

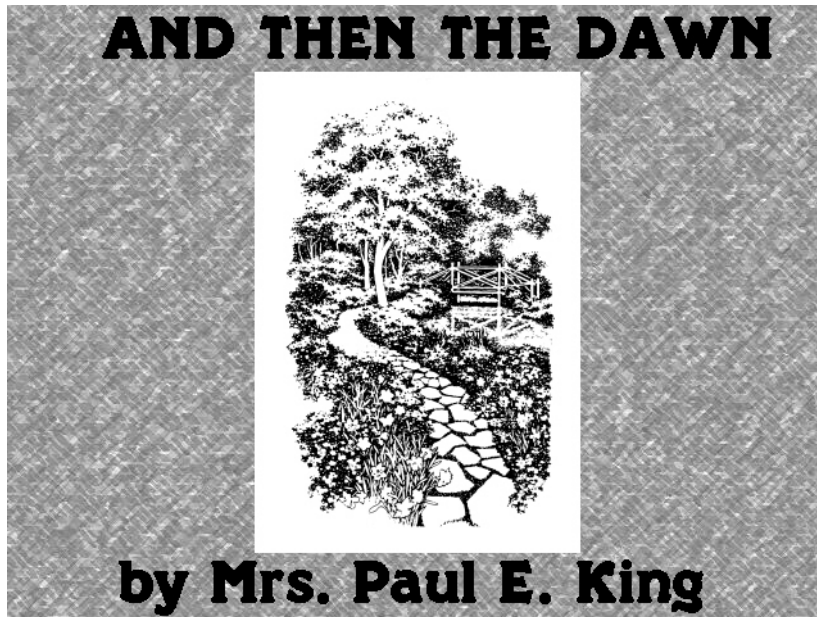
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AND THEN THE DAWN
By Mrs. Paul E. King

(Chapter 1)

The song of the lark drew Alyssa to the window like a magnet drawing metal. Throwing the window open wide, she knelt on the floor, elbows resting on the windowsill, and listened to the singer's full orb'd melody with awe and rapture. Tears of happiness and delight sprang to her eyes and, surfacing, they danced merrily down her cheeks. She was so happy that she felt her

inner being would explode any minute unless she could give vent to her feelings.

"Dear Lord," she cried aloud, raising her long, graceful arms heavenward, "my cup of happiness is full and running over. Thank You. Thank You!"

The lark continued its singing, each note sounding purer, clearer, and sweeter than the previous one. It was good to be alive, she thought happily. Yes, so very good. And spring must be one of the most beautiful seasons of all, she was sure, as she inhaled deeply of the fresh, pure-scented mountain air that the early morning breeze wafted in through the open windows.

The outside world called to her, beckoning her to make haste and meet its newness and its freshness ere the day was too far advanced.

She hurried with her dressing and tidying up the room, doing the work deftly and swiftly. Some things could be enjoyed and indulged in only in the glory and the splendor of the early dawn. She had learned this early in life; shortly after her beloved father had left her mother and her to occupy his new abode in Heaven, to be exact. She had felt it her duty then to take his place, insofar as she could. So she had gotten up early each morning and built a fire in the fireplace when it was cool, then milked Harmony the Jersey cow, though she had milked very few times before. The habit had become fixed; it was a delightful one.

She walked down the hallway on stockinged feet, carrying her shoes in her hand. She didn't want her mother awaking. Since her father's sudden Homegoing, Alyssa noticed the tired lines in the sweet, patient face of her mother. Four years' passing had not erased those lines; a thing the young woman had thought and heard that time would do.

She let herself outside and, closing the screen door noiselessly, she slipped her shoes on her feet, then took the path that meandered lazily but prettily toward the meadow. She had a rendezvous with the lark. She felt as joyful and as happy and carefree as the beautiful singer himself.

She tripped daintily across the bridge that arched the stream and afforded her passage over, then she followed the laughing brook to where

the willows welcomed her with their long, slender, graceful, gently-swaying withes.

She sat down along the stream beneath the willows and closed her eyes. The lark sang melodiously and sweetly nearby. So sweetly, in fact, that tears of joy sprang to Alyssa's eyes and danced down her satin-smooth cheeks.

The morning had a beauty all its own. Its silence, save for the awaking bird choruses, was healing and soul-uplifting and the clean, fresh, cool breezes had a way of sharpening one's mind and senses and quickening the physical man in general.

She listened to the lark, joined now by myriad other winged singers. All around her the earth and the sky echoed with joyful song. She felt like she was in a vast cathedral listening to music such as no mortal on earth could produce. Notes of the woodthrush trilled and warbled from the swamp and floated to her listening ears with such melodic beauty and perfection that Alyssa wondered how anything could be sweeter, purer than the singer's song; it and the lark.

Above her, doves cooed and called and robins sang lustily, sweetly, trilling out their joyous thanks to the Creator-God Who had given them protection and life through yet another night. Song sparrows, Field, Harris, and Vesper sparrows added their melodic and beautiful songs to the chorus above and around her. In the not too far away distance, quail called and whistled. Even the cacophony of the crows seemed only to be making music instead of noise, as she listened. Her entire being was immersed in loveliness and beauty. Her soul and mind and body was being prepared for the time and season of greater blessing and beauty and glory -the time of her communion and fellowship with God.

Gradually, the heavenly chorus diminished. The sun came smiling over the eastern horizon and stars of the night paled into nothingness. With happy tears flowing from her eyes, Alyssa opened the much-worn, oft-read Bible which she had brought along and began to read, continuing where she had left off the night before. How precious was God's Word; how it warmed and encouraged her heart! Chapter after chapter was read, meditated upon, and applied to her open heart. Then came the time of prayer. Her heart was a well-spring of praise and adoration and thanksgiving. God met with her. She

left the open "cathedral" knowing she had pushed through and made contact with Heaven.

Walking back to the house in the soft rosy dawn, Alyssa thought about Charles. Perhaps today the mailman would bring her a letter from him. Lately, he had become careless -- or whatever -- in writing. When he left, a year ago, he had promised to write her two or three times a week, depending, of course, on his military duties and obligations. Until two months ago, he had fulfilled that vow. Then suddenly, and with no explanation whatever, she had begun hearing from him only every two weeks or so.

She missed his letters. And why not? They were engaged to be married. "As soon as I come home," Charles had told her when he left for overseas, "we'll be married."

She wondered how he was doing spiritually and if the church to which he was going preached, or even believed in, holiness of heart and life. She had written, asking him as much, but he had made no reply about the matter. She tried to believe that maybe he had forgotten, but it continued to trouble her.

Charles and she had gone to the same church together all of their natural lives. Their parents, too. Charles' father had come up to the light of holiness, like her own father had, in a revival meeting in the church. Her father had gone to the altar and wrestled with God in prayer until God the Holy Ghost came in purging, purifying, refining fire, crucifying and eradicating the old man of carnality and filling him with Divine Love. Charles' father, on the other hand, had scoffed and laughed about it and turned against both the evangelist and their pastor. He left the church shortly after to never again return. Charles and his mother, however, remained in the church.

She heard Harmony's soft moo and hastened her footsteps, smiling as she came near to the cow's small barn and adjoining fenced-in yard.

"You're hungry, as usual, aren't you?" Alyssa said, going to the fence and rubbing Harmony's head gently. The cow nudged her playfully.

"I'll get your grain and give you some hay; then I'll milk you, you dear, dear cow. Oh, what would we ever do without you!" Alyssa exclaimed, throwing her arms around Harmony's neck and stroking her silky hair. "You're

as much a part of our family as Spot and Muffin are," she added as the dog and cat came running to her.

Alyssa fed and watered Harmony; then she filled the pail with the rich, creamy milk which the cow gave her as she milked. Muffin's dish was filled to the brim with the warm, frothy milk and, together, she and Spot drank to their fill, running away gleefully shortly after, one to clean his muzzle, the other to wash her face and her dainty paws.

Alyssa smiled. Work was so rewarding; it brought with it a sense of meaning to one's life; a sense of fulfillment and of worth. She was thankful that her parents had taught her early in life the value and the blessedness of work.

She opened the gate of Harmony's barnyard and watched as the cow followed the narrow, fenced-in path to the meadow pasture land, leaving the gate open so Harmony could come and go at will. Then she took the pail of milk to the kitchen for straining and cooling. Today was butter-making day. That meant, too, that from some of the buttermilk she would be making cottage cheese for Aunt Hattie, who was not a blood line aunt at all but was always known to her only as Aunt Hattie.

Aunt Hattie lived in a small cottage next to them just two-tenths of a mile away. A small, delicate looking woman whose stature and facial expressions belied her less than ordinary wisdom and intelligence, Aunt Hattie had been a great spiritual mentor to Alyssa. As a child, she recalled having heard the woman pray earnestly for her, asking God to lay His hand upon her and to use her in some special way. In adolescence she had heard the gentle voice beseeching God to keep her, Alyssa, pure and holy and clean and to "get her safely through the turbulent years."

A lump came in Alyssa's throat now as she remembered Aunt Hattie's prayer when she told her that Charles had asked her to marry him. The quiet-mannered neighbor had bowed her head and laid her hands lovingly upon Alyssa's small shoulders, remaining silent for a long while. Then her lips parted. "Father dear," she said, speaking as if friend to friend, "Thy will be done in this matter. Thy will. Only Thy will! Take care of my little girl. Lead her aright. Keep her on the straight and narrow pathway to glory. Work out Thy perfect plan for her life. In Jesus' name, with thanksgiving, Amen."

Did Aunt Hattie, perhaps, feel that Charles was not meant for her? Alyssa wondered now, as she had frequently done since hearing the simple but straight-to-Heaven prayer that day. That the dear old soul lived close to God and had an open line to Heaven, Alyssa had no doubt. She was wise with Heavenly wisdom. A widow for almost as many years as she, Alyssa, was old, the saintly woman had seemed to have given her life over to praying and fasting and doing good whenever and wherever possible. She possessed little of earthly goods but was rich in Heaven's wealth. Her one aim and purpose in life was to please only Christ.

