Margaret sat on the twin bed brushing tears away as Lois snapped the last suitcase shut and set it on the floor. "Honestly, Lois," she said weepily, "I don't know what we're going to do without you here. Maybe you'll come back for second semester. . . ."
Her sentence, which was more like a question than a statement, trailed into the otherwise quiet atmosphere of room number 29.

Lois looked around the room with quick scrutiny before sitting on the edge of what was her twin bed for the brief time she was there. "You'll manage well, Margaret. And believe me," she said, "I'd certainly not be going home if I didn't have to. But I really feel it's the only Christian thing to do. Mother's operation was serious, the doctors said. She'll be months recovering from it. And with two sisters and three brothers still at home, and all under twelve years of age except for Joel, fourteen, and John, thirteen, well, I feel Mother needs me now. Desperately so."

"I realize this," Margaret answered, "and I agree with you. Only, things won't be the same around here without you. Oh, Lois," she wailed, hiding her face in her hands, "why must these horrible disappointments come? And just when God was beginning to move here, in Bible school!"

"Where's your faith, Margaret?" Lois asked quickly, getting to her feet and shoving the suitcases toward the door. "I do believe my things took up three-fourths of this room," she added with her usual little giggle. "Look at these bare walls! Oh Marg, you should have stopped me when I decorated so flamboyantly."

"Flamboyantly? Do you call having one's family pictures over the walls flamboyant, Lois? I loved them; every one of them. They revealed a lot to me. Just like your sacrifice now is doing. And besides, what things I brought along from home were on display too."

"But you didn't bring nearly so much as I did," Lois countered sweetly. "And believe me, Margaret Marie Hillis, if I'm ever able to come back here again, God willing, I'm bringing only half as much as I brought this time. Why, I nearly crowded you out with my belongings, and with what I once called my 'few earthly possessions,' which, in this small room, seemed to be anything but few."

"But each thing looked lovely, Lois. You have a real talent for tasteful decorating and I shall miss you and your 'few earthly possessions' dreadfully."
They laughed together, then Margaret jumped to her feet and washed the tears from her eyes with a cold, wet washcloth and walked quickly to the door. Opening it wide, she motioned the ten girls inside.

"Surprise!" they chorused together, as they set the lovely store-bought cake on the dresser and began dishing out soupy-soft ice cream.

"Our going-away gift," one of the girls said sadly. "And this ice cream is as soft as we all feel right now," another added. "Better eat it quickly or you'll need a straw to sip it. No refrigeration, you know," she laughed.

"And who would have as many pleasant memories as we've had because of not having a refrigerator!" Lois exclaimed, laughing. "I've always enjoyed a good milk shake and soft ice cream. Um-m, this cake and ice cream is delicious! Especially, since I know how extremely wealthy each of you are." Tears trickled down her cheeks. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks much. This was a real sacrifice for you dear, dear friends of mine. I know this."

"It's going to be a lonesome place around here without you, Lois," another girl declared sadly." Sometimes one wonders about these things. Why they happen, I mean."

"God's appointments must never be questioned," Lois replied. "Since I am His and He is mine, I feel as though nothing happens to me by mere accident: I feel He has Divinely permitted it and/or appointed it. Not now, but someday I'll see and know and understand the whys of these strangely-mysterious things and happenings. And now," she added, as she finished the last bite of cake and creamy-soupy ice cream, "let's have one last season of prayer together; then I must be going. I'll miss you all so much. But I promise to keep in touch by writing, God willing. My 'wealth' of money is, like yours, low, else I'd say I'll keep in touch by calling. But this will be out, I know. . . ."

Shortly after Lois left, Mrs. Burns paged Margaret over the intercom. "Come down to my room," she said. "I need to have a talk with you, please."

Closing the door quietly behind her, Margaret hurried to the dorm-mother's room. "You wanted to see me?" she asked, feeling lonely with Lois gone, and wanting to be alone for at least a little while.
"I hate to do this now," Mrs. Burns said, looking at Margaret, "and I knew it wasn't the time to do so when I was down to your room and said good-bye to Lois. But I have no alternative, Margaret."

"What is wrong, Mrs. Burns?" Margaret asked anxiously.

"I won't stall for time, my dear," the kindly-faced widow replied. "I received word from the Office -- the Administrator's Office, I mean -- that they will be needing to use the single room immediately."

For a while, the meaning of the woman's statement didn't make sense to Margaret. Then with a sudden light she comprehended its full impact. With utmost clarity, it registered on her brain and in her mind.

"You... mean Teresa... ."

