She sat in the rocking chair on the porch, hands folded in her aproned lap, and watched the street for the mailman. Perhaps today she would receive a letter from Ken. Or maybe Mildred, his wife, would be so kind as to write.
Hope surged up inside her heart. Oh, hope was such a wonderful thing! It kept one going. Expecting. Believing.

She looked down at the small hands in her lap. Wrinkles crowned them now. Once they were beautiful hands to behold. Delicate, even, and dainty. Not any more. But they would have a story to tell if they could talk. What a story! Eighty-two years old, they were. What a lot of work they had done, those hands!

She lifted them upwards, out of the folds of the printed gingham apron, and looked at them, recalling the years now past. Happy years, every one of them, because she had surrendered her heart and life unreservedly -- in childhood's carefree days -- to the Author of eternal peace and joy and happiness and salvation. All her labors, the work of her hands, had been done in love. All of it!

Those hands, once lovely to look at and smooth and soft, made all the baby clothes for all four children. They even fashioned the long, white, soft dresses for the three little girls the winter when diphtheria snatched them ruthlessly and heartlessly from her arms and they were buried on the hillside near the church. Oh, the tears that were stitched, thread by thread, into each little dress! A broken heart, too. But the little ones were Home. They were safe. And happy.

Then, like one born out of season, Ken came into her husband's and her life. It was late in life, to be sure, but he was as welcome and as loved and wanted as were his three little sisters before him. With loving, gentle hands she made his clothes, stitching love into each little garment. How happy the three of them had always been together! They had laughed together, wept together, sang and prayed and read the Bible together. And always, her hands were busy, making, doing, or creating things for the pleasure and happiness of those so dear to her. There was joy in giving and in doing. A very special kind of joy.

They had watched their young son grow, her husband and she. Watched and worked with and prayed for him, teaching, teaching, line upon sacred line and precept upon precept, instilling in his heart and life the things of spiritual value and meaning and depth.
At an early age he had come to know the Lord in saving grace and sanctifying power. Their hearts were full, her husband's and hers, and when he left for Bible School between his eighteenth and nineteenth birthday their cup of joy overflowed. Perhaps God would call Ken into the ministry! Or the mission field, even!

His letters were fountains of praise, coming regularly each week of the year for two years. Then they slackened off, arriving only on a spasmodic basis.

They cried, her husband and she. Her weekly letters to him continued on with persistent and loving regularity, always assuring him of their fervent prayers and changeless, ceaseless love.

The year he would have graduated from Bible School her husband, Ken's father, died. He arrived home for the funeral with his bride of less than a month. Shocked over her husband's sudden Homegoing, the shock of her son's unannounced and kept-secret-from-his-parents wedding was the greater shock.

"I'm no longer in Bible School, Mother," he told her after the casket was lowered into the earth and the mounds of fresh dirt covered it. "I've been working for a promising corporation for almost seven months. That's how I met Mildred. I've had two promotions already, and my boss says a third is just at my fingertips. It's excellent pay, Mother. I'm sorry I haven't written you more frequently, but I stay so busy. I do love you. Mother. . . ."

He had given her his new address before departing, the day following the funeral, saying it would save him much time now, not having to go by the Bible School to pick up her letters. Also, he had added, he was glad that, finally, the well-kept secret of his months of working and of his marriage to Mildred were now known to her. He hadn't had the heart to tell them, he had said.

He left her with a sizable amount of money before departing and a promise to be more faithful in writing. And Mildred had called her "Mother," hugging her tightly and warmly to her.

The loneliness in the now-empty house was almost more than she could bear at times. But always, she had her Ever-abiding, True, Constant
and Faithful Friend. She spent hours in His presence, thanking Him for His constancy and His inexpressible peace and joy. He filled her lonely and long hours with His fullness, always giving her a song, if not on her lips, in her heart. Deeper and deeper she went, into His love. His presence. And always, she waited for the mailman.

Days flowed into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into years. There had been letters. A few. Scattered across the years, like jewels of rarity. Like sunshine coming into a lonely life. With each letter, few and far between though they were, hope sprang up like rain watering a wilted, thirsty plant: perhaps things would change now! Finally, the long-awaited-for letters would start coming on a regular basis, like when Ken was first in Bible School!

In the heat of summer and the crispness of autumn or the chill of early spring, she waited on the front porch for the mailman, hands folded patiently and prayerfully in her aproned lap, her eyes searching the block for the blue-garbed mail carrier.

"No mail today, Miss Sally," the mailman called out cheerfully, wanting more than anything else to "have a talk with that young man of Miss Sally's," as he told his wife upon his arrival home. "Sometimes I wish I didn't need to go by her house," he confided. "The sad look in her eyes will never be concealed nor hidden by the lovely smile on her face. I tell you, Janice, it breaks my heart the way that son neglects his mother. I suppose he's forgotten that the things a man sows he'll reap some day. Miss Sally and Mr. Henry were two of the best people ever to live in our town. They brought that young man up in the fear and the admonition of the Lord; and what does he do? Neglects her like it doesn't matter. But look out: reaping day's coming for Ken Cromwell!"

