everything was around her! She paused and, turning about face, she looked across the valley where farmhouses and barns dotted the landscape in freshly-painted whites and red. One by one, she picked out their neighbors' dwellings. As she did so, she prayed a silent prayer for each. There were the Byers. The Weavers. The Boyers. The Sheffers. Oh, if only they were ready to meet God! she thought.

"What are you doing to help them to get ready for Heaven?"

Where did the voice come from? she wondered, startled for a moment.

Linda turned and looked toward the large white frame house. No one was there. No one. And there was no one coming up the hill either. She could see clearly; all the way down to Mel's and her house.

"The best way to shed loneliness is to give of yourself," the Voice continued. "Take the good news of salvation to your neighbors. I planted you here for more than to be caretakers of My land. There is a higher, nobler calling: An eternal work that needs done. You have neglected My harvest field."

Immediately, Linda recognized the Voice. "O God!" she cried aloud. "Forgive me. I have been so obsessed with my loneliness that I haven't seen Thy harvest field in the valley. And I, who have known Thee in saving grace
and sanctifying power too! I tried to win them, Lord. Before the children were grown and married, I tried. Over and over. Thou knowest." Tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Go again." The Voice was gentle. Urgent.

"I will, Lord. Oh, I will! will! And the results will be left up to Thee."

"It is yours to be faithful, Daughter. The rest is up to Me. Go. Again! The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Linda stood in awe and reverence. Never had she had an experience like this. It was so very real. She had heard God's voice but had seen no one. But His presence was so real.

She dropped to her knees and prayed for a long while. One needed God's special anointing before going out as Christ's ambassador, she knew. A testimony or a witness, was void of power without God's help. And how she did need His special touch upon her life! By nature, she was both shy and timid. Little matter, God had given her His orders. He would provide the grace and the courage. He had said it was hers to be faithful; He would give the results.

She got to her feet. Something inside was burning in her soul. She felt excited and elated. She would begin today to witness . . . again . . . to her neighbors. And this time she was certain that God was going to give her some fruit for her labor. His words had prodded her. Encouraged her. She had a job to do. It was a Divinely commissioned job. The mere thought of it made the loneliness inside her disappear like a vapor in a room. She felt challenged. Joyously, she would accept the challenge.

She unlocked the door of the house and went inside, checking the windows and the rooms as she went. Then she sat for a while in the rocking chair which was Mel's mother's. Closing her eyes, she said, "You had always hoped that God would call Mel and me to the mission field, Mother. Well, today God called me. To our valley. It isn't to lands across the seas. But it is a mission field: right around Mel and me! And what a mission field! You and Dad prayed for years for the salvation of the neighbors. I have a feeling that God is about to answer those prayers. I just wanted you to know. . . ."
Linda locked the door behind her and began the pleasant walk down the hill. Her heart was overflowing with expectancy and faith in God!