Thomas Malone Jeffries lifted his eyes from the page of the book in which he was reading to look at his grandfather, who sat napping in the reclining chair in the living room. Lately, it seemed, Grandpa napped more than anything else. This bothered the seventeen-year-old. Why, time was when "Gramps" (as he was affectionately called) was as agile and active as any young man was. He worked with what seemed to be untiring limitations
and unlimited strength and energy. All his life, so Thomas had learned and heard, his grandfather had been a hard, conscientious, and diligent worker. Little wonder, then, that he had "made good" and become successful in their small town in the hardware store business.

Thomas got thrilled at the thought of the hardware store on Main Street. Jeffries Hardware, the neon sign declared. Beneath the neon-lighted sign were the words, "The Store of Brotherly Love." And they were not mere words, either. Ah, no! Gramps displayed and practiced the Do-unto-others-as-ye-would-have-them-do-undo-you injunction, religiously and carefully. To his wholly sanctified nature and heart, it was as natural to do as breathing in and out was. He loved the store, which by God's help and blessing, had grown and expanded from the single building in which he started out to include two other larger buildings on either side. The thriving, once-little hardware building expanded its sides with new buildings connecting on to the original store building.

Tears filled the boy's eyes as he watched the rise and fall of Gramp's chest. He was worn out. Just plain worn out, Gramps was. And this hurt young Thomas. Hurt him badly! Hadn't he heard old Brother Archer from their church say just before he died, that he was "plain wore out and ready for the Lord to change this tired, mortal body and give me a new, never tired and immortal body!" Gramps was saying much the same thing lately, Thomas remembered with a catch inside his chest.

Gramps stirred in the chair, let out a deep heavy breath, then opened his soft blue eyes to look at his grandson. "You still here, Thomas?" he asked kindly in a voice that trembled ever so slightly.

"I wouldn't think of leaving you, Gramps," Thomas replied tenderly. "You're a good boy, Thomas," came Gramps' quick answer.

"Only, I don't expect you to waste your precious boyhood hours by sitting with me. You're young, Thomas; surely you would like to be outside! Did Mister Brentley get home next door? I believe he was to be home from the hospital today."

Thomas swallowed, trying to rid himself of the nasty lump that popped up in his throat. "Mister Buxley lives next door, Gramps. Remember? He got
home from the hospital two weeks ago. He's doing fine. He asks about you every day and. . . ."

Thomas saw that Gramps had fallen asleep again. He brushed tears from his eyes. Poor, dear, sweet, kind Grandpa; he got things so confused any more: People and places especially. It was so totally unlike his once keen-minded and correct grandparent to be this way. But Gramps wasn't exactly young anymore, he realized. 88 was rather old, he conceded mentally. Still, it hurt to hear him getting so confused. True, it was perhaps confusing to Gramps' 88-year-old mind anymore to keep the three B's on their block straight as to where each lived. Hiram Buxley lived next door to them. He, along with Matilda his wife, had been their closest neighbor for all the years of his . . . young Thomas's . . . natural life. And many more before his time. Down the street, to the west of their home, lived Joshua and Anna Bentley, and to the east of them lived the Brentlingers. Hence the three B's. Gramps had known them so long as each had lived in the small town. And he had never, ever confused one with the other until recently.

"Oh, God!" Thomas cried into his hands. "Please help my dear grandfather. I love him so."

"Thomas." It was Gramps. "I've been thinking about your grandmother." The soft blue eyes probed the grandson's face. "She's inside God's Eternal City, as you know. She was a saint, Thomas. We had such high hopes that you would follow in both your father's and my footsteps and continue the hardware business under the Jefffriers name. But Thomas," and now Gramps sat suddenly erect and looked for a long while at his progeny, "I want you to mind God. Above all else, mind God! He may not want you in the hardware business. His ways are higher than your deceased grandmother's and my ways. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. Mind God! Get His leading and His direction; then follow it through. It will pay big dividends and you will be blest and happy. I suppose, when one is strong and well, he thinks too much about earthly material things, and then sometimes his good intentions may get in God's way."

"I understand what you're trying to tell me, Gramps, and I appreciate it."

