It was the tantalizing fragrance of sandwiches grilling inside the store that drew Esther's attention to Harvey's Snack and Fountain Shop. Hurrying inside and placing her packages beside her, she slid into one of the many attractive bamboo booths, heaving a great sigh of relief and rubbing her tired, benumbed arms until circulation came back into them. Then she settled back
to savor and enjoy the delightfully relaxing atmosphere of the small, extremely busy eating place.

A waitress, dressed in oriental attire befitting the place, came quickly to her table. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Petersen," she greeted Esther congenially. "Am I ever glad to see you!" she said softly, her enormous dark eyes speaking volumes.

"How's that, Sylvia?" Esther asked, placing a hand over the young woman's small one.

"It's Treva," the waitress confided, handing a menu to Esther. "Her fever's dreadfully high again. If only I didn't need to work and could stay home with her," she exclaimed sadly. "But with the high cost of living I'm forced to work to help make a living. . . ." Her sentence trailed meaningfully; bright tears glistened in her eyes.

Placing her order and patting the small hand consolingly, Esther promised to go by and see the child on her way home. Relieved, Sylvia hurried away.

Drawing a shopping list from her handbag, Esther went over it carefully, making a quick mental calculation of what was absolutely essential and what was not. With the cost of living at an all-time high and Arthur's weekly paycheck little more than it had been ten years ago, she was accustomed to doing without numerous items that her friends and acquaintances had deemed absolutely necessary.

"Esther! Esther Petersen!" a woman's voice exclaimed joyously, slicing into Esther's mental deducting and rearranging of the shopping list.

"Judy Sloan!" Esther cried, looking up from her list into the beautiful face of her old friend. "What brings you here?" she asked happily, motioning for Judy to have a seat.

"I guess one never wanders so far but what familiar places and faces lure and draw them back," Judy laughed, sitting across from Esther and removing her white gloves carefully.

"Are you still living out on the coast?" Esther wanted to know.
"In Los Angeles, just two blocks from my plush office-suite. What about you, Esther? Still working for Mr. B. at Bosken-Boskens?"

Esther laughed pleasantly. "I had forgotten just how many years it's been since we saw each other, Judy, but your question suddenly gave me the answer. It's been a long time! The Mr. "B." was my employer for a mere two years. I met Art there. We fell in love and married; a year later Jennifer arrived, bringing our family up to three in number. Not quite two years after the birth of Jennifer, the Lord sent tiny Gretchen to us, followed by Philip and Paul, fourteen months later. So you can well understand who is my employer or I should say, employers!" Again Esther laughed.

Judy threw her arms upward in sheer exasperation. "Four children! Help us! You do have your nose to the grindstone. Poor girl. What you need is a job. You're wasting your time washing dishes and dirty faces and cleaning, cooking and homemaking. It's a shame, Esther, all your business training and know-how going down the drain with the dirty soap suds. You could be making big money. You used to. . . ."

"Arthur doesn't believe in mothers of young children working, Judy; neither do I. We both believe that a mother's place is at home with her family."

"Isn't that just like a man!" Judy exploded quickly. "I believe in equality for women, and I mean to get it, too."

Esther smiled; she surveyed her friend with a merry twinkle in her eye. "Frankly, I'm the happiest I've ever been in all of my life," she replied. 'I'm very much in love with my five 'employers' and this makes all the difference in the world."

"What a boring life! Me? I lead an exciting life. Besides, I'm totally independent -- doing as I please, coming and going whenever I want to, and earning a fabulous sum of money, too."

"Then you and Jed didn't marry. . . ."
Judy sighed. "That's an 'off-limits' subject, Esther. Sorry. It's a thing of the past, a 'has-been' part of my life. Suffice it to say that I'm totally and completely liberated."

Sylvia came with a menu just then and placed it in front of Judy. The conversation ceased momentarily.

It was over the airy-light dessert that Judy once more broached the subject. "You really should be working, Esther," she declared. "With your skill and training you could be making a fantastic wage these days. It's not like when you used to work. I mean, the wage scale has climbed tremendously since you left the office and settled for a lesser role. Think of all the nice things you and Art could have. You could hire a baby-sitter; and with a bit of extra pay you could get her to do your housework, too."

"Thanks for your concern, Judy, but I'm completely happy and satisfied being a wife and a mother. I'm fulfilling God's role for my life. My work is both beautiful and pleasant and the hours are perfect. I can find work anytime, and I am in demand at any hour of the day or night. I never have a work shortage nor are there unemployment and strikes in my field. Consequently, I never have a worry along this line, and when I retire at night I sleep the sleep of the contented, of the peaceful at heart. You, dear Judy, are never 100 percent sure of your job; you have it today, but tomorrow -- or next week -- the business could well become just another 'has been' thing."