Finished with the milk, Alyssa now poured the thick cream, which for a few days had been saved and was carefully dipped off the top of Harmony's rich milk, into the butter churn for the butter-making. She hoped to have the job finished before her mother got up for breakfast. Besides, Mrs. Moore had said she'd be coming earlier than usual for her weekly two pounds of butter and her two dozen eggs from the hen house not far from Harmony's barn. She wanted the butter chilled and nicely molded before the town woman arrived.

A soft breeze coming in from the open windows and the screen door played teasingly with the loose tendrils of hair around Alyssa's neck and forehead. Her naturally-curly wheat-colored hair formed in tiny ringlets about her sweetly-serene face as moisture formed on her face while she worked. She hummed softly to herself, feeling happy in her soul. Only the thought of less and less marl from Charles gave her any disturbing thoughts whatever. And these she turned confidently and trustingly over to God, knowing that His will was by far the best and the wisest and the safest for her.

She molded the churned butter into attractive molds, then took care of the buttermilk and washed the churn, sterilizing it carefully before putting it inside the pantry until the next churning.

She had just slid sliced potatoes into a skillet for browning when she heard her mother's pleasant voice call to her from down the hallway, wishing her a pleasant morning and adding that she was sorry she had slept so late. "I'll be there in a jiffy," she had said.

"Don't hurry, Mother dear," Alyssa replied. "I just now put the potatoes on for frying. I'll add the onions a little later. Two eggs for you this morning?" she asked brightly.

"Only one, Alyssa."

"It will be two for you this morning, dear. Nurse Alyssa's orders. You've been eating like a bird for too long. That must change."

She laughed as she said it, but she meant it. If she could persuade her mother to eat more, and better, Alyssa felt sure she would regain the strength which seemed to have been sapped away with the death of her husband.

She looked out the window and saw the mailman's car coming up the road. Her heartbeat quickened.

Chapter 2

Rain was falling steadily, some weeks later, and Alyssa had not heard from Charles for over a month. She kept up her correspondence to him, fulfilling the promise she had made before he left for overseas. But her heart was heavy. Was he ill, perhaps, or injured? Surely, if he was, his parents would have been notified, she reasoned. And his mother, being the kind woman that she was, would have contacted her, Alyssa knew, even though they had moved to a community some distance away after Charles went into the Air Force.

"We wanted him to finish his schooling here," Mrs. Downs had said when the news of the family's moving was made known. "My husband has a better job offer in Townsend. With the same company, by the way, but a better salary. Now that Charles is gone, we have nothing standing in the way. Charles started first grade here. He liked the school. So did we. I will always have fond memories of the community and of my church. I became rooted and established in Christ here. And in true holiness, too."

So they had left, Mrs. Downs weeping softly when she told Alyssa and her mother good-bye and Mr. Downs making a sarcastic quip about holiness people in general. It was plain to see that the man's attitude had not changed one iota from the time when God's Holy Spirit had brought him face to face with his need of a holy and cleansed heart, Alyssa thought, as they drove away, following the moving van.

"Mother," she said, as she came into the house after getting the mail from the mailbox, "do you think I should continue writing to Charles since he no longer replies nor writes to me? I feel obligated; I told him I'd be faithful and would write at least three to four times each week. And I've done that. Now, however, I don't know. Oh Mother, you don't suppose Charles has found someone else. . . ."

Her sentence trailed. Tears sprang to her eyes, then went rushing in a wild way down her cheeks.

"If he has," Mrs. Stonington declared, "he's passing up the best young woman in the world. But maybe it's to be this way, Alyssa dear," she added as she hugged her daughter to her tender, loving breast. "Sometimes I have had doubts about Charles; whether he was really meant for you, I mean." Alyssa wept softly.

"While we're on the subject, honey, I may as well tell you what I have sensed and how I feel. I have done a lot of praying over this; it has given me great concern. I know what you are and how you live. My heart rejoices greatly over your close walk with God and your beautiful relationship with Him. You are genuine, Alyssa. I'm not too sure about Charles. Time and time again I have had the fear that he was only going to church because of you; going, to keep you interested in him and not because of his love for the Lord."

"But he said he loved the Lord," Alyssa replied, looking into her mother's sweet face. "Do . . . do you suppose he had been telling an untruth? That's a fearful thing to do, if he didn't love the Lord."

"I can't answer that, my dear. I may wonder, and have my thoughts, but God alone knows the real truth. However, the Bible says that not all who say, 'Lord, Lord' are going to enter into Heaven; meaning, of course, that not all who profess to love the Lord are going to make it into the Celestial City. Jesus said it was those who did the will of His Father, who would go into the City. There's quite a difference between professing and doing. Truthfully, my dear daughter, I have been afraid that Charles never struck rock bottom. Spiritually, I mean."

Alyssa listened quietly. After a while, she said, "Then I have been most undiscerning. This troubles me. Jesus promised to lead and guide His

children into all truth. Those whose hearts were filled with the Holy Spirit, I mean. Oh, have I been blinded? Have I been deceived?"

"Not willfully, Alyssa. But one can love so deeply until he is blinded by things others notice and sense or detect. It's that simple. I know you well enough to know that you would not willfully or knowingly move out of the will of God nor do anything that He would not want you to do. Not ever! You have always been very conscientious."

"I want to go and pray, Mother. I must. I want only God's will for my life, both now and forever."

"The Bible tells us to commit our way unto the Lord and He will direct our path. This means our life, as wen. Rest in Him, Alyssa; He will make known His will for you. This could well be God's way of giving you the answer to your own prayers. I heard you tell the Lord around our family altar on more than one occasion, to break up yours and Charles' relationship if it wasn't His will for you to marry. I'm sure you meant that."

"I did. And I do. With all of my heart, I do!" "Then rest your case in God's hands, my dear. He is too good and too kind and wise to do anything but what is for your best. Your very best!"

"Oh Mother, I will. I will! Regardless of what it costs. I love Charles so very much; but I love the Lord far more."

Long after Alyssa had gone away to pray, Mrs. Stonington, too, was on her knees, imploring God to direct and guide her beloved child right and to give her strength for the ultimate outcome, however severe it may be. She had her own fears as to what was happening.

It was noon before Alyssa returned from her place of prayer down by the brook beneath the willow trees. Her eyes bespoke the agony through which she had come but her face and her entire being wore an expression of utter resignation and total conformity to the sweet will of God. She was the picture of serenity.

She went about the duties of the day with a peace in her heart and joyfulness in her soul in spite of the keen disappointment and the acute pain in her heart. She understood, now, the meaning of the scripture, "As

sorrowful yet always rejoicing." Her soul had a cathedral where constant praises were being sung and where no amount of outside pain or pressure could quell or quench the Heavenly music; it had an inner sanctum where nothing could disturb or disquiet its inner peace and soul rest: she was dwelling in "the secret place of the most High" and abiding -- lodging -- "under the shadow of the Almighty."

Mrs. Stonington noticed the beautiful spirit of holy resignation to whatever God's will was for her daughter and her heart was moved with compassion and love and, yes, to tears and many a fervent prayer.

Alyssa had carried a heavy load since the passing of her father. This, too, moved and touched the mother heart greatly. In her own frail health, due largely to the sorrow and shock of the sudden, untimely death, Alyssa had gone out of her way to nurse her and care for her and help to bring her back to a life of normalcy. And she was improving, she admitted silently and thankfully. And now, she realized, it was time that she reciprocate and ease, as much as possible, the pain and hurt which her daughter was experiencing.

The mother longed to help. She remembered her own love life with the man whom she finally married -- Alyssa's father. She, too, would have been hurt deeply and greatly had David done to her as Charles was doing to Alyssa, for she loved him so very much. Still, when one was in God's school and was learning His lessons, was it not better and far wiser to let God do the teaching and the disciplining and directing!

The kind mother shed tears as she worked. She must not do anything unwise, no matter how greatly her heart hurt nor was grieved for her daughter. Her pain and grief over the matter must be in subordination to His will. She would be supportive in prayer and love and compassion and understanding but the final decision and outcome would be entirely up to God. His ways were not only best, they were also "past finding out."

The days flowed into weeks and still no letter. Strawberries ripened and were frozen and made into delicious freezer jam, and peas were shelled and canned or frozen, all to be enjoyed when the season of harvest was past. Alyssa worked untiringly with her mother. She noticed the color gradually but surely returning to the once-pale and sallow-looking cheeks and her heart rose in instant praise and thanks to God for the restoration of her mother's physical being. The God who could heal the physical could just as easily heal

a breaking, broken heart, she soliloquized as she brushed unbidden tears away from her eyes.

Three times each week, she wrote to Charles. She had made this commitment-promise; she would fulfill it and abide by it until he would sever or break it by releasing her, in whatever way. She felt that a promise made should be a promise kept. In all things, not just in the matter of letter writing. A Christian should be as good as his word, fulfilling and keeping his vows, conscientiously so, unless providentially hindered. And then he should explain why he was unable to do as he had said, or promised. Didn't the Bible state that it was better never to make a vow than to make one and then break it? Indeed it did! Charles may be able to take his promise lightly, and to break his commitment, but she couldn't. It was too serious a thing with her.

In her heart musings and her searching for the reason why Charles no longer wrote, Alyssa's mind was opened to the fact that a man who wouldn't, or didn't, keep his lesser-seeming commitments would be just as unlikely to keep his bigger, greater vows and commitments. Like the marriage vow.

She had a sudden, frightening fear. It drove her to the place of prayer. Would Charles have been unfaithful had she been married to him? It was very possible and highly probable, she realized with a fresh onslaught of fear. If one was not faithful and true in life's so-called "little" things, would he be true in the more serious aspects of life? The Bible had the answer to this, too: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."

