NEW NEIGHBOR
By Mrs. Paul E. King

(Part 1)

One of the last things Janelle Marie Landry wanted to do was to go to the Haddons, two doors away, and ask to baby sit their two small children. Shy by nature and more introverted than extroverted, Janelle had difficulty making new friends in school. But, still, she couldn't get away from the still
small voice within her which seemed to be prodding her ever so gently but consistently to offer her services to the young mother.

Tears sprang up in Janelle's deep blue eyes. "Please, kind Father, help me," she prayed. "You know I'm neither bold nor brazen and . . . and if I go, Mrs. Haddon may think I am both."

"Go." The gentle Voice was so soft and kind as to calm Janelle's fears.

She had heard . . . rather, overheard . . . some of the cruel gossip floating around in school; gossip, that Mrs. Haddon was seeing another man while her own husband worked. Gossip, that the two small children were left alone five days a week while she, Mrs. Haddon, "chased around."

Janelle remembered fleeing away from the three girls who were so glib with their tongue; so free and so very harsh and unkind with their words. For one thing, she didn't believe a single word of the tales. Mrs. Haddon, young though she was, seemed to be a wonderful mother. Kind and loving, too. Janelle was sure she had seen worry lines on their young neighbor's face the last time she saw her in the yard hanging clothes on the line while Becky and Buddy played around her feet. And before she went inside, with the children following happily at her heels and loving her legs, Mrs. Haddon had played a long while in the yard with the two.

"She's not fit to be a mother!" one of the loud, outspoken girls had declared that morning in school.

"Why don't you notify the police?" a second girl had asked. "I think I'll have my father do it if no one else will. After all, those are sweet children and . . ."

But Janelle had fled down the hallway. She didn't want to hear anymore. Gossip was such a deadly weapon, she knew, and, what was more, it was hated by God. She wanted no part in it; none whatever. She purposed within herself that she would listen to no evil nor speak any evil. Furthermore, if the children were being left alone she was sure Mrs. Haddon was doing the best she could under the circumstances, whatever the circumstances may be.
"Go, Janelle." Again she was acutely conscious of the sweet, gentle voice.

Without further hesitation, she rushed from her bedroom into the living room where her mother had lain down on the davenport while the supper baked in the oven. "I'll be back as quickly as possible, Mother," she said. "I feel I must go over to Mrs. Haddon's. Maybe I'll be able to care for her children while she . . . she . . ."

What could she say? Janelle wondered. She didn't know if their pretty young neighbor was working or what.

"That's fine, honey," Mrs. Landry answered. "I'm sure she'll be glad to see you. I've been wondering how we could get close to them."

Janelle hurried from the house, praying for right words when she would see Mrs. Haddon. What would she say? she wondered as a shiver of fear raced through her body. She didn't want to appear brazen, nor bold! Oh no!

The children were in the yard, playing, when she stepped up on the porch and knocked softly on the front door. The Haddon house was small; neatness and orderliness abounded everywhere she looked on the outside.

The door opened wide and Janelle was face to face with the pretty young mother. "I'm your new neighbor from two doors down," she said timidly. "I'm Janelle Landry."

"Oh, do come in," Mrs. Haddon invited. "Brad . . my husband . . and I are new here, too; we moved in three months ago. And I get so lonesome some days that I think I can't stand it. The neighbors, for the most part, seem rather stand-offish. But maybe it's because I'm shy and don't know how to be a good mixer."

"That makes two of us, Mrs. Haddon," Janelle confessed as she followed her host into the immaculately kept living room off the small foyer.

"I hardly know where to begin," Janelle said, looking into the young mother's sweet face as she talked. "But I am a Christian. So are my parents. And for some time now I have felt the gentle proddings of the Holy Spirit urging me to come to you and offer my services as a baby sitter . . . free."
Mrs. Haddon's face turned pale. "Do . . . do . . . does anybody know?" she asked, rushing to Janelle and taking her hand, clutching it fiercely. "I haven't wanted to work. I honestly haven't. But the Company cut Brad's work back drastically. So many of the men working with him are going through the same period of stress and financial strain as we are. We'd make it fine on his much-cut salary if it hadn't been for Buddy's many operations. . . . That's why I'm working. The hospital bills must be paid. And I'm only too happy to do it . . . look at our fine son! He's whole! He's well." Mrs. Haddon's tears wet Janelle's hands.