"How foolishly you talk! Of course my business won't fold up; it's solid, believe me. I can't understand you, Esther, wasting your time and talent with the mundane, the meaningless. You were cut out to be in the business field, like myself."

Esther sighed tiredly. "I feel genuinely sorry for you," she told her friend. "I have the most wonderful job on earth: that of raising God-fearing children. I can't afford to take outside employment: my children and my husband need me at home. They don't need what extra money I could earn, but they do need a mother to love them and to answer their questions -- a mother to kiss their bruises and to sympathize with them in their little troubles, and a mother to laugh with them and play with them."

"Our children are now in their formative years; whatever I want them to learn and know I must teach them now. As a Christian, it is my special
privilege to instruct them in the Word of God. They delight to hear the Bible stories read and to say their childish prayers around the family altar, and I wouldn't miss these sacred times for anything in the world, Judy. Surely you haven't forgotten all the Christian training you received so long ago, dear?"

"I'm a business woman, Esther . . . to the core. I've changed my thinking on many things -- having children and rearing a family, to name but one. I could never stand the monotony of being a wife and a mother. There's no future in it; no money, either."

"That's where you're all wrong, dear: The future of a continuing society is dependent entirely upon the family. God instituted and ordained the family. It's a very sacred thing. Children, the Word declares, 'are an heritage of the Lord.'"

"Enjoy yours, if you like. I'll take my world to yours any day. Most of the housewives I know don't even own a decent wardrobe, not to mention the fact that they have empty purses most of the time -- money-wise, I mean."

Esther looked across at the table at her immaculately dressed friend, wondering what dollar figure constituted the "decent wardrobe" of which she spoke. Judy wore expensive clothing, she knew. She looked down at her own much-worn dress with its simple lines and modest look and became acutely aware of the contrast between her "look" and that of her friend. In that moment she realized just how far from the old paths Judy had drifted and strayed.

Grief filled her heart; she longed desperately to help her worldly-wise friend -- to say something or do something to draw her back . . . turn her about face -- but one look at the set jaw and determined look in the snapping dark eyes told her that her words would not be appreciated. She would be "casting her pearls before swine," she thought, with an ache in her heart.

Sipping her hot tea, Esther's mind raced back to her wedding day. Mrs. Sloan came to her and, with loving warmth and sincerest congratulations, she had said tearfully, "I'm so happy for you, Esther dear; I wish Judy had never gone to college. . . ."

Her words, suspended meaningfully in seeming mid-air, gripped Esther's heart. "I thank God you haven't swallowed this new teaching that's
circulating in our society today; Judy absorbed it to its fullest. The constant bombardment from the media plus the college studies, coupled with her association with the wrong crowd, has convinced my daughter that no woman or girl can possibly be fulfilled in just being a housewife and a mother.

"Tragically, she bought the idea; and if she ever marries, she has plans to never have children."

Remembering Mrs. Sloan's words now, Esther shuddered involuntarily. How wicked, and how very sinful and evil! she thought. Satan's subtle attack on her sex, changing beautiful, noble womanhood and motherhood, a God-ordered and God-planned role, into selfish, self-willed, rebellious, materialistic bigots. It was the devil's way of breaking down and breaking up God's highest earthly institution, the home!

Bright tears danced from Esther's eyes down her cheeks as Judy, picking up both bills, slipped her hands into her soft, expensive white gloves and stood up to leave. "It's been nice seeing you again, Esther dear, but I must be going; I have a business client to see in half an hour. I may drop by your home before heading back for the coast. Meantime, don't take 'mothering' too seriously." And with a grand flourish of her hand and a mocking laugh, she swept past Esther toward the cash register.

Long after Judy had gone, Esther pondered the friend's words, arriving at the ultimate conclusion that the young woman was "without natural affection," as stated in II Tim. 3:3.

A quiet voice spoke close to her ear, bringing her out of her musings. "You will not forget my Treva, Mrs. Petersen?" Sylvia's tone sounded urgent.

Smiling into the pleading dark eyes looking upon her, Esther said quickly, "I'll go right now, before I do my grocery shopping even. And if I feel anything is seriously wrong, I'll take her in to Doctor Baker, Sylvia."

"Oh, thank you. Thank you, Mrs. Petersen. You are such a good woman and such a perfect mother."

Hurrying away a short time later, Esther's heart felt light and happy. A "lesser role," had Judy said? What a deceived heart the woman had, she thought, humming softly as she started the motor of the car. Hers was a
noble role, she mused. Furthermore, she wouldn't trade places with a king. "Mothering" was cut out for her -- by God! It was terribly important and she felt completely and positively fulfilled.