To Alyssa, her engagement to Charles was no light thing; nothing to be tampered with nor "toyed" with. She conducted herself in a God-like manner and was just as faithful to Charles as though they were married. There was nothing within her that made her desire a few "flings" before the sacred vows were spoken and taken, binding her for life to the man whom she loved.

She had heard of some who did such things, declaring they wanted to enjoy their freedom, what was left of it, before they became "attached," their words. She wondered now, just how deep and true and genuine was the love of those who had this attitude and who felt this way. Married love was not something to be dreaded; it was something to be desired and looked forward to with great anticipation, joy, and eager delight. It was God ordained and

Christ sanctioned. It was the holy union of two people becoming one, not in dictatorial fashion, but in love.

The young woman knew now that, whatever Charles may do to try to make amends for his laxity and his broken promises, if, indeed, he would try to do such, ever, she would forever be plagued with doubts as to his love for her and his faithfulness to her. With the breaking of his commitments, doubts, as to his truthfulness and his integrity and love for her, had found their way into her heart and mind. She had prayed earnestly for the Lord to flush them out, but still they remained, warning her gently, silently and persistently that they were "friends" and not enemies, in her case.

It was midsummer when, as usual, Alyssa went to the mailbox to bring the mail in for her mother and herself. She no longer looked for nor expected the once familiar postmarked letter from overseas, though, true to her commitment, she had continued her letter writing. They had long ago become more of a friend-writing-friend sort of letter, to be sure, and consisted mainly of church news and happenings, but she had been true to her promise.

She put the mail on the table where her mother and she could sort through it. Then she saw the letter.

Like one expecting bad news, she opened the letter slowly. Then she read,

"Alyssa,

Please don't write anymore. I know it was a dirty thing to do to you, but I did it: I'm a married man now. I found a girl over here and we fell head over heels in love with each other. We were married two weeks ago. I'll perhaps never come back to the States.

Good luck to you --
Charles."

Alyssa sat for a while, holding the letter in her hands, in complete shock. Then the tears began to flow. The letter dropped to the floor and she passed out.

Chapter 3

When Alyssa rallied, she saw her mother bending over her, washing her face with a cold, wet wash cloth. Tears shimmered in her mother's eyes. "You'll be all right, dear," she said, caressing and caring for Alyssa as gently as though she was a small child.

"Wh . . . what happened, Mother?" the young woman asked, trying to raise herself into a sitting position.

"Lie still for a little while longer, Alyssa dear. The shock did this to you."

"Oh, yes . . . the . . . letter. He's married, Mother. . . ." The words trailed, painfully.

"I know; I read the letter. Quite a dastardly thing to do to you. I . . . I'm sorry this had to happen. But lean hard on Romans 8:28, my daughter; that precious promise will sustain you and bring you comfort in this pain-filling situation and circumstance. So many things in life we cannot understand. But always, to the child of God, each and every thing works together for his good. And, too, for the glory of God. Although you cannot see it now, God has someone of sterling character out there in the future for you. In His providence and in His time, you will meet each other."

"I guess, for the present, I'm not interested, Mother."

"Not now, no; but you will be. In God's time!" "Just pray for me, that I won't lose faith in all men. I know my father was an honest, upright, and righteous man, totally unlike Charles and.., and . . . his philandering ways."

"There are many upright young men, Alyssa. You will see the truth of this statement some day, God willing."

Sighing painfully, Alyssa said, "I . . . I'm glad the truth is out. It's far better to know the facts than to live under constant doubt and fear. One can imagine all kinds of things until the truth is known. I'm glad it's over. The Lord will give me strength and grace. I guess that means I won't be needing the wedding dress you helped me to make."

"Oh but you will, the Lord willing! Not now, it's true; but in the future you'll be thankful you have it, Alyssa. It's such a beautiful gown. You did a marvelous piece of work on it."

"Please, may I sit up now? There's no sense in moping around and crying over something that will never be. There are beans and tomatoes in the garden needing to be canned, and I'm sure I won't faint again. That was so stupid of me. It came on so suddenly and without much, or any, warning."

"Shock does strange things to us, honey."

Alyssa got to her feet slowly. Then she sat on a kitchen chair. Her head still felt strange and funny.

"Lie down on the sofa a while," Mrs. Stonington suggested, noticing the pale-white cheeks.

Alyssa needed no prodding this time. She was thankful for the steady, supporting arms of her mother as she walked into the living room and dropped, thankfully, onto the sofa.

Her mother put a cold, wet washcloth on her forehead and with another she washed her face, praying softly as she worked. Alyssa succumbed to the gentle touch and the healing balm of prayer and she was soon fast asleep.

While she slept, she had a dream. It was strange but so very real. She saw a young man with handsome face and manly frame enter a building on a busy street. The neon sign and gaudy lights outside the building's entrance were blinking and flashing invitingly, calling attention to passersby. Many were entering in.

The young man entered confidently, denoting the fact that he was familiar with the place and had felt at ease with its business. He smiled as he entered and, she noticed, he was greeted warmly by those inside. Dapper looking people, they were, every one of them. They were dressed in their finest; diamonds flashed and sparkled on their fingers.

The owner-proprietor slapped the young man on the shoulder congenially and led him to a room within a room. It was a large room, lighted by costly ceiling lights that glittered and glistened like diamonds or rare

crystal; not overly bright but enough light to lend an aura of romanticism and intrigue to whatever was going on inside. The ceiling seemed to have been made of one solid mass of mirrors that reflected the softly-glittering lights in such a way as to make the room appear enormous and exquisitely magnificent and enchanting.

The young man took his place with others around a table, and then Alyssa saw that it was a gambling casino. Not just one table, but many tables. And many more rooms, too, all of them filled with gambling devices and slot machines. Everywhere she looked, she saw people at the tables or playing the machines. And the young man was one of the most ardent of all the gamblers.

After a long time, she saw him leave and go through a dimly-lit archway into another area of the building where he was greeted affectionately and warmly by a strikingly beautiful brunette. He led her to a bar and, together, they sat down. All around them was the sound of music, almost deafening at times. People were dancing and drinking and smoking and, to her horror, she saw that the young man and his lady friend, too, were drinking and reveling in the same way as their companion friends.

She saw him, after a long time of drinking and dancing, walk unsteadily back into the gambling casino and, finally, out onto the street. Before he could get the key into the car's ignition he turned and, with bleary eyes, looked her way. And just as he drove away with the attractive brunette, she recognized him.

"No! No! Charles! Don't! Don't!" she cried.

She awoke with a start. She was trembling and shaking like one who had a high fever. It was horrible. Horrible!

Her mother, hearing the frightened cry, came hurrying from the kitchen in to her daughter's side, saying, "Alyssa, whatever is wrong?"

Alyssa was sobbing now; great, heaving sobs that shook her slender body and seemed to be tearing her to pieces.

"Please, Alyssa, tell me what's wrong," Mrs. Stonington pleaded, adding tenderly, "Why, child, you're trembling like a leaf in a late autumn wind! What happened? Did you have a bad dream?"

For a long while Alyssa couldn't speak. Then as her sobbing subsided and her trembling and shaking body calmed down, she said, "Oh, Mother, the Lord has been so good to me! He did me a favor. No, it's far more than a favor; it's a merciful kindness and a blessing -- the letter, and this which He has just shown me."

"He isn't going to fail you, this I know." "Praise His holy and worthy name!" Alyssa said, weeping softly now. "The Lord saw things I didn't see; He knew things I didn't. I feel sure that, just a short while ago, He gave me a little glimpse into Charles' life. The real Charles. Oh, it was horribly frightening. And so sad.

"Mother, it's hard for me to imagine Charles gambling and drinking and smoking, and even dancing. But in my dream -- or maybe it could be called a vision -- he was doing all these things and enjoying them greatly."

"Alyssa, I want to be careful what I say, for the Bible tells us not to judge lest we be judged; but for a long time I have been extremely concerned about Charles. The Lord seemed to impress upon my heart that he was living a double life." "You . . . mean. . . ?"

"That he was living in sin and still trying to keep up his profession of faith because of you. He knew you would never date, or go out with, a man who didn't love the Lord. Or at least say he loved the Lord."

"But Mother, do you mean to say that Charles . . . I mean, don't you think he was ever really saved?"

"I didn't mean to give you that impression, Alyssa; forgive me if I have. I think there was a time in Charles' life when he was saved. His life gave witness and testimony to this; for a while, at least. But, in my heart, I wonder if he ever died out to Charles and was truly sanctified wholly He was so easily offended and.

"I am ever so thankful, Mother," Alyssa interrupted, "that God intervened now. My dream, or vision or whatever it was, was heartbreaking. I

never actually knew what a gambling casino or a barroom looked like. But I saw it all in the dream. And Charles was indulging himself in it all to its fullest. He seemed to be enjoying it immensely."

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,' Jeremiah 17:9 declares. This is why it is so important that one be truly born again and sanctified wholly. So long as self is not crucified, there will be a tug and a pull toward the world."

"How could I have been so foolish and . . . and so blind!" Alyssa exclaimed tearfully.

"You must now try to forget the past, my dear. The Lord has graciously delivered you and spared you grief and heartache, now you must look ahead to those things that are before you. There is a whole new future out there for you, Alyssa; a future of marvels and surprise beyond anything either of us can begin to imagine, I feel Truly, the Lord doeth all things well. Today He has answered prayer for me; my heavy burden is totally gone. My heart is rejoicing in His goodness and His love. His ear is open, indeed, to the prayers and the cries of His children. Your letter from Charles is a very definite answer to many months of praying."