"You're a wonderful mother," she said to the neighbor. "And to help you out, the way Jesus would want me to do, I'd like to take care of the children after school until you and your husband can pick them up. This is one of our love gifts to you. Free, and with no strings attached. Mother and Father love children, so they'll be welcome in our home."

Mrs. Haddon looked at Janelle for a long, long time. Fresh tears raced each other down her cheeks. "You . . . you're an angel!" she remarked softly. "I have been so worried, leaving them alone when I leave. But I had no other route to go. Brad and I can't afford a baby sitter. And each of our families live hundreds of miles away. What were we to do? We explained to the children that, as quickly as we could, we would make some kind of better arrangements for them. I am forced to lock them in the bedroom when I leave. Brad's home three hours after I leave. He cares for them until I am home at eight. It's only part time for me, but it's making the hospital payments for Buddy's many surgeries."

"God sent me here, Mrs. Haddon," Janelle remarked, asking softly, "Do you know the Lord? Is He your Savior and your Friend?"

"No. No, I don't know Him. But He must be wonderful, to have sent you here. I cry and cry each time I must leave the children. It's dangerous, I know, and it's not the thing to do. But what else could we have done?" the mother asked quickly. "Brad and I have been nearly frantic with worry and fear. I often wondered if nobody cared. And now, here you are; an angel sent by God to me. Oh, how will I ever be able to repay you?"

"No payment at all, Mrs. Haddon. My payment compensation comes from the deep inner peace in my heart, just knowing I have obeyed the Lord."
My shyness could be a real chain about me were I to dwell upon it instead of following the Lord's commands. And today, again, I rejoice that I have obeyed God's tender voice. Before I take the children and leave for home, may I pray with you?” Janelle asked, patting the mother's hand tenderly.

"Oh, would you? No one has ever prayed with me before. I would feel greatly honored, Janelle."

Kneeling before the well-kept but much-used sofa, Janelle prayed. It was easy to pray: the young mother was open, she could feel. There was no rejection or rebellion at all that she could sense in her neighbor's attitude; nothing but openness to everything she prayed for and about.

"Do you know something, Mrs. Haddon?" she asked, when she said her final "Amen." "You are not far from the kingdom -- from being saved, I mean. I sense a beautiful openness about you. Would you like to know that Jesus is your Savior and that your sins are all forgiven and you are on the road to Heaven?"

"Oh yes! Yes! I would. I really would! What must I do to . . . to be 'saved,' as you phrased it?"

With tears flowing down her cheeks, Janelle pointed the young woman to Jesus, praying for and with her until a healthy shout arose from Mrs. Haddon's lips. "Oh, I'm saved! I'm saved! Saved! she cried, getting to her feet and going around and around in the riving room. "At last . . . at long last . . . I have discovered real joy and peace. Thank you, dear little angel from God! Thank you!"

Long after Mrs. Haddon had left for work, and while the two children played contentedly in the Landry living room with a box of toys kept handy for visiting grandchildren (nieces and nephews to Janelle), Janelle felt like she was living in a brand new world.

She had won her very first soul to Christ. The joy had transported her into the realm of the heavenlies. She must reach others. Indeed she must. God would help her to overcome her shyness; He would give her the strength and the courage to witness and help, in any way possible, if she would but continue to trust Him and lean upon Him for her help.
She thought of Marcie then. Poor, unhappy appearing Marcie Williams. She must find out how to approach her. No. No, she decided: God knew how to open the way. He did. He did! She would talk to Him about the neighbor girl who lived four doors to the west of their house.

Casting another glance in the direction of the well behaved, contented playing children, Janelle hurried down the hallway to her bedroom and dropped on her knees in prayer for Marcie.

Part 2

Janelle talked to the Lord about Marcie, asking Him to soften her heart and to prepare the "soil" for when she witnessed to and talked with her distressed looking counterpart. They had a language class and a literature class together. Each time Janelle saw Marcie she felt like the pretty teen was going through something or other. Just what it was, she didn't know.