"Let's make up for his unconcern," Janice had replied. "I'll send a small gift by you, every now and then. It will never take the place of the letter she's looking for but it will help to brighten her day and it will bring a bit of cheer into her life."

And thus the small gifts had arrived, carried carefully in the mailman's bag and presented with tenderness and love to the little woman who was always waiting and watching for his arrival.
She heard his softly whistled tune before he came into view now and her heart rose in hope. Perhaps today! Perhaps today! the heartbeat seemed to say.

She got to her feet and walked stiffly to the porch railing, steadying herself against the post. "Please, Lord!" she prayed. "It's been so long since I heard from them."

"Mornin', Miss Sally," the mailman said, stepping up on the porch and smiling down upon her.

"Any letters today, Daniel?" she asked, holding more tightly to the post.

"Nothing, Miss Sally. But Janice sent you this," and he pulled a gaily-wrapped package from his pack and handed it to the little woman, whose knees felt like they would buckle beneath her before she reached the rocking chair.

"Why, thank you, Daniel, for bringing me another gift!" she exclaimed with a smile. "You and your wife are most kind to me," she added, walking toward the chair, with Daniel's hand steadying and supporting her all the way.

"I baked a peach cobbler this morning," she remarked, carefully removing the lovely ribbon from the box. "Still warm. You must have some, young man. I have fresh cream to go over it. . . ." She was smiling.

"You know my weakness, Miss Sally. And believe me, you won't have to tell me a second time to have some. Seems like I'm hungry as the proverbial bear by the time I reach your house. Now undo that box; I'm as anxious to see that thing as you are. Janice wouldn't so much as allow me a peek even. She was afraid I'd drop you a hint before it was finished. It was only before leaving today that she told me what she had made for you."

Miss Sally's eyes were bright with happy tears as she lifted the large, warm shawl from the box. "It's lovely!" she exclaimed with a catch in her voice. "So very lovely. God sent this," she added. "Tell Janice for me, please. Mine is worn out. Oh, do thank her for me, Daniel. It's so beautiful."

"And warm," Daniel added, lifting it gently to her shoulders and fitting it around her neck.
"God bless you, young man; you and your wonderful wife. And, again, thank you. Thank you! You must be God's special angels of comfort and cheer to me."

"And I know of no one who deserves special angels more than you, Miss Sally. You're a wonderful little lady. Why, I'll never forget what a wonderful Sunday school teacher you were. It's because of you that I'm a Christian today. And you know something? I'm trying to teach my class of boys the same way you taught us. I'm getting a bit old to be teaching such a young group -- even though you continue to address me as 'young man.'" And Daniel laughed, adding, "It sounds pleasant and nice. But my body is beginning to address me to its age; its years."

"You're still young, Daniel; wait till you're eighty-two. But come, while the cobbler's still warm."

The kitchen smelled sweetly fragrant of peaches and cinnamon, and of all places that Daniel preferred, none exceeded Miss Sally's kitchen. It was a haven of sorts to him: bright, cheerful and always neat and clean. How Miss Sally managed to keep her house in tip-top shape, order, and cleanliness was as much a mystery as ever to him.

"What is left," she told Daniel, "goes home with you for Janice."

"That's a nice part of your being near the end of my route," Daniel remarked. "I get to visit a bit, eat, and take home what's left. I'm a blest man, indeed. Instead of dogs snapping at my heels and tongues gossiping behind my back, I'm treated like a son. Like royalty. Thanks, Aunt Sally. You're truly one great and wonderful little woman, and Janice and I love you greatly. I owe my spiritual birth to you. To us, you are, now, and ever will be, special. So very special. God bless you, comfort you and cheer you."

She washed the few dishes which were dirtied, after watching till she couldn't see Daniel anymore, then she sat down in a chair and closed her eyes. She felt tired. So very tired. A bit chilly, too. She walked into the bedroom and got the beautiful, warm shawl from where she had laid it, folded neatly, on top of the trunk standing at the foot end of the bed frame. Draping it carefully around her slender shoulders, she went back to the chair and sat down.
"Thank You, kind Father, for friends," she prayed. "And most of all, thank You for being Ever-present. Bless Ken and Mildred and their children. And, dear Father, bless the new great-grandchild which I've heard I have. Bless the other three, also. I've never seen them, Father, but I love them. And Lord, perhaps tomorrow there'll be a letter. They're so busy. . . .Bless Daniel and Janice in a special way. . . ."

It was Daniel who found her. Waving the letter when he turned the corner, he almost ran the short distance to her house. "Miss Sally! Miss Sally!" he called, feeling as excited as he knew she would be.

Silence greeted him. Fear struck him. Tiptoeing inside, he saw her. Wrapped in the new shawl, her eyes closed and a heavenly smile upon her face, Miss Sally looked like an angel.

He fell to the floor at her knees and wept like a child. Then, kissing her marble-cold hand, he placed the letter in its palm, whispering and echoing her oft-repeated statement, "Perhaps today. Too late!"

Once out on the porch he leaned against the post and sobbed. "There will be no more days of waiting, of looking, of expecting, kind Father," he said. "Thank You. Thank You." Then, quoting softly, "'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4); he walked down the steps to finish his route and to contact Ken.