"Yes, Margaret, Teresa will have to move in with you. The only reason for her having that single room was because she couldn't get along with any of the girls with whom she roomed. I'm sorry... ."

Suddenly Margaret felt that the loneliness which she was sure she would be feeling due to the emptiness of Lois' leaving, would be far more preferable and desirable than having to put up with the unsmiling, uncooperative, sharp-tongued Teresa.

Knowing that Mrs. Burns was expecting some kind of answer, Margaret said, "We'll manage."

"It won't be easy, Margaret, I'm sure you're aware of this. Teresa's not the easiest person in the world to get along with. Her wall seems almost impregnable. But I shall be praying much for you."

Reaching out and touching the widow's hand, Margaret said tearfully, "Please do; I'll be needing it. This must be one of God's appointments for my life. Have you told Teresa yet?" she asked quickly.

"I thought we might share it together, Margaret. Teresa needs help," she added softly, as they started down the hallway together. "Lots of help. She went through four roommates the first three weeks; that's why she has the single room. And it's the only single room up here," she said softly.
Teresa came to the door at the first knock and Mrs. Burns explained the situation.

"I hope you won't mind rooming with me," Margaret said softly.

"I do, but I suppose I haven't any choice, do I? Sometimes I wonder just why I'm here," Teresa replied, gathering up an armload of things and heading for Margaret's room.

Margaret helped with the moving, and several hours later the room looked cozy and neat and invitingly pleasant, with Teresa's many plush animals grinning at her mischievously from the dresser, Teresa's bed and even from the top of the curtain rod.

Margaret's attention, however, seemed riveted on the snapshot of a tall, angular, well-tanned, handsome man on the dresser. Teresa noticed her intense interest in the picture.

"My father," she remarked, motioning toward the picture. Her voice was bitter as she continued. "I cut my mother out of the picture -- just as she cut us out of her life when she left us and ran away with another man three years ago. She taught me one thing -- that it doesn't pay to get attached to anyone. I loved my mother. Believed in her, too. And what did loving her do to my brother and sister and me?" she asked bitterly. "It did nothing but get us hurt, that's what." Changing the subject abruptly, she asked, "Will you be continuing the Tuesday meetings?"

Margaret scarcely knew what to say or how to answer. She hadn't given the meetings much thought, with the shocking news of Lois' mother's serious illness and her subsequent surgery, and of Lois having to leave and go home. The Tuesday meetings were get-together times of prayer and Bible reading and studying, initiated by Lois. And Margaret suddenly remembered that Teresa hadn't missed a single one of those very-special meetings.

Hope surged within her. "I don't see why not," she replied, smiling and placing her hands on Teresa's too slender shoulders. "You are excellent at remembering the assignment texts, Teresa," she said, recalling the new roommate's keen memory for memorization. "I'll be counting on your help. And Teresa," she added quickly, as tears flowed down her cheeks, "I'm sure
God put us together: you see, my father left my mother and all five of us children four years ago -- for another woman. I know how you hurt. I know your pain and . . . and how you, maybe, blame yourself for what happened. I came through it all, Teresa."

Teresa's face paled. Anger registered in her eyes and on her face for a brief moment. Then, as if a dam broke inside her, she sobbed.

Margaret held her in her arms like a mother holds a wounded child, sobbing with her; praying for her and, all the while, longing, longing to help her.

After a long while, she quieted down and sat on the edge of her bed. Looking up into Margaret's face, she said meekly, "Forgive me for crying. But since you understand I . . . I guess I became like a helpless child." Then quickly she added, "Oh, Margaret, Margaret, sometimes I think I'm going to die over this! But I've had to be strong for Father's sake. And for my brother's and sister's sakes too. And, to be truthful, I've almost broken -- physically and emotionally -- over it all."

"I know, my dear," Margaret said, weeping softly. "If the Lord had not been my Helper and my dearest Confidante and truest Friend, I'd have had a nervous breakdown, I do believe. Like you, Teresa, I had to be strong for my mother's sake. We had no idea that Daddy was anything but a loving husband and father to all of us."

With intense earnestness registering in her eyes, Teresa cried, "Please, Margaret, help me to find peace in Jesus. I've been so bitter. And I've hated the man who stole my mother's affection and wrecked our once happy home. This bitterness has affected me physically; I'm almost a nervous wreck. I want to change. Oh, I do. I do! Please, please pray for me."

With unusual clarity, Margaret saw the wisdom of God's appointments. Too, she realized again, as she had so often done before, that His timing was perfect. Always, perfect.

"Let's pray, Teresa," she said, dropping on her knees beside the weeping, broken and contrite young woman.