"I'm sorry I caused you anxiety, Mother," Alyssa cried. "I would not have done this deliberately for anything. Oh, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, dear child. Nothing. I know how very sensitive and tender and loving and kind you are. Of course you didn't mean to cause me anxiety or worry; I know this. And now, how does a cup of freshly-made potato soup sound to your ears? I just finished putting the seasonings in it a short while before you were awakened so rudely and startlingly."

"I'm not hungry, Mother. Thanks, most kindly." "But a little cup of soup would strengthen you, honey. Just a little amount, please? Will you try?"

"Because you are so kind and so dear and went to all the trouble to make my favorite quick soup, I'll try to eat a little bit now," and Alyssa got up slowly from the sofa and followed her mother into the kitchen.

Immediately afterwards, she went into her bedroom and gathered all of the letters together which Charles had written to her. She took them outside and watched as they burned and went up in smoke along with his pictures.

Chapter 4

After the letter from Charles stating that he was married, Alyssa went more frequently than ever to her place of prayer. The Word of God became more and more precious to her. In its pages she found comfort and solace and strength for each new day. She prayed fervently to be kept from making the same big mistake that she had made by dating Charles and becoming engaged to him.

She exhibited and possessed an even greater serenity about her than before. To the mother's watchful and loving eyes, the severity of the furnace of affliction through which her daughter had just passed served only to have made her more mellow and more watchful and to have gained a new spiritual depth in Christ heretofore unknown.

Was not the furnace of affliction designed for just such purpose? the mother thought, as she worked side by side with her daughter shelling the dry beans for winter's consumption. Indeed it was. And -- blest thought -- the Refiner Himself gave constant and careful supervision to the extent of the heat and to the duration of the heat, as well. Always, He was close at hand when one of His dear children was in the refining furnace of affliction, no matter what form the affliction took or possessed. It took the refining process to manifest and reveal the quality of the gold and to show forth its purity and beauty and worth. How much like her Master was Alyssa becoming since going through, and being in, her Heavenly Father's refining furnace! the observant mother thought.

A lump caught in the woman's throat; she choked back the sob that tore at her heart. Her inmost being was crying, and feeling, and yes, hurting for her daughter. The shock itself was dreadful to both the physical and the emotional part of one's being, she knew. But Alyssa was still young, and this in itself was good, for the young had a resiliency about them which was indeed remarkable; a resiliency to bound back, quickly. It was another one of God's marvelous and amazing gifts to mankind; to the young, especially so.

Mrs. Stonington watched as Alyssa gathered more of the dry beans from the garden for shelling. How very lovely she was! And so obedient. Always! She had been delightful as an infant and child and became even more so as she grew into adolescence and young adulthood. Never had she caused them grief or heartache in any way. She had brought an immeasurable amount of joy into their home. Her coming was no small miracle.

Thinking back to those early years of marriage now, Mrs. Stonington recalled how utterly frustrated and grieved she and David had been when the doctor informed them, upon the loss of two prematurely-born children, that, very likely, they would never be able to have a child which they could hold and love and raise as their very own. There were serious physical problems, so he had stated, and she, Mrs. Stonington, needed major surgery. The kind doctor had suggested adoption as an alternative, adding that he would assist in every way possible and would begin procedures with an adoption agency immediately.

She remembered how she and her husband had prayed over the matter; not lightly, but earnestly and with an open heart for the perfect will and desire of God for them. This was something not to be rushed into; something to not do until they had gotten their direction from God.

The more they prayed, she recalled now, the greater became the conviction that adoption was not for them. They informed Doctor Wise of their decision. The graying haired man brushed tears aside as he said, "I know each of you well enough to know that your final decision has not been made by you alone; you sought the will of the Divine; the help of One Who knows and sees the future from this present hour on. You have my blessings. And, who knows what surprises the Almighty has in store for you! You are still young. If it means being childless, thank God for the blessing of having each other. Life can be rich and quite fulfilling without little ones pattering about the house."

She had started to say something to the good doctor, but he had held up his hand in a friendly protest and added, "I can take you to half a dozen homes, or more, right now, where the couples are childless, but they are extremely happy. And why are they happy? Because, in their own deprivations and loss -- yes, I said loss -- of children, they have turned to other alternatives for fulfillment.

"One fine couple is helping to pay the medical expenses for a little child, an acquaintance of theirs, who is afflicted with the very affliction that took their child. Another couple goes periodically to a Children's Home and takes gifts of clothing and fine books and creative toys to the little ones there. And I know two couples who felt that, since God didn't see fit to send them a family of their own, they should reach out in acts of kindness and loving compassion and helpfulness to the elderly who need their services and have no family nearby to help. These couples are receiving rewards here and now that are fulfilling to them and in the life to come they will be receiving their greater, eternal rewards.

"Don't feel like the best part of married life has passed you by by taking your little ones from you before they got to know you, even; the best can yet be yours. It depends so much upon how you look at things and how you accept them and act, or react, to them. All of life will have its bitter mixed in with its sweet; its good with its bad; its sorrow with its joy; its sunshine with its rain. I could go on and on, but I think you know what I'm trying to say and what I'm trying to tell you. Just because you have been disappointed, and can't have what you want, don't stagnate. And never, never allow self-pity to enter your beautiful souls. Self-pity nor bitterness! You will find fulfillment in some other area, chosen for you and cut out for you by the Divine One. Find that area."

How wondrously true the wise doctor's words had been! the mother thought as she recalled those days of years gone by with vivid recollection. David and she had looked for ways to help little children. Especially the poor. Many a little child received his or her needed shoes or winter boots, coat, trousers, dress, underwear, hat, gloves, sweater, or whatever, all delivered to the door in a pretty box wrapped in bright paper and tied with a beautiful bow. The expression of joy and delight on the little faces was reward enough for the couple.

The Sunday school began to grow as they reached into home after home with their gifts of love and their in-as-much-as-ye-have-done-it-onto-one-of-the-least-of-these" ministry expanded. Many a paycheck found them with little left over for themselves, but their hearts were full and rich and overflowing with satisfaction and happiness and joy. And yes, with blessing too. It was indeed far more blessed to give than to receive. They were learning it firsthand and experientially.

A smile parted her lips as she recalled that very special Christmas of long ago. David's paychecks had begun getting increasingly smaller by then because the company with which he was working and for whom he was working, was phasing its business out in the area and was transferring its plant and a select few of its employees elsewhere. David's job did not entitle him to be among the "select few." Already he was having only part-time work; his no-work days were spent mainly looking for another job.

They had discussed their plan for bringing Christmas to the poor and the less fortunate carefully. And thoughtfully, too. They had no money with which to buy those things which they knew were sorely needed by some of the children and the elderly. But they couldn't disappoint them either, could they? No, they couldn't. And by God's help, they wouldn't!

They had set aside one night a week then for prayer and fasting. God knew how to meet those needs even though they didn't and couldn't with David's small income now. Week after week, they waited upon God. He fed the sparrows and kept them from freezing in the bitter-cold winter weather and He had said man was of infinitely more value, didn't He! He clothed the lilies in spotless white "satin" gowns and He would clothe their poor; their needy!

On and on they had pined, quoting scripture to verify and substantiate their claim. And He had answered; they were not denied. It had been one of the most exciting and thrilling times of their lives, ever. Every single need was met, and more beside. Hearts were cheered; faith was restored in the lives of two elderly people; the poor were clothed and fed and God was glorified. They were strengthened and uplifted in a spiritual manner. Their souls were happy and blest even though their pantry shelves were almost bare.

Mrs. Stonington remembered their Christmas dinner that year; she would never forget it. How could she! A boiled potato for David and one for herself with an apple divided between them for dessert. Little matter; they had satisfied others' needs. They were so happy.

They had just gotten seated at the table and, while holding hands as they thanked God for the food set before them, they heard a thump against the front door.

David finished his prayer, then got up from the table and went to investigate. He opened the door and sacks of groceries tumbled inside. What a supply of food God had sent! Things they could not have begun to buy with David's small income. What a feast they had had that day! She would never forget it. Never! And their kind benefactor, whoever it was, remained anonymous. Could it have been an angel from Heaven? she wondered again. To David and herself, that memorable Christmas day, it had come as a gift from God. And who could say it was not delivered by a Heavenly being! David had seen no one when he went to the door.

And then, as an added blessing, God had sent them Alyssa. She was so tiny and dainty looking that David had been afraid to hold her; afraid he might injure her. Doctor Wise had wept with them at her birth; wept for joy.

"This is a miracle!" he had exclaimed jubilantly. "I am happy for you."

And, indeed, Alyssa was a miracle child. She was God's special gift to them, the mother recalled, deep in pleasant thoughts of days gone by.

"What's so nice as to make you smile, Mother?" Alyssa asked as she set the basket of beans down. "You must have been having some beautiful thoughts; your smile was so beautiful. Like always."

"I was thinking of you, honey; when you were born, and of how very fearful your dear father was that he would injure you by picking you up and holding you. You were such a tiny little thing. But God endowed you with a pair of wonderful lungs! You knew how to use them when you were hungry, and if you had some other little problem."

They laughed together, talking and working, when suddenly the ringing of the telephone sliced into their pleasantries. Alyssa hurried inside to answer it.

"It's Aunt Hattie," she said, rushing out to her mother. "I must go to her at once. She sounds like she's dying. Good-bye, Mother." And away she ran.

Chapter 5

Alyssa sped down the lane toward Aunt Hattie's humble but always neat and well-kept cottage. If only she could have extracted from Aunt Hattie

what was wrong, but she couldn't. If she didn't know the woman's voice so very well she would not have known that it was Aunt Hattie, so muddled and indistinguishable was what she was trying to say to her.

If only Aunt Hattie would have come and lived with them! Alyssa thought, remembering how her mother had pleaded with her to do so. But that was not to be; Aunt Hattie had thanked her mother kindly and graciously, stating that so long as she was able she wanted to maintain her little cottage home and live in it. "I'd like to stay here until the angels carry me Home," she declared sweetly.

And from the sound of her, the angels couldn't be too far away! Alyssa thought with a start. Maybe they had come already and transported her over the river.

Tears began making steady streams down her cheeks. Oh, how she would miss Aunt Hattie when she changed worlds! It was an appointment each individual would have to keep at some time or other, she realized. But the thought of Aunt Hattie dying was almost more than she felt she could stand and endure.

Aunt Hattie was not just another neighbor; she was every bit as close to Alyssa and her mother as a biological aunt or a beloved relative would or could ever be. Always, for so long as Alyssa could remember, Aunt Hattie was there when they needed her, taking over if necessary, and lending help and support in each and every crisis. She dealt out massive doses of love and administered aid and comfort in a super-abundant way. In her quiet, unassuming way, she always helped out. She was the strong one in every crisis. God had endowed the little woman with a special gift, Alyssa felt sure; the gift of helpfulness and kindness.

Aunt Hattie wanted no trumpets sounding her praises; no bragging on her good deeds of mercy and kindness. None whatever. She declared that her reward and her delight was in the fact that she knew God was pleased with her and that she had His constant smile of approval. She said the praise of people meant little, seeing as how they would "praise you one day then criticize you the next." Not so with God, she said; His approval was constant so long as one was walking with God and doing His bidding and His will.

Oh, Aunt Hattie had been such a blessing to them, Alyssa thought now. To her, especially. She had learned so many spiritual lessons and truths from the dear, sweet soul. The aged woman had been a shining light to the young one; a spiritual beacon star.

"Please, God," Alyssa cried, "can You see fit to spare her a while longer? Please?" Then in total commitment, she said, "Thy will, not mine, be done, kind Father. But I love her so much. So very much! Please don't let her suffer too greatly, whatever her illness may be."

She let herself in through the back door, knowing that Aunt Hattie almost always kept that door unlocked during the day. Wasting no time at all, she hurried toward the bedroom, calling softly, "Aunt Hattie, I'm here. I'm here."

A low groan greeted her, followed by a mass of softly-jumbled words.

She found Aunt Hattie on the floor with the telephone still clutched in her hand.

"What happened, dear?" Alyssa asked, trying to stay as calm as she could. She wanted to get Aunt Hattie to bed but knew this might be the worst thing she could do for the immediate present. Her training to become an LPN had taught her this. The training was cut short, however, when her father died.

Aunt Hattie reached for her hand. Alyssa squeezed it reassuringly and tenderly.

"I'm going to call for an ambulance, honey," she said, taking the phone and dialing. "Did you fall?" she asked, while she waited.

Aunt Hattie nodded yes as Alyssa made arrangements with the ambulance personnel. Then she checked Aunt Hattie's pulse and looked in her eyes. Eyes could reveal so many things, she had learned.

She smoothed the hair back off the forehead in among the other strands of gray and dropped a kiss on the fair cheek. "I'm going to have prayer with you, dear Auntie, before that ambulance gets here," Alyssa said, kneeling down beside her.

Again the woman nodded assent. Her eyes looked tired, Alyssa noticed. She wondered just how long she had lain on the floor before she was able to reach the phone and call.

The thought sent a torrent of tears falling down Alyssa's cheeks. She called out to God for help, asking Him to alleviate any of the pain and suffering Aunt Hattie might be experiencing or enduring, and asking Him for grace and His comfort during her stay in the hospital. God's sweet presence filled the room. Praying for Aunt Hattie was always easy; there seemed to be an open line to Heaven. Always.

The ambulance hurried up to the cottage and, wasting no time whatever, the well-trained men entered the door and began to check Aunt Hattie immediately. Within a short while, they discovered many things, among them a broken hip. The fall had done this.

While they examined and worked over Aunt Hattie, Alyssa called her mother on the phone. "I'll be going to the hospital with Aunt Hattie," she said. "Unless you would rather have me stay home and you go. We are all the 'relationship' she has left on this earth, Mother. I could cry; I feel so sorry for her. She bears her pain so patiently and uncomplainingly. You think both of us should go? Oh, that will be wonderful! I know it will mean much to Aunt Hattie. All right. I'll wait here for you then. And Mother, bring me some clean clothing, please. I worked in the garden in these. I'll run along and get myself 'sponged' off. See you. I love you"

Alyssa put the phone back on the receiver, then hurried into the bathroom and gave herself a quick sponge bath. She knew her mother wouldn't take long at getting to the cottage and she knew, too, that once the men were through with their examinations and had done everything they could do in their line of duty, they would be leaving for the hospital with dear Aunt Hattie riding away with them.

Alyssa moved like one in a dream; tears stung her eyes and darted down her cheeks. Oh, how very lonely the little cottage would seem without the beloved woman inside! It would be like an empty shell; something with little or no substance in it. After all, a house was just a house until people lived in it; then it became a home. The four walls and fancy trappings never made it special. In Aunt Hattie's case, the little cottage home was like a bit of

Heaven on earth because of its Godlike owner-inhabitant. Let her be taken and the greater beauty and meaning of the house would die also, so far as she, Alyssa, was concerned. The little cottage was Aunt Hattie!

Mrs. Stonington gave the clean clothing to Alyssa as she passed by the bathroom door on her way in to where the men worked rapidly and skillfully over Aunt Hattie, whose eyes brightened when she saw her neighbor-friend.

Only for a moment did Mrs. Stonington stay in the room; long enough only for dear Aunt Hattie to know she was there; long enough to convey her silent message of sincere love and care and concern over the other one's plight.

She hurried out into the kitchen to see what needed straightened up or taken care of, if anything, and found things in Aunt Hattie's usual "tip-top" order and shape. Then she went into the sitting room and closed all the windows, locking each as she shut it. She did the same in each of the other small rooms. Then she seated herself on the sofa in the sitting room and waited. Aunt Hattie would want her beloved Bible going with her, she knew. So she picked up the much-read Book and drew it tenderly and lovingly to her breast.

How many times had it been read through? she wondered, fingering its pages gently and carefully. More often, no doubt, than even Aunt Hattie could recall or remember. To her, such things meant little; the main thing was to read it through. Not once, nor twice, but over and over again and again, until the Holy Word became a living, quickening, all-empowering, glorious part of you.

She opened the sacred Book at random and saw some writing in its margin. "Praise God!" she read. "Today God fulfilled this promise; He answered my prayer: The exact amount of money arrived for my mission pledge!"

Turning the page, she found another notation:

"Today I touched Heaven for Alyssa! On the authority of this promise, God is going to remove Charles out of her life."

Mrs. Stonington drew her breath in quick-like; the date and month recorded in the Bible's margin, with an arrow pointing to the promise, was the very month and time when Charles began letting off writing consistently! She felt like shouting. Then, feeling almost like she was trespassing and prying into areas where she had no business, she closed the Bible reverently.

How many times had dear Aunt Hattie touched Heaven and laid hold upon a promise for her while she was in her state of utter shock and was almost totally "done-in" emotionally and physically over David's death? Mrs. Stonington wondered now, wiping the tears from her cheeks. She was sure that, should it ever be revealed or made known, the time would be without number. There again, Aunt Hattie didn't believe in "numbering," as she called it, when God had answered a prayer, or prayers, for her. She was not one who placed emphasis on self nor anything she could do or had done. No indeed! Always, it was God who was magnified, uplifted and glorified.

The same was true in her giving; and she gave much, and consistently. Yes, her little traveled far and wide, as well as in her own church and in her community. Especially among the poor and needy, those whose circumstances were worse off than hers. Oh, how she delighted in giving and doing! With never a mention of what she had done, nor to whom. She made it a practice to give lovingly, cheerfully, and as unto Christ, and then to forget what she had done. Aunt Hattie was a great woman; a truly great woman. If her time had come to go Home, there would be one less intercessor in the world, and the world would be the poorer for it.

The thought that this might well be the beginning of the end for Aunt Hattie, sent a shower of tears from Mrs. Stonington's eyes. She buried her face in the dear woman's Bible and wept.

Chapter 6

Mrs. Stonington and Alyssa waited anxiously in the hospital waiting room as doctors and nurses worked over Aunt Hattie, whose conditioned worsened considerably during the ride from her home to the city hospital some distance away.

"What changes a day can bring forth!" Alyssa exclaimed sadly to her mother as they waited. "Our day was so very tranquil and peaceful until this happened. We were enjoying a beautiful late summer work day until the

phone call. In a moment's time, everything is changed. Oh, I'm so glad I know the Lord and have Him to lean upon!"

"This is the Christian's anchor, honey; Christ, and only Christ," the mother replied, "James, in his epistle, said, '. . . ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.' Life is brief and short at the longest. It's such a joy to know that if Aunt Hattie passes on she'll be in Heaven. We know where she will be, Alyssa. And we'll have a double benefit; we'll not only find comfort in knowing where she is but we know that we shall be with her again some day. David, in the Psalms, said, 'My times are in thy hands.' So, whether our dear Aunt Hattie lives or dies we know that she belongs to Jesus."

"I'll miss her so!" Alyssa exclaimed tearfully. "But God is too wise and good to do anything but what is for her best. And I don't know if I could stand to see her suffer. . . ."

"God's grace is always all sufficient for each and every thing we face and encounter, Alyssa. And now, we dare not cross any of these glum-appearing bridges until we must, then God will furnish both the grace and the strength for our day. Aunt Hattie is being helped and held and supported by those wonderfully strong and gentle Hands. And before I forget it, I called Mr. Ainsley before leaving home, and asked if he or Steve could please take care of Harmony for us, and milk her and feed her. So you must not worry over our faithful Harmony. Mr. Ainsley's a good man."

"Oh, thank you, Mother!" Alyssa exclaimed. "I was wondering just how I could manage. Now I can stay here. I really feel we're both needed. It will mean so very much to Aunt Hattie."

The two lapsed into silence, praying as they waited. People came and went; the hands of the clock moved from the half-hour to an hour; then two. A young mother with a small child paced the floor restlessly. She, no doubt, was going through the trauma and the anxiety of waiting; waiting for the doctor's report on her loved one's condition.

Alyssa watched the mother, then she got to her feet and walked over to where she now stood, having finally stopped pacing, and was staring out through the large windows. Tear drops shimmered in her eyes.

"Excuse me," Alyssa said softly, "but would you like for me to hold your little girl for a while? You look tired. I'm Alyssa Stonington," she said by way of introduction.

"No, thank you. I really appreciate your kindness, though. This is my sister's child; I'm not married. My sister's having serious surgery. I told her I'd keep Melissa here in the hospital with me. This was how she wanted it. How could I refuse her? Even though I think Melissa would have been better off staying in one of our relatives' homes. Sis said she wanted her here so she could see her when she started coming out from under the anesthetic."

"Will this be permitted?" Alyssa said.

"She asked her doctor; he said she could. This is her second surgery for cancer." And the young woman broke down sobbing. "It seems like a horrible nightmare instead of a reality," she cried. "But when I see what this horrible disease has done to my lovely sister and how radically it has changed her plans, I'm made aware of just how very real it is. And what will Melissa do if anything happens. . .! Oh, I don't dare to dwell on it; it nearly drives me crazy sometimes. She doesn't deserve this! Why did it have to happen to her? She is such a good person. . . ."

"I can't answer why your sister is having to go through this," Alyssa answered softly, "but one thing I know, and that is that God's ways are higher than man's ways. He promises grace sufficient for each and every trial. He wants to carry your burden. I know you must be hurting dreadfully."

"I am. But please don't tell me how good God is; where has He been, in my sister's case? Why must she suffer like she is? It's not fair. I . . . I'm afraid I'm bitter. And why not?"

Sensing that anything else she might say would be futile, Alyssa said kindly, "I'll be praying for you. If I can help you in any way, please let me know. I want to help. I really do. I hurt for you." Then she turned and walked back to her mother and sat down.

"Waiting for a doctor's report can be quite 'wearing' on one's physical being," Mrs. Stonington commented to her daughter.

"And especially so when one's sister is having her second surgery for cancer," Alyssa replied. 'That dear young woman doing all that pacing back and forth is nearly wild with fear and bitterness over her sister's condition. How I wish I could help her and pray with her. But she's in no condition for much of anything fight now."

"We can pray, Alyssa. Prayer is like a lever that sets things in action, or motion, and makes things happen. It is one of the most powerful and wonderful forces the Christian has."

"And so many use it so little!" Alyssa exclaimed, as a doctor crossed the room and came their way. "Mrs. Stonington," the doctor called.

Alyssa and her mother got to their feet. The doctor came over and sat on the arm of the sofa. "I'm Doctor Ward," he said by way of introduction. "Hattie's in rather serious condition. We had to operate on that broken hip. Her age is against her."

"Did she have a stroke?" Mrs. Stonington asked.

"A slight one, yes. It affected her speech somewhat."

"Is that what caused her to fall?" Mrs. Stonington wanted to know.

"No doubt. Now, if complications don't set in, there's a fair chance that she will recover. But, again, like I just stated, her age is a big factor to be taken into consideration. She will be heavily sedated for many hours yet. So my advice to you is, go home, get a good night's rest and come back tomorrow. There's nothing you can do here to help her. The nurses will take good care of her. She's in the recovery room now and will be taken into the intensive care unit from there. It's going to be a long, hard pull for her "

He got to his feet and strode out of the room, his sentence trailing like a staggering, struggling kite behind him.

The two looked at each other in silence. Tears started in Alyssa's eyes, then fell to the floor. "Oh, Mother!" she cried. "I love her so."

"We both do, honey. But God's will and His way are better by far than ours. Keep this foremost in your mind. He loves Aunt Hattie with an

everlasting love and, loving her thus, He is looking down upon her with tender concern and care. All that has happened to her has been with His permissive will. He is too wise to do anything that is not for our good and His glory."

"I know," Alyssa answered brokenly. "And I do want only God's will to be done for Aunt Hattie; but I shall miss her so dreadfully."

"I think we'd better take the doctor's advice and go home, Alyssa. There's nothing we can do here."

With eyes that were filled with grief, Alyssa looked up at her mother. "Please, may I stay here?" she asked. "Aunt Hattie may need one of us. She has no one else. I . . . I . . . would feel better, knowing that if she did need us or want us, one of us was here."

"You are right, dear. I'll be going home; you go up into the waiting room outside of the intensive care unit. They have comfortable chairs and sofas in there. I want you to promise me that you will rest. You've come through a pretty hard time yourself and you can't afford to lose too much sleep and rest right now."

"I marvel at God's help: He has healed the hurt and eased the pain marvelously, Mother. But I hate for you to drive home alone. Why don't you stay in the motel across the street? The hospital owns it, and I hear that the rates are extremely modest. It's here for people with circumstances such as ours are with Aunt Hattie. I'd feel better knowing you were nearby if we were needed. But you do what you think is best; I didn't mean to tell you what to do, dear Mother."

"Of course you didn't, honey; and since our neighbor is going to be looking after Harmony and the chickens, maybe I will stay. I'd feel greatly hurt if Aunt Hattie should rally and call for me and I wouldn't be here. Are you sure you want to stay here, Alyssa? We could both get a good night's sleep in the motel room."

"I'll feel better staying here, Mother. And if anything happens, I'll get in touch with you."

"Just remember, dear, the darkest hour is just before the dawn; after darkness, comes the dawn. God sees and knows how much we can bear. . . ."

"Thanks, Mother. I love you so much."

Chapter 7

Alyssa took the elevator up to the fifth floor and hurried into the waiting room close by the Intensive Care Unit. How very still and quiet it was! Lights burned dimly on night stands beside two comfortable sofas and three large overstuffed chairs. The sofas looked inviting; she was beginning to feel the fatigue and the weariness in her body as it washed over her. She dropped into one of the chairs and leaned back against the soft cushions, closing her eyes and praying for a miracle from God for Aunt Hattie.

Life could be so very complex, she thought, and it could throw curves to one which looked totally and absolutely unfair, by life's standards. Aunt Hattie, for instance and as an example: The dear woman had been a doer of good all of her life. Converted as a small child and sanctified shortly thereafter, she had lived her life in complete and absolute surrender and abandonment to Christ, never once going out into deep sin of any kind. True, she had been born in sin and was by nature a sinner; but when she was converted, and filled with the Holy Spirit, she was changed instantly and immediately from a sinner to a Christian. From that moment on, her life was lived only for Jesus.

Aunt Hattie had frequently told her, Alyssa, about her early-in-life conversion and her subsequent infilling of the Holy Spirit. How she had enjoyed listening to Aunt Hattie's vivid account of the beautiful and radical change which took place in her heart! It was the theme of her life, she said; Jesus, and His power to save and to sanctify.

For years and years, Aunt Hattie walked the by-lanes and country roads near her home, going from house to house passing out tracts and telling those who would listen that Jesus Christ had power to set them free from sin's bondage and could fill their heart with joy and constant peace. Many heeded her call to come to Christ and were made new creatures in Christ Jesus; others mocked, jeered, snickered and made light of her and her message and slammed the door in her face. Was she discouraged or

disheartened? Not Aunt Hattie! She continued doing what she felt was her calling; sowing the seed by witnessing, passing out the tracts and weeping and praying for the lost in her community until failing health made it impossible for her to do so. Then her ministry turned into one of praying and fasting for the lost and the needy.

She planted her garden each spring, a thing of beauty indeed as the seeds germinated and came up, growing into lush greenery and, ultimately, into fruits and vegetables of their kind. Her composted soil was rich in nutrients and harbored few destructive insects. She believed in taking care of the soil by building it up with natural fertilizers and composted materials, knowing that the body-building vitamins and nutrients from the soil would be transferred into the vegetables and fruits which she was growing. This was a necessary thing, she maintained, since a great amount of her harvest was distributed among and given to the poor. "Their little ones need vitamin-filled fruits and vegetables," she would often say.

Alyssa took a tissue and wiped the tears as she recalled the unselfishly-lived life of the little-known gentle woman known as Aunt Hattie. It seemed unfair, if one looked at it from the world's standards, that this soft-spoken, do-nothing-but-good woman should be lying now between life and death, lingering on the border between the earthly and the Heavenly. Perhaps, even at this very moment, she might be more into the "river's" crossing than she, Alyssa, was aware of.

The thought sent a torrent of fresh tears coursing down the young woman's cheeks. Silently, she slipped off the chair and dropped to the floor on her knees. She had to pray! And why not? she was all alone. Visiting hours were long since over and the hospital seemed to have settled down to a quiet time. True, the night duty nurses were busy as ever, but the corridors and hallways were emptied, for the most part, of people.

Quietly, she poured out her fears and apprehensions over Aunt Hattie to God, asking only for His will to be done. When she arose, some time later, her heart felt calm and at rest. Her God would do what was best. This fact was fixed firmly and confidently in her heart. It was a blessed thought.

She eased back in the reclining chair, propped her feet up on the hassock in front of the chair and closed her eyes. She was tired, so very tired. Perhaps circumstances would all have changed during the night.

Things generally appear more frightening and ominous at night than during the day, she realized as she relaxed.

She must have fallen asleep, for she awakened suddenly from a fearful dream in which she was sobbing uncontrollably. She sat up with a start and opened her eyes, saying over and over, "No! No! Please, dear Lord, no!"

"Are you all right? May I help you? Please stop crying," a strong male voice said close to her ear. "What happened?" he questioned.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Forgive me, please. I . . . I had a . . . a dream about Aunt Hattie." And again Alyssa broke out sobbing.

The young man reached down and lightly touched her shoulder with his hand. "May I pray for you?" he asked. "There is comfort at the throne of grace."

With tears brimming her eyes, Alyssa asked, "Are . . . you a . . . a doctor? Or . . . or a minister, perhaps?" Smiling, the young man said, "I'm neither; I'm a born again, sanctified wholly child of Heaven's King. By name, I'm Andrew Paul Matheny."

"Oh, I'm so glad to know you know the Lord!" Alyssa exclaimed, leaning forward in the chair. "I'm Alyssa Ann Stonington. Please, do pray for me. I need it right now, desperately. I . . . I dreamed Aunt Hattie died. I know God is able to help her. I dot"

With his hand still resting lightly on Alyssa's shoulder, Andrew began to pray. What a prayer! To Alyssa, it was evident that he knew, intimately, the One whom he was addressing and to whom he was talking. She sensed the moment he made contact with the Throne; the Spirit bore witness with her spirit; the fearful burden, caused by the dream, lifted instantly and was removed.

"Oh, praise the Lord!" she cried happily and joyfully. "The Lord just now lifted my heavy burden. Thank you for praying for me. I don't know what people do who don't know the Lord! He is so good! So very good!"

Wiping tears from his eyes, Andrew sat in a chair near Alyssa's. "I knew you were a Christian the minute I laid eyes on you," he said. "A real Christian has something about him, or her, that cannot be hid."

"Thank you," Alyssa said shyly and softly. "Have you been here very long?"

"For over an hour. You seemed to be having a fine nap until that dream spoiled it."

"I was quite tired; Mother and I did a lot of work at home before coming to the hospital. It's amazing how drastically and radically a phone call can change an ordinarily beautiful day into one of anxiety and fear. Especially when the call comes from someone who's very dear to you and you can scarcely understand her garbled sounding speech."

"You love your aunt greatly; this is obvious by your speech and by your attitude. She must be a wonderful person."

"Oh, she is, Mr. Matheny! Aunt Hattie's a saint if there ever was one. She's in a poor state physically just now but her soul's ready for Heaven."

"And isn't it sad the way we mortals try to hold them here when they're so anxious to depart and see the One who redeemed them and saved them from their sins? In a way, it's selfish of us. We know where they'll be, and with whom, when they pass on; but we are so loathe to have them go. And all this, when we know they'll be free forever from pain and suffering and from heartaches and tears! God forgive us!" Andrew exclaimed tearfully. "Forgive me!" he added emphatically, pressing his hands to his eyes that were now overflowing with tears.

"You must have someone very dear to you in there, too," Alyssa remarked, pointing toward the ICU ward a short distance from the waiting room in which they were sitting.

"I do. Oh, I do!" Andrew exclaimed. "And she's such a patient little sufferer, too."

"Is . . . is it your mother?" Alyssa asked ever so softly, almost reverently

"No. No, it isn't; my mother and father aren't able to be here. I wish, for her sake, they could! But missionaries on far-flung fields can't get into a car and 'drive over' when there is a crisis. They wait anxiously for news from the homeland regarding their loved one's physical condition: my sister, in this case; their oldest daughter."

"Does she know the Lord?"

Andrew wiped the tears away. His face became radiant. "I wish everybody was as ready for Heaven as my sister is!" he remarked joyously. "Especially do I wish that our other sister, Beverly, knew the Lord the way Evelyn knows Him! I'm teaching in a Bible school, so I couldn't be here in time to see my sister before she went up for surgery, her second one in less than a year's time. But as soon as I got here this evening I went into the unit to see her and to have prayer with her. It was like walking into the presence of the Lord. She was praising the Lord and telling me how much He meant to her. She said she wants to go Home, that she's not only ready but is longing to go. The only thing that gives her a bit of distress at leaving, she said, is Melissa. Melissa's her only child. She loves her dearly and deeply."

"Melissa!" And now Alyssa was sitting on the edge of her chair. "I know Melissa. I saw her this morning. Your sister had cancer surgery."

"Why, yes, she did. Who told you? How did you know?" Andrew asked anxiously.

"Your sister. Beverly, did you say her name was? She was pacing the floor, holding the child. I offered to help her with the little girl. And... and I wanted to have prayer with her, but knew that, at the moment, I dare not ask."

"Did she allow you to do that?" Andrew was incredulous.

"No, as a matter of fact, she didn't. She seemed to be filled with bitterness toward God for allowing her sister . . . your sister . . . to have cancer."

Andrew dropped his face in the palms of his hands and wept. "Beverly's always been so different," he admitted in a voice quivering with emotion. "We have all been carrying such a heavy burden for her and her lost soul. This is

an added burden on our parents. And Evelyn told me only this night again, as I spent those precious-allowed five minutes with her, that if this surgery will bring Beverly to God, she's only too happy to suffer and endure the pain."

"She must be a wonderful person," Alyssa replied.

"A saint, like your Aunt Hattie," came Andrew's immediate response.

Chapter 8

The night wore on. Alyssa and Andrew, nodding, dozing, sleeping and talking in the intensive care unit's waiting room, found comfort in each other's presence. For five minutes each hour, Andrew visited with his sister, encouraging her and praying with her and for her.

"Will you be here long?" Alyssa asked on one of his visits back from the unit with his sister. "Away from your teaching position, I mean?"

"They told me to stay as long as it was necessary. From the looks of things, it may be quite some time. But this will be good for my brother-in-law, who really needs me right now. I persuaded him to stay home and get some rest tonight. This has been a hard day on Bud. He and my sister are so much in love. It's heart-rending to see how he is suffering. If it wasn't for the Lord and His helping hand, I don't believe Bud could hold up under it. God gave my sister a wonderful husband. They met on the mission field, where his parents and ours were laboring together. In fact, Bud and Evelyn had applied to go as missionaries themselves when Evelyn's cancer was discovered."

Alyssa gasped. "Oh, no!" she cried, feeling almost as though she knew those two.

"It's true," Andrew attested sadly. "Their hopes were shattered when they got the doctor's reports. Their hearts will always be on the field, where they were raised. To each of us who were missionary children, I guess our parents' chosen field, chosen for them by God, will always be home. I know I still refer to it as home."

"Do you ever long to go back?" Alyssa asked.

"All the time. And one of these days, God willing, I'm going back. There is such a great work to do over there and so few to do it. My parents, bless them! aren't as young as they once were; they need help . . . young help, with strong bodies, Spirit-filled lives and willing hands to work. I am teaching so I can pay off my school bills and, in the meantime, I am getting the experience I'll need to teach in the mission school."

"That's wonderful," Alyssa replied. "One wonders why this had to happen to your sister, when they were wanting to go and labor for the Lord abroad. This is one of the things, I would think, now that you mentioned about them wanting to go as missionaries, which has caused your younger sister to become bitter. She seemed to be extremely fond of her older sister."

"Oh, it is, indeed, part of Beverly's trouble. But in my opinion, I'm wondering if she herself isn't fighting the call to go back. She's extremely talented. She could be a tremendous blessing on the field if she'd fully surrender herself to God. Coming back to the States for more education was anything but uplifting to Beverly. Spiritually, I mean. Scholastically, she excelled; spiritually, she declined."

"Has she ever known the Lord?"

"When she was a child, yes. She was a true-born missionary those days, working and laboring earnestly to bring everyone to Christ whom she possibly could. Beverly always had new people in church for our father to preach to. And many of those people got gloriously converted."

Alyssa sat in awe, listening. "She'll never be happy with anything less," she told Andrew. "Her heart must feel so lonely and bereft without the Lord's wonderful presence. She is bound to be miserable and unhappy."

"That she is. It's most obvious and so evident. And now, with Evelyn's serious physical condition, well, she's nearly beside herself with worry and fear. My sisters were extremely close to each other all of their lives. Each looked out for the other. If anything were to happen to Evelyn I don't know what would become of Beverly."

"It may take this to draw her back to the Lord," Alyssa remarked thoughtfully.

"I've thought of that many times. And truthfully, within my heart, I can't help but wonder if this isn't God's way of getting to her; of softening and melting her heart. She's hurting like you wouldn't believe it, so my brother-in-law told me. And knowing my sister, I'm sure he spoke the truth. My heart bleeds for her. And with my parents on the mission field and not here to see how far she has fallen, I feel so responsible for her. I guess it's because I'm her brother, and two years older than she."

"I'm sure it would be wonderful to have a brother who knew God looking out for you and caring for you," Alyssa answered softly.

"I gather that you don't have any brothers," Andrew said.

"No, I don't. And I'm sure I missed a lot by not having at least one."

"Sometimes brothers can be quite 'a pain in the neck,' so I've heard some girls proclaim who have brothers," Andrew replied with a grin on his face.

"I'm sure the same could be said of some girls, Andrew. But I believe that in a home where Christ is exalted and lifted up, and where the father and mother love each other and their children and rule the house according to Biblical principles and injunctions, the children will adjust to each other and get along. I'm certainly not an authority on this, as you may well have noticed and suspected, nor can I say this by actual experience since I am an only child. But I know several homes where there are large families, both boys and girls in each family, and they get along very well with each other. But, like I stated earlier, Christ is the head of these families, and in each case the father exercises his God-appointed authority and headship. Consequently, they respect and love not only their father but the other members of the family as well."

"I know what you're saying. And I was only teasing about the 'pain in the neck' part. I thought you needed something a bit on the lighter side; your face had a worried look upon it."

"I'm sorry; I know it isn't pleasing to God to be so anxious over Aunt Hattie. And I try not to be; I really do. Then when I think that she may never come out of this, and that she may never again live in her little cottage home so very near to us, well, I get all sick feeling inside. She's always been there,

in each and every emergency and during some real crisis times for Mother and me."

"Is your father not living?"

"No, he isn't. He passed away suddenly four years ago. And we had no inkling he was ill, even. From all standards and by all appearances, he was a very healthy man. Only that morning he told Mother and me, at the breakfast table, how well and good he felt. You can imagine our utter shock when his foreman called Mother and said he was dead. Aunt Hattie came in and, in her quiet but efficient and loving way, she took over, doing the things which we couldn't do. Like I said, she was with us in every emergency and stood by in times of crisis and heartache and heartbreak. Her very presence was a constant bulwark of strength to Mother and to me."

"You are fortunate to have a relative like that." "She isn't a relative," Alyssa stated by way of correction. "Not in the biological sense or meaning of the word. But she is as close, if not closer, to me as an aunt or very dear relative ever could or would be."

"She's been a real God-send, I can see," Andrew stated, recalling some of his own Spirit-filled relatives. "But Alyssa, death is an appointment scheduled for each of us, as you know from the scriptures. Sooner or later, your beloved Aunt Hattie will be having her appointment, same as you and I will. If this is God's time to gather her unto Himself, release her, please. God knows what's best for her and for you."

Alyssa felt a lump come into her throat; she had a sudden, severe catch in her heart, like someone, or something, was twisting and wringing it into a tight little knot that was almost choking the breath out of her. She was sure she had yielded her will to God's will; sure she had surrendered her desires and wishes regarding Aunt Hattie completely over to what her Lord and Savior deemed best and wisest to do. But Andrew's statements had gone like a knife to her heart, true though each was.

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed uncontrollably. It was so hard to give someone whom you loved, up. Especially to death; it was so final! "Thy will, oh God! Thy will!" she cried.

Chapter 9

When Alyssa's sobbing subsided and she opened her eyes, she saw Andrew kneeling beside her chair. He was praying for her; praying for God to give her the necessary strength for whatever may happen. He was weeping, she saw. Suddenly she found herself comparing Charles to Andrew, and in the comparison Charles didn't score even one point. Her comparison was not a romantic comparison for she had prayed and fasted and waited upon God until all her love for him had vanished and was gone, especially when she learned of his marriage, through his letter. It was like she was released. God worked a miracle for her, through much prayer and fasting and through His Word.

Alyssa felt a tenderness engulf her as she listened to Andrew's impassioned prayer for her strength; her comfort. Here was someone who, though he himself was experiencing anxiety in the possible death of someone close and dear and near to him, was pleading to God for her to "have and experience and exemplify the all-sufficient grace of a loving God in the time of crisis."

Her silent prayer joined his audible one. It reminded her of the times when her father and mother and she had had their family devotions together. How she missed her father's strong male headship! Her mother missed it, too, she knew. Always, it had been her father who took care of the business matters and made the decisions for them. She and her mother had felt so secure and safe in his wisdom, his guidance, and his wise counsel, knowing full well that before anything was said or done or any decision made, he had sought the mind of God on the matter.

How kind and good her father was! Alyssa thought now. He never acted hastily nor quickly on important matters but waited patiently upon God for the answer or the solution. And when he spoke his words were anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit; they were full of grace and wisdom and gentleness. Even when he had to take his stand on certain matters, he was never harsh nor unkind, but was, instead, loving and kind but solidly and sweetly firm. And now, here was Andrew, who reminded her in so many ways of her father.

She looked at him again, weeping and praying for her. Strange, she thought, how they had met. They hadn't known each other until each had this crisis time, yet it had seemed like they had always known each other. There was no strain between them; each talked the same heavenly language and

each was concerned about the same spiritual things. Communication was easy and open between them. But then, she thought, this was the way it was with truly consecrated and fully dedicated Christians: there were no walls and barriers; their language and their concerns and desires were the same. Everything said or done pointed to Christ. Always to Christ.

Andrew's face was shining when he got up from his knees. "God's going to see you through this, Alyssa!" he declared emphatically.

"Thank you most kindly, Andrew, for praying for me. I should be praying for you and your sisters instead of breaking down over my own grief, which, in comparison, is nothing toward what you must be feeling and experiencing. Especially since your parents can't be here!"

Wiping the tears off his cheeks, Andrew said, "I'm amazed at the grace God has been giving me for this ordeal. I really am. It's like He keeps pouring it into my being. And while I'm concerned for my dear sister and her family, I'm not worried. Bud and I prayed together before I came up here, and what a glorious time we had with the Lord! Bud still feels they'll be going to the mission field, in due time. And who am I to say they won't! God is still able to perform miracles today. But we must keep our hands off and allow Him to work in His way and in His time. My hands are completely off Evelyn's condition. By that I mean that I'm not telling God what to do, nor such like things. My heart keeps saying one big, hearty, amen to anything He chooses to do or not to do. Evelyn belongs to Him; she's His child: He will do nothing except what is for the best."

"Oh, Andrew, that's so beautiful! So very beautifully stated."

"That, little Alyssa, is submission. Total submission to God's sovereign will."

"Yes. Yes, it is. Oh, thank you, Andrew. God sent you here for me. To help me. This makes it so much easier for me. What you have just said, I mean. And even though I'll miss dear Aunt Hattie dreadfully when the Lord calls her Home, I see now that it may not be God's will to heal her. She'd be most unhappy if she felt she was a burden on anyone. She was not able to move very much, I noticed when I got there, and her speech was all garbled sounding. It was so different from the dear little Aunt Hattie whom I have always known. She's been such a very active, independent soul. And there

she lay on the floor, unable to move. She looked so pitifully helpless that I wanted to cry. I knew, though, that I must not move her lest I injure her more. So I called for an ambulance, and they soon discovered that the fall had broken her hip. The doctor told Mother and me that she's critical. Oh, Andrew, I want God's will to be done for her. Only God's will! She wouldn't want to be an invalid for the rest of her life, even though she knows Mother and I will take care of her until she crosses over."

"That's what God wants, Alyssa, for us to turn these whom we love so dearly over to Him in complete trust and confidence."

"I have. Praise the Lord, I have! I have released her, like you said to do, and my heart feels perfectly calm and at rest with whatever He chooses to do. I honestly and truly meant it each time I said, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' But this time it is completely settled. Your prayer is answered. Now I mean to join you and Evelyn for Beverly's salvation. 'If two of you agree. . . .' I believe this."

"So do I; it is God's Word. We will believe, or 'agree,' together. And now I think it's time for another little visit with my sister. . . ."

"The providences of God are indeed mysterious to man, but they work out His purposes and plans in awesome and remarkable ways," Mrs. Stonington said to her daughter as they left the hospital together the evening Aunt Hattie died.

"What is so amazing to me, Mother," Alyssa exclaimed, "is God's perfect timing and His gentle moving! Beverly rarely came up to see her sister. Andrew said she couldn't stand the sight of all those tubes and 'hoses,' as she phrased it, on her sister. And, had Aunt Hattie crossed over two nights ago, like the doctors and nurses said they felt she would, we would not have been here to get to talk to Beverly. So the dear Lord prolonged Aunt Hattie's earth-stay so we'd be here. Oh, God is so wonderful! Praise His name! Beverly, a truly born again Christian!"

"I am so proud of you, Alyssa; not carnally proud, but thankfully proud: it was because of you, and your calm and totally resigned attitude in the very midst of death, that helped Beverly to realize just how much and how badly she needed the Lord. She said you and Andrew had an 'anchor' to hold you steady. And being young, she could readily and easily relate to you. She

said, 'Mrs. Stonington, by God's grace and help, I'm going to mind God whatever it may cost me. I'm ready to go over to the field and help my parents. I should have been over there all along. But I wanted to make money. Well, I made it but it didn't satisfy me one bit. And when my dear sister was diagnosed as having cancer, I thought I'd die.' "

"Oh, Mother, do you mean it? Is Beverly going over to the mission field?" Alyssa asked, interrupting in her excitement and joy.

"That's what she told me, dear. And she also said that it was her sister's grave illness which really started her to thinking. She said she was so miserable with conviction that she felt she couldn't stand it at times. When you spoke to her on the day of Evelyn's surgery, in the waiting room, it was like adding fuel to the fire, she said."

"Praise God for answering prayer! Andrew said Bud feels that he and his family will be going over to the mission field in due time. And I believe they will. Especially now that Beverly's saved. I truly feel it took Evelyn's sickness to stir Beverly and to shake her and awaken her to her need of salvation."

"In the three and a-half weeks we've been here in the hospital, I can see a big change in Evelyn's physical condition. She has a long way to go yet, but she's on the mend. You and Andrew are quite fond of each other, aren't you, Alyssa?" Mrs. Stonington asked in her sweet way.

"Yes, we are, Mother. Very fond of each other. Without a doubt, God had this all timed so we could meet. We love each other very deeply. However, we don't intend to move hastily. We will stay in touch with each other by letter and an occasional phone call, Andrew says, until he is finished with his teaching assignment and has his college bills all paid."

"I'll be gaining a wonderful son, Alyssa. From the moment I met him, I sensed a spiritual kinship with Andrew. And being so closely tied together in the hospital only served to reinforce and confirm my feelings. That whole family is pretty wonderful, honey. They're dedicated to Christ. And now that Beverly's in the fold it will make a completely whole family; spiritually whole, I mean. She said she was going to find a quiet room somewhere and seek until she was wholly sanctified. Tonight yet!"

"Oh, Mother, that's wonderful! Tonight there is much joy and rejoicing going on in Heaven; a saint joined those happy, joyous ranks inside the City and a sinner found her way back into the Good Shepherd's fold! Oh, how brightly shines the Light on my pathway Home! How victorious it makes the death of the saint! One has laid her armor down; another has just buckled hers on!"

"And suddenly, the darkness is ended; the clouds are lifted, and then comes the dawn!" Mrs. Stonington exclaimed jubilantly, smiling down at her daughter as they walked to the car in the parking lot.

The End