The piercing but softly-blue eyes studied the grandson intently and unwaveringly. Then Gramps said, "My thoughts now are almost constantly on Heaven and spiritual things, Thomas. Yes, lately, this is what occupies my
mind. This being the case, one evaluates all things then, in the light of eternity and of eternal values. Jeffries Hardware will one day pass away. . . ." His sentence trailed meaningfully. Then the tired eyes closed and Gramps was once more asleep.

Thomas watched his grandfather, knowing full well the intent of his speech. In his young heart he had always thought how nice it would be to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and take over the hardware business when and if the time should ever arise. Already he was fully acquainted with the business, having helped both Gramps and his father for years. Truth of the matter was, he could not remember when he wasn't in the store. From his earliest days, he was there. His mother kept the books and was the secretary for all the business matters. So, in a way, he grew up in the store. He loved it.

Thomas watched the rising and falling of Gramps' chest and tears stung his eyes. One of these days his beloved grandfather would go to sleep and never awaken on earth again. Doctor Gaines had told them so. He said Gramps was plain worn out.

He bowed his head. No matter how badly he wanted to help in that hardware store business, Gramps was right: He must find the will of God for his life. God may have other plans for him. He would pray and wait patiently upon the Lord; God had promised to direct his path. If it was the hardware store, that would be wonderful; if not, this, too, would be wonderful, he knew.

Thomas got up from the chair and went into the kitchen for a glass of freshly-made lemonade. His mother's lemonade was unsurpassed, he was sure. Always, she kept a pitcher full in the refrigerator; it was Gramps' favorite beverage.

Back in the living room sipping the icy-cold beverage and once more watching his grandfather as he slept, Thomas reflected upon the years in which he had known Gramps. There were seventeen of them, to be explicit and exact. But the infant years of his life were not years of remembering; for what child can recall what the first few years of his life were like? But from four years on through the present time, the teenager's memories and recollections of his grandparent were filled with only pleasantly-sweet happenings and times.
A smile tugged the corners of his mouth as Thomas recalled Gramps' aversion to anyone calling him anything but Thomas. Not Tom; nor T. M., as his father frequently addressed him. Never! Always, to Gramps, he was Thomas. In full pronunciation. "It's a good name," Gramps frequently reminded his son -- Thomas's father -- when the latter addressed his son by either Tom or T. M. "I like to call one by his or her complete or full name," Gramps added sweetly. "Thomas Malone, isn't it?" he would ask as a sort of reminder to anyone who chose to call him anything else.

To Thomas, it mattered nothing how he was addressed. At school, he was called T. J. for short. He rather liked this. But then, he liked to hear Gramps address him just as he always had . . . Thomas. There was dignity and an old-fashioned charm to the way Gramps said it.

Gramps and he had been buddies for all of his life, Thomas remembered. Their fishing expeditions were times of purest delight and enjoyment. Gramps was never too busy to take the time (or make the time) for a twice-weekly (at least) "time-out" fishing expedition with him. The walk to the swiftly-running cold-water stream afforded each with pleasure and good exercise. They were drawn closely together. It was on many of these fishing trips that Gramps and he discussed spiritual things and Biblical principles and injunctions. Always, he -- Thomas -- had come home feeling closer to God. Also, Gramps' counsel and advice served to "cement" his God-given standards and principles in his heart when peer pressure became strong. Oh, it was wonderful to be blest with a spiritual, careful-living, close-to-God, grandfather, Thomas thought, closing his eyes and asking God to strengthen Gramps.

"Why don't you go and do something you like to do, Thomas my boy?" Gramps had awakened again. "I don't want you to waste your day on me."

Thomas got up from his chair. "A glass of lemonade, Gramps?" he asked. "It's delicious, and it's icy cold."

"I believe I will, thank you. You're a fine boy, Thomas. You bring me the lemonade, then you go out in the fresh air and sunshine for awhile. There's nothing inspiring about watching an old man doze and nod and sleep. No, nothing at all inspiring nor uplifting."
"I'll not leave you alone, dear Gramps. I love you too much. Besides, I'm getting a lot of good reading in, sitting here with you."

Gramps smiled and heaved a sigh of contentment. Thomas hurried to the refrigerator after the lemonade. Maybe he was missing out on the normal things a seventeen-year-old did, he thought. But for love of Grandpa, he didn't mind.

Feeling good in his heart, he poured the sweetly-tart beverage into one of the tallest glasses he could find then hurried into the living room with it.