Here I Belong

By Mrs. Paul E. King

That was the question! To be or not to be! All my life I had entertained visions of splendor and grandeur regarding my future.

These visions included, first of all, a tall, darkly-handsome husband whose wealthy resources would never become depleted nor be exhausted and whose patience and love toward me and our offspring would be as enduring and immovable as the renowned Rock of Gibraltar.

We would live (I dreamed and envisioned) in a beautiful, old and large, three-story house, having no less than seven spacious and commodious
bedrooms, with attached baths and dressing rooms to at least four of the seven. The sitting room, in one part of this lovely home, would feature a sunken garden where tropical and semi-tropical flowers and plants would grow and thrive and blossom under a roof of thick, clear, heavy glass.

In this indoor "garden of Eden" I would do all my crocheting, writing, painting and meal planning. Anton, the chef, would prepare all meals and Valette, his wife, would take care of the house.

Such were my dreams, those first 15, 16 years of my life. At age 17 the vision dimmed slightly, and by the time I was halfway through my second year of college, working to put myself through and carrying a full school load too, well, my dream husband was relegated to the back of my mind.

But through some miracle, I found myself suddenly in love with a young man. He was handsome, all right, but there the comparison came to a sudden halt. His resources were already exhausted after three and one-half years of college where he was studying in preparation for the mission field. Financially, this was far below the executive vice-president, or prince, of which my dreams had chiefly consisted in my younger life.

Quite suddenly my dream house began to shrink rapidly as I visualized some of the parsonages I had already lived in (as a most unwilling tenant before I was wholly sanctified, I must confess. Most fit the description of "four rooms and a bath.") My chef and maids and servants suddenly, seemed to look a great deal like me, and it was difficult to conjure visions up of me presiding graciously over a sterling silver tea service at the afternoon garden and flower display held (of course!) in that special sitting room with its sunken garden, its floor length windows and roof of clear glass which let each and every ray of sunlight inside.

Mark and I were married immediately after I graduated. (We did have the good sense to wait till each was through college.) Our wedding was a sweetly-simple thing; one we felt would be in keeping with our testimony of death to the self life and the world, with its glamour and pomp and fanfare. We said our vows beneath the rose arbor on my folks' parsonage lawn, with my sister and Mark's older brother our only attendants. There were no ladies-in-waiting attending me nor did any chauffeured limousine carry us away to an expensive island paradise, yet we were as happy and content as two lovers could possibly be.
After a brief honeymoon at a distant camp meeting, we gathered our few personal belongings together and packed them carefully in preparation for shipping. Only the barest necessities would go along with us on our flight; the heavier, bulkier things would come by boat.

Amid hugs and kisses and laughter and tears, we waved a fond farewell to loved ones and friends and soon we were air-borne, my dream house visions consistently modest and conservative now, in perfect keeping with being a missionary's wife.

Many weary hours later we landed at a small, isolated and totally inadequate (I thought) air strip where a slow-moving but perfectly courteous native transported us and our belongings to a small river steamer which we boarded. We were soon moving away from the shore.

It was one of those moonless, starless nights when the blackness of the tropics is impenetrable. I leaned over the railing of the steamer, straining my eyes through the blackness.

It was nearly midnight when the pilot edged our small craft cautiously toward the river bank, expertly judging the flow and force of the great tide and pitting the strength of his sputtering engine against it. A lantern with soot-smudged glass swayed dimly from a post on the bank, outlining a wharf at the river's edge. With a final bump the launch nosed against the dock but continued to rise and fall on the restless, murky waves.

Mark insisted upon helping me, but the Brazilian deck hand intercepted his aid. Throwing a narrow plank across the gap from launch to wharf he reached out his callused hand and steadied my descent.

I was extremely weary from the long hours of travel, and the difference of the time zones and loss of sleep added to my fatigue.

"It can't be much farther now, Lois," Mark said, close to my ear, adding, "we're almost home!"

The word sounded sweeter than ever to me. Home! Our home; Mark's and mine.
We made our way up a dark road, stumbling into holes filled with water from a recent rain. I stumbled over a large root that grew on top of the ground and found myself on all fours in the mud. Again, our Brazilian deck hand and guide came to my rescue and helped me up.

This was my "glamorous" arrival to a country where the Gospel had no witness. I smiled and (to myself) I called it, "The Initiation Ceremony."

The gray-blue of early dawn was breaking in the east when our guide stopped (at last!) before a house of mud and straw. He lowered the luggage from his head and set it inside the door.

Smiling at me and, with his arm motioning me inside, he said, "Missionary's home."

Returning his smile and thanking him graciously, I stepped inside, thankful to be "home."

Mark invited our friend inside but the friendly, courteous Brazilian refused, saying, "Missionaries need rest. I see you after you rest." And, waving his hand, he hastened away.

I glanced quickly around the room with its simple furnishings, and then (through another doorway) I spied our bedroom. The hammocks each were hung from two hooks on opposite walls. How inviting those "beds" looked!

Mark shut the outside door. Quickly I slipped my shoes off and readied myself for bed. Roaches scurried across the room and spiders hung from the ceiling.

"Sorry, honey," Mark apologized. "I wish I could give you something better, something more modern and adequate. . . ."

I laughed heartily, recalling the visions of my dream house with its maid and chef and servants.

Crawling into my hammock and tucking the mosquito netting under me like an old pro, I said softly, "Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven, Mark. He's here, dear. I have Him and you! What more do I need?"
"But these roaches! And the spiders, Lois! I know how you loathe the critters and how frightened you are of them!"

"I am a missionary, Mark. God's grace is sufficient. Here I belong! Good night, my dear; sweet dreams. I'm so thankful we're home." I yawned sleepily and closed my eyes.

"Good morning, Lois, not good night," Mark teased. "'The battle is the Lord's,'" he quoted as I drifted off to sleep in our Brazilian home.