Gail Thompson tossed her heavy shawl on the rocking chair in the kitchen then, opening the lid of the ever-hungry coal/wood stove, she stuffed lengths of properly cut wood into its dark, gaping mouth. She hated the stove; hated it with a passion. Hated the house in which the black monster stood, even.
She slammed the lid in place as the flames leaped up brightly and warmly to consume the dry wood. At least she was warm, she reasoned, as she shoved the heavy cast-iron tea kettle up toward the stove lids where the fire was the hottest.

She listened to the wind rising outside the door and knew she must bestir herself and fill the shed that leaned hard against the west end of the kitchen with wood. A storm was brewing; a real "nor'-easter," the weather man had warned above the crackling of the radio less than an hour ago.

She thought back upon the circumstances that had brought her to this place and felt all the old bitterness crest inside her chest like on a giant wave. She could break the contract, she thought again, as she had done for ever so many times since her arrival at Honeysuckle Place. But if she did, what then?

The name was an enigma, she thought quickly; a totally baffling place. Still, it was hers. Rather, it would be hers if she lived beneath its roof constantly and consistently for a total of five consecutive years. Until then, it was held in the estate of the late Mrs. Norma Morris.

Gail groaned aloud. Five years! The four months in which she had lived there had seemed like an eternity almost. How could she ever endure and tolerate four years and eight months more of the same?

She thought back to the circumstances surrounding the house and its devoted owner. Mrs. Morris was a sweet, dainty, and softly-spoken woman when Gail first met her in the hospital. She had remained the same way throughout her entire time there. She took a liking to Gail from the initial meeting, when Gail was assigned as the woman's special, private nurse. All the nurses on the floor knew that Mrs. Morris' days were numbered. Mrs. Morris herself knew this. Instead of fretting about it and being upset over it, the little woman faced the fact with a quietly-calm and sweet assurance in her heart, stating softly that she was "just going to begin to live," when her frail body ceased to exist on earth.

Gail recalled thinking that the woman's mind was being affected by the malignancy in her body. But she soon came to realize that such was not the case: Mrs. Morris had an anchor which she, Gail, knew nothing about. And day by day, as she waited upon her patient, the secret of the hidden peace and calmness came to the fore and was revealed. Mrs. Morris was a
Christian; a woman whose faith and trust was in the Lord her God. She could actually smile as she faced her great enemy, death. Shout, too.

To Gail Thompson, excellent nurse and super rationalizer, Mrs. Morris herself was an enigma. How could one actually shout and rejoice when each day brought death's icy-cold fingers nearer and closer to one's vital parts? she wondered, feeling strangely moved upon by the little woman's victorious testimony and her glowing and radiant countenance and personality in the throes of the inescapable monster, death.

Never one to take anything religious too much to heart, Gail had found Mrs. Morris and her constantly victorious nature and spirit almost too much to cope with. On more than one occasion she had purposed within herself to give notice, quit the case, and do special duty elsewhere. And each time she had done so she came face to face with the glaring fact that she had sat by and watched as men and women had passed beyond the reach of time and of mortal help screaming and begging for help as they exited this world for the next, so why could she not remain on Mrs. Morris' case and watch as a Christian died?

She was a coward; she knew this. She was not ready to die. She knew this, too. Mrs. Norma Morris and her constant victory were painful reminders to nurse Gail Thompson of her own unreadiness to meet death.

She remained with her patient till the final end. After all, the woman had no close living kin; how could she do less? And when she saw the glory light on the radiantly happy face, she was overcome with emotion as Mrs. Morris cried joyously and rapturously, "I'm going Home now, Gail! Oh, what glory! What glory! Meet me in Heaven. Promise me, child? Please! Please! Hurry, dear girl. They're coming for me. Hear their singing? Oh, it is wonderful! Wonderful! I am going now. This is not death; it is victory! Victory! Glory!"

She had promised Mrs. Morris that she would meet her in Heaven. She remembered that she had. But of course it was only to appease the dear woman in her dying moments, Gail told herself over, again and again.

She was totally and completely surprised when an attorney called her shortly after the funeral and informed her that she, Gail Thompson, was sole heir to the estate of the late Mrs. Norma Morris.
"There are a few stipulations, however," he had added. "I would like to go over everything with you at your earliest convenience, Miss Thompson."

It hadn't taken her long to find a convenient time, and within a few weeks she had moved out of the modern, expensive apartment which had been home to her for more than three years, and she had taken up residence at Honeysuckle Place, all of which would someday become hers providing she lived there constantly for the five years, as per the deceased woman's stipulation.

