The loud, insistent ring of the alarm clock aroused Delayne to wakefulness. Without opening her eyes, she reached out to the night stand beside the bed and pushed the button off. She would doze for only a little while, she decided, then she would get up and have her devotions. Maybe she could pick up where her dream was so pleasant when the alarm rang its shrill awakening sound. She hoped she could. The bed was so comfortable and toasty warm; she would enjoy its comfort only a while longer, then she would get up.
Warm fingers of sunlight were streaming in through the window when she finally opened her eyes. With a start, she sat up in bed. A glance at the clock told her she had only a short while to get ready for the part-time job to which she had been recently hired. She must hurry or she would be late, and that would never do.

Mrs. Flarity was a stickler for punctuality. Wasn't that why the other young woman, Maureen Bock, had lost the part-time job and she, Delayne, had been hired? Indeed it was. Mrs. Flarity had told her so. "I will expect you to be punctual," the store owner had told Delayne. "I am fair with my employees, and pay them good wages when they abide by my rules and do what I expect them to do. My father, who owned this store before I took it over, ran the business in an honest and upright manner. I do the same. But there are some do's and there are some don'ts for my employees. . . ."

Mrs. Flarity had gone on to explain what she meant and she, Delayne, knew what was expected of her, and what she could expect. Especially if she failed to abide by the owner's policy of the old but modernized store, which did a great volume of business.

Delayne straightened the bed covers and pulled the spread up over the pillows in a neat way, then she dashed into the bathroom for a quick shower before dressing for work. She wished she hadn't told her mother that she needn't bother waking her, that she would begin relying upon her newly-acquired alarm clock to do the job. She wouldn't be in such a tizzy to get ready for work if her mother were still getting her up; her mother insisted, always, that she get out of bed with the first call.

She brushed and combed her long hair, working feverishly to get it done up right on her head. She seemed to be all thumbs; so clumsy. She took it down and repeated the brushing and combing process again, glancing quickly at the clock.

"You'll be late! You'll be late!" the ticking clock seemed to accuse. "I did my part! I did my part. . . ."

Delayne tucked the last strands of hair in, then rushed downstairs.

"Better stop long enough to get your breath," her mother teased.
"Oh, Mom! I thought I told you to sleep in today. I didn't realize you were up."

"I couldn't let you go to work without breakfast, my dear. How do you want your eggs? Sunny-side up okay?"

"I'm sorry, Mother, but I don't have time for breakfast this morning. Look at the clock!"

"Didn't you set your alarm, dear?"

"I set it."

"Didn't it go off?"

"Did it ever! It woke me out of a very pleasant dream. I only meant to doze a while in the comfort of those toasty-warm blankets. And look what it has brought me to; no time for my devotions and no time for breakfast. I must run, or I'll be late for work, and that would be a catastrophe. For me, I mean. I love what I'm doing."

"Take this toast and eat it on the way, Delayne. I'll even put a slice of cheese on it for you. You need something in your stomach. It's hard to be at one's best when the stomach is empty and growling for food. Now let me have prayer with you. . . ."

"I'll be late for work, Mother."

"Which is the most important to you, dear, God, or your job?"

Delayne's cheeks flushed in shame and condemnation.

"Let's pray, Mother," she said softly. Tears glistened in her eyes.

Mrs. Flarity glanced at the clock near the checkout counter at the front of the store as Delayne made her entrance through the heavy doors.

"I will expect you earlier next Saturday, Delayne," she said softly-kind but with firmness in her voice. "You have only three minutes to get yourself
composed and ready for when the store opens. Do you understand what I mean?" Her eyes probed Delayne's."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Thank you. I want you to do your best, Delayne. It's honorable to be punctual."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Delayne was in her department when the doors were opened and customers began to enter. She enjoyed her work. The children's clothing was so very beautiful and attractive, and the fabrics were so soft and cuddly feeling in some of the infants' garments and outfits, too.

She checked the racks to make sure the little garments on hangers were grouped properly according to size. Then she straightened some out-of-order boxes on a shelf and folded several towels and washcloths, putting them neatly back on the counter beneath the red sign marked clearly, Reduced for Quick Sale. Whatever didn't sell quickly was put on sale, selling, usually, within a few days.

Mrs. Flarity wanted her merchandise to sell. She was a careful and wise buyer and she was an excellent manager of the store, "moving" quickly those things which didn't sell well or fast enough to suit her. Consequently, the store always had items at a reduced rate. This well-known, well-established fact among the townspeople and the outlying areas kept a steady flow of customers coming into Babreys Department Store, her father's last name. Mrs. Flarity's also, before her marriage to Robert Flarity.

"I'm in a hurry," a young mother said, rushing over to Infants Wear and finding Delayne busy among the myriad items for the newborn.

"May I help you, please?" Delayne asked, stepping over beside her customer.

"Yes. I need this replaced," the woman said, shaking a tiny sweater set out of a rumpled bag. "The sweater has two holes in it. But please hurry; I can't wait long."
Delayne looked at the little blue sweater set. "These look like cigarette burns," she told her customer. "Our sweater sets like this are all boxed, so the burned-out holes were put there after you took the set home. Mrs. Flarity purchases only first quality sets and each set is carefully inspected before we receive it."

"Oh, so you're accusing me of putting these holes in the sweater, huh? Well, I'll have you to know that either you will give me a new set, or my money back in full, or I'll take this to my attorney."

Delayne felt frustrated. The woman had a nasty temper and an equally nasty disposition, as well. She didn't know what to do. She wished she could have a few minutes alone somewhere to talk the matter over with the Lord. Then she remembered that she hadn't even had time to commune properly with Him before she left for work. Her heart ached within her. If only she had heeded the alarm clock's call to her to get up! Oh, how much she needed the Lord's help; His presence and His guidance and wisdom throughout her busy days! But she had allowed her desire for a few extra minutes of sleep and rest to crowd out the most important of all times for her--her prayer and Bible reading time!

"Lord, please forgive me," she whispered softly. "I promise never to do this again, by Your grace. I need help now. How shall I deal with this problem? Please help me. Show me. Thank You. . . ."

"I told you, I am in a hurry; so why are you stalling?" the young woman asked. "Do I get a new set or a refund, or what?"

"One moment, please, Ma'am." Delayne pushed a button at a nearby counter. Mrs. Flarity answered.

"I need your help, please," Delayne told the store owner via the intercom.

Within a little while, Mrs. Flarity was in the department. At a single glance, she observed the woman who, by now, was irate and extremely impatient and, in a loud tone of voice, declared,

"I'll take the matter to my attorney. Give me the set."
"What is the problem?" Mrs. Flarity asked. Delayne placed the sweater down on the counter. "These holes; she says they were in the sweater when she got it home. . . . "Her sentence trailed meaningfully.

Mrs. Flarity held the little garment up. "These are cigarette burns," she stated in an impersonal sounding and matter-of-fact tone of voice. "We handle only first quality merchandise. These holes were put there by a careless person after the sweater left the store. Also, there are food stains down the front. However. . . ."

"Give it to me!" the young woman demanded, snatching the sweater out of Mrs. Flarity's hands and rushing away, declaring loudly, "I'll see my attorney about this."

Delayne was trembling with fright and fear. "Oh, I hope I haven't caused you any trouble!" she cried "I . . . I just didn't know what to do. Forgive me if I did the wrong thing. But I know that sweater didn't have holes in it when she bought it. They were cigarette burns."

"You did the right thing, Delayne. I was going to give her another set, however, since our policy has always been that of keeping our customers satisfied."

"Even when you know the facts?" Delayne questioned.

"Yes, even when we know the facts That is why I was so pointed with my statement; I wanted her to be aware of the fact that I knew why those holes were there and what had made them"

"But what if she sues you?"

"She won't. It was a ruse; a threat ruse, to frighten you into replacing it. Anybody could tell what made those holes. Now don't fret about it and no more worrying. She is not a regular customer or I would have recognized her. Our clientele, for the most part, are nice people."

The day wore on and Delayne was glad when the doors were finally closed for another Saturday. All day long she felt like she had deprived her soul of its much needed spiritual bread. She felt empty and dry. Worst of all, she was missing the closeness of her Wonderful Savior. How refreshingly
bright and joyous were those other days when He was closer and nearer than the air she breathed. But those were the days when she had given Him the very first hours of her new day. Oh, the sweetness of His presence as she communed and fellowshipped with Him in prayer and Bible reading and meditation. It was easy to do this when her mother's orders were that she must get out of bed with the very first call to do so.

She hurried home with a determined heart and a fixed purpose in mind: every morning, from here on out, she would get up with the first ring of the alarm clock. No more "dozing" and catching a few more winks. Never! Her life needed disciplining; a bringing-under . . to God.

She visited briefly with her mother when she arrived home, then she headed for her bedroom and closed the door. She hadn't given God the first-fruits of her morning, it was sadly true, but she would give Him time now. Indeed she would.

Tearfully, she opened her Bible, then dropped to the bedside on her knees, hugging the Word close to her bosom. And He Who had said, "Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh to thee," was there, waiting for her. In "quietness and confidence" was her strength.