Marcie kept pretty much to herself, it seemed to Janelle. Maybe she couldn't tolerate all the gossip and the lewd stories of her peers, Janelle thought, remembering that she, too, kept pretty much to herself in school. But her ears were not dumping receptacles for gossipy "garbage." She loathed it, knowing that God hated it and that all who partook of it and listened to it were made the leaner, spiritually, for having done so. Furthermore, one could not long remain saved and sanctified and listen to or partake of gossip. It was just that simple.

She walked to school deep in thought and much in prayer. Marcie may resent her talking to her, she reasoned factually with her heart and her mind. After all, the girl undoubtedly had a reason (or reasons, in the plural) for her actions, her attitude and her behavior. But the gently-soft proddings within her being made Janelle realize that if she walked softly before her Lord and if, carefully and prayerfully, she sought to do only His bidding and follow His leadings, she would be able to help the teen. God didn't give one a heavy burden and a deep concern for another without a reason. No indeed.

There was the usual early morning hurry and scurry of students rushing through the big school doors, trying to beat the clock and the noisy buzzer-bell, alerting them that it was time for school to begin. Janelle saw and felt it all as she stood inside, hoping to see Marcie as she came through the doors.
"Hey Jan, don't you know it's almost time for your first class?" a boy shouted across his shoulder as he rushed down the long hallway and disappeared inside his home room.

Janelle didn't have time to reply to Daniel's question, so quickly had he hurried away. Turning, she made her way to her first class. She felt disappointed not seeing Marcie. Maybe she had gotten there early, Janelle reasoned, as she slid into her seat and prepared for her first class.

The day progressed beautifully and, as always, Janelle became totally engrossed in her studies. She liked school. Really liked it. Books were like special friends to her. She had a thirst and a relish for learning; consequently, she made good grades in school. She was keenly disappointed when she got to language class and discovered that Marcie wasn't there. Was the girl ill? she wondered. Marcie loved language class. She made excellent grades in it. It was obvious that she studied hard. And it paid off for her, too. Janelle was thankful and overjoyed over Marcie's grades. She was right up there at the top.

Immediately after school was dismissed for the day, Janelle hurried homeward. She would check in at home to keep her mother from worrying, she decided, then gather up young Mrs. Haddon's children and get them involved in playing, then she would make a quick call on Marcie.

The Haddon children could scarcely wait to get to Janelle's house to play with the many old but well-kept toys which were a "permanent fixture" in the Landry home, kept there for the express purpose of making the little ones happy, whoever they might be and whenever they might drop in.

With her mother's blessings and a quickly-uttered prayer, Janelle hurried down the street to where Marcie lived.

She heard angry words coming from inside as she stepped up on the porch and, for a while, she hesitated to knock. But the urgency coming from deep within her was a compelling force. Quickly, she knocked on the door. The angry voices were silenced.

"Marcie," she called. "It's I; Janelle."
The door opened almost immediately and a woman said, "Come in."

"Thank you," Janelle replied, stepping inside. "You must be Marcie's mother. I'm Janelle Landry; one of your near neighbors' daughter. We're quite new in the neighborhood. I missed Marcie in school. We are in the same language and lit classes."

"I'm not coming back to school." Marcie's voice sounded hurt and bitter as she stated the simple sentence.

Janelle's mouth flew open in shocked surprise. Then she saw the piece of luggage on the floor in front of Marcie. With an overflow of love and compassion for the girl, she rushed over to Marcie and threw her arms around her. "Oh, Marcie, you can't mean it!" she cried. "I missed you dreadfully from our classes. I did!" Tears ran down Janelle's cheeks.

"I . . . I'm leaving, Janelle. For good. I . . . I can't stand it here . . . anymore."

"No, Marcie. No! Where will you go?"

"I don't know. I only know I can't stay here anymore. Walt's hateful and mean and nasty to me. He's jealous of me. He wants Mom all to himself. He doesn't want me around. . . ." 

"Marcie!" came the exclamation from the mother.

"You know it's true, Mom; every single word of it. If only I was older. . . ." Marcie's voice broke. Tears fell unashamedly now down her cheeks. They wet Janelle's shoulder.

"You . . . you were going to run away?" Janelle asked softly as she patted Marcie's shoulder.

"What else can I do?" Marcie cried. "I'm not welcome here anymore. My stepfather made this plain to me. And . . . and it wasn't his home!" she added, sobbing. "Not till he married Mother."

"Marcie, don't talk that way," the mother said with a pained expression on her face.
"It's not the same here anymore; you know that, Mother. Walt's making life miserable for all of us. I can't take anymore."

"Marcie," Janelle said, in a tone as gentle as a loving mother's, "why not come and say at our house for a few days? My parents and I will be happy to have you. And you will be able to think things through more clearly if you're away from your problems. May she, Mrs. Williams?"

Tears shone in the mother's eyes. "I'm Mrs. Jodphur now," she answered. "My first husband was Williams. He was Marcie's father. I . . . I know this is hard on Marcie, bringing a stepfather . . . to her . . . into the home. But one can't go on forever grieving over the dead. And one can't live with the dead. Walt has good characteristics. He . . . he's extremely verbal on some things and I . . . I keep hoping he'll change."

"Oh, Mother! You know he won't. You often told me to be careful whom I dated, stating that one can't expect to change his or her mate after marriage. I never dreamed things could turn out like they have in our home. It's not home anymore; not like it used to be." And Marcie's tears cascaded down her pale pink cheeks in rapid succession. "I've got to leave. I just must. Walt doesn't want me here," she sobbed. "Oh, I can't believe it! I can't!" And Marcie raced down the hallway to her bedroom where she threw herself across the bed and wept bitterly.

Janelle looked at Mrs. Jodphur. She felt sorry for the slender, attractive woman whose face gave testimony to the pain and grief deep within her mother heart.

"I . . . don't know what to do!" she cried, throwing her hands upward in utter exasperation. "I love my husband and I love my daughter." She buried her tear-filled face in her hands. Her shoulders shook with weeping.

Janelle put a gentle hand on the woman's arm. "I know Someone who can help you," she said, speaking softly-kind. "Jesus is the world's best and greatest problem solver. Do you know Him, Mrs. Jodphur?"

Mrs. Jodphur raised her head and looked at Janelle. "Walt wouldn't . . . I . . . I mean, he wouldn't approve. He's not religious at all."
"But your husband can't take your place when you stand before God, Mrs. Jodphur. There you will be accountable for yourself. Your husband can't help you then. Each of us will answer to God for himself and herself. God's Word tells us that it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment. Are you ready to die?"

"Oh, no! I know this much; I'm not ready to die. But I don't know what would happen if I . . . changed. Walt has quite a temper." Fear registered in the brown eyes.

Janelle said quickly, "Do you fear him more than you fear the judgments of God, Mrs. Jodphur? Eternity is forever. And ever and ever! Your husband's anger and wrath is only for a time. You will never be sorry, if you turn from your sins, confess and forsake them and become converted God knows how to fight your battles and how to solve your problems. If you will turn your heart and life over to Him and be born again, as Jesus said each of us must be if we want to go to Heaven, I'm sure the Lord will change things here in your home."

Mrs. Jodphur looked at Marcie for a long while. "I . . wish I had enough courage to . . . to do that," she said earnestly and honestly. "But Walt's temper can be frightening at times."

"God has dealt with many a 'Walt,' " Janelle replied. "Give Him your heart, Mrs. Jodphur, and let Him take care of your husband."

"I'll think it over," the woman promised. "I really will." Seeing Marcie standing, looking on, she said, "Let's try it one more time, Marcie. Don't leave. I love you. You know I do."

Janelle stood, weeping, as Mrs. Jodphur rushed over to where Marcie was and wrapped her arms around her daughter.

"Let's change," Marcie cried, clinging to her mother. "I couldn't help but hear what Janelle said. And . . . and Mother, Janelle's . . . well . . . she has something you and Walt and I need. She's different from all the girls at school. I've watched her: she has something that keeps her joyful and peaceful when everyone around her is upset and mean and hateful. I . . . I'm willing to try again; but only if we change.
"We used to have such good times together, you and Daddy and I. I'm sure Daddy's in Heaven, Mother, for just before he died, he said, 'I've been praying, honey. Yes, praying. And I've asked Jesus to forgive me of all my sins and to come into my heart. And, Marcie, He did it! He's living in my heart. I'm going to Heaven now. Meet me There, will you!' I couldn't stand to see his eyes searching my face for the answer he wanted to hear, so I ran out of the room, and when I returned he was gone. Daddy didn't know anything much about God nor praying. But God spoke to his heart and he responded I . . . I know He's speaking to my heart -now. I . . . I want to change, Mother."

Mrs. Jodphur's face drained of all color, it seemed. "Why didn't you tell me this before?" she asked in little more than a whisper.

"Because I . . . felt guilty and . . . and wicked for not giving Daddy an answer. A . . . a promise! Oh, I'm so sorry Janelle, can Jesus forgive me for this?" she asked, tearing herself from her mother's arms and rushing over to Janelle.

"Oh, yes, Marcie! Yes! Why not kneel here and ask Jesus to forgive your sins and to come into your heart?"

"Now? Oh, may I, Janelle? Please? I thought no one cared about me, but you have proven that I was wrong: you care, and so does Jesus. Oh, this humbles me so, but makes me feel so good. I will change, Janelle, right now. I'm tired of being unhappy and empty inside. Pray for me, please. . . ."

Marcie's repentance was genuine; her praying and seeking was rewarded: she was gloriously converted and made new in Christ. Throwing her arms around Janelle's neck, she said, "Thanks, dear Janelle, for caring for my soul. Do you suppose Daddy knows what just happened in my heart?"

"I believe He does, Marcie. And something else is happening in Heaven, too: the angels are rejoicing. Do you want to pray, Mrs. Jodphur?" Janelle asked, seeing the look on the mother's face.

"I do. But I'm afraid of my husband's wrath. Please let me think about it a while longer."
"You don't know what you're missing!" Marcie exclaimed joyfully. "I have a wonderful and deep peace and rest in my soul. I wish you'd get saved. . . ."

"Not now; maybe some other time."

A short time later, Janelle left for home. Marcie would be going to church with her, she promised. "I want to learn all I can about God, and what He wants me to do," she remarked to Janelle with a shine on her face.

Some weeks later, Mrs. Jodphur attended church. Janelle and Marcie were overjoyed. They had agreed together to pray earnestly, daily, for her salvation. Marcie had begun a fast two days previously. Her joy knew no bounds when her mother slipped quietly out of the pew and made her way to the altar at the close of the morning sermon.

Marcie and Janelle followed her. Kneeling, one on either side of her, they began to pray. Mrs. Jodphur needed no prodding; her burden of sin gave birth to prayer for deliverance and in a short while she was on her feet, shouting for joy. She was saved. Saved!

"I was so miserable," she testified. "Marcie is a different girl. Her joy and her beautiful new spirit put me under deep conviction. I wanted what she possessed, and now I have found Him. Oh, I am so happy. My husband will be furious with me, I know; but I have Someone inside me who will help me. And with Marcie's and Janelle's prayers, I know the Lord is going to give me the grace I need."

Marcie threw her arms around Janelle. Tears were running down her face. "Oh, Janelle," she cried happily, "thanks for caring enough to come to our home and to speak to us about our souls. God sent you. Right on time, too. God only knows where I'd be today if you hadn't come when you did. You're the most wonderful new neighbor we've ever had here. Thanks, again, for caring. And for loving."

"Just thank God, Marcie. I'm as happy for you and your mother as I can be. Now we'll really pray for your stepfather's conversion."

"Oh, yes, by all means. Since I got converted and am now sanctified wholly, I see Walt through spiritual eyes. And Janelle, I have a real burden for
him. God has removed my bitterness, and in its place He has filled my heart with compassion for him and a Christian love, the kind one has for the sinner. It's easy to pray for him.

Janelle bowed her head and wept for joy. God was going to use Marcie in a great way. And she wouldn't be surprised if Walt would be her friend's next convert. In fact, she was expecting it!