She stood now in front of the kitchen window facing the woods, thinking. She was tempted to call the attorney and tell him that she was leaving; that she was going back to the hustle and bustle and the bright lights of the city. She hated Honeysuckle Place for its nerve wracking quietness; its profound solitude. She felt isolated. Trapped. She was not used to such utter stillness. It got on her nerves. She felt she would go mad in the absence of noise. She had too much time to think.

She shook herself. What would she gain by leaving? she asked herself candidly. She knew the answer. She was not a fool.

She spun around quickly and almost fiercely. She grabbed the heavy shawl off the chair and, tossing it over her shoulders, she hurried outside. She must get the wood inside that shed, and fast. She would stay on, she told herself silently and determinedly. After all, how many young women her age fell heir to a neat Cape Cod house, completely furnished down to bedding, linens, dishes, pots and pans and silverware, and everything? If only Steve were living . . .!

The thought of Stephen Conrad sent a shower of blinding tears rushing to her eyes. Oh, how much she loved him! And he, her! Their wedding day was almost upon them. How excited and happy they were! The plans for their house were being drawn up by a very close architect friend and, soon, Stephen would be in practice for himself. His office would be only a short distance away from their new home. She, Gail, would work side by side with her extremely handsome and equally extremely competent young doctor-husband. It had seemed like such a perfect set-up for a perfectly matched couple.
Stephen had told her about the little girl and the nature of her disease and the seriousness of her condition. But he had not mentioned that he was going across the mountain and, in his own private plane, that he was going to fly her to City Hospital and do the surgery on her himself -- at no cost whatever to the poverty-stricken parents.

He never crossed the mountain. The blinding blizzard that struck iced his plane over, taking it to destruction and Stephen to his grave. His heroic effort alerted others to the little girl's critical condition and her need of immediate surgery and, in record time, she was brought to City Hospital, was operated upon and was soon on her way to recovery.

But Stephen never returned. He never would. The news of his untimely death left Gail's heart empty and bitter. Never would the new house become reality, she realized with a sickening sensation deep inside her chest. And never would the shingle bearing Stephen Conrad's name be hung from the latticed entranceway that led to the door of the neat offices inside. Stephen was dead. And with his death Gail felt that a part of herself had died also. Her world had suddenly crumbled and fallen apart around her and she had not known to whom to turn or where to run for help.

And then Mrs. Morris had come into her life. Was a gate opening for her? A doorway to a new beginning, perhaps?

She shook herself now, trying to forget the past. Mrs. Norma Morris especially. But Mrs. Morris remained, constant, unshakable, and unmovable. She remained as an irrefutable reminder that a life lived with Christ in one's heart was a perpetual life of joy and peace and happiness and constant victory. She could not get away from this, try as Gail may. She had witnessed many deaths but none so victoriously wonderful as the death of Mrs. Morris.

She carried armload after armload of wood into the woodshed off the kitchen, and not until it was stacked full and high did she stop. She knew how hungrily the stove gobbled up the wood she shoved into its gaping jaws and she didn't want to be caught in a blizzard with the woodshed empty, or nearly so.

Her arms ached. What a strange twist life had given her! Never had she carried wood into a woodshed before. But then, never had she had a never-
satisfied stove to feed, either. Her life had been one of pushing buttons; a life of ease, really.

She may as well get used to the stove, she told herself as she brushed wood chips off her clothing; it, too, was in with the five-year stipulation.

She removed the heavy shawl, a gift of the late woman, and gave it a vigorous shaking to free it of wood chips and/or shavings. It was, without a doubt, the heaviest, warmest shawl she had ever owned. And best of all, it was beautifully and practically washable.

How different her life was since coming to Honeysuckle Place! It was almost like she was living in a different world and a different era, she thought, as she picked the last, few, remaining clinging bits of woody pieces out of the carefully knitted shawl.

She still took an occasional private-duty case, but the driving distance made it quite prohibitive. With winter coming on, especially. She dare not board in the city lest she forfeit her right to the modest but adequate and well-cared-for house, and the estate in general. She never knew when the attorney would call, or when he would casually drive into the beautifully landscaped yard, asking how she was getting on, and other such mundane questions. He was merely fulfilling his duty, she knew. His duty to the late Mrs. Norma Morris.

She hurried inside and closed the door behind her, relishing the warmth of the kitchen. And for the first time since coming to Honeysuckle Place, she felt a spark of love for the "monster" out of whose "belly" the warmth was flowing. It was only a spark, mind you; a tiny spark at that. But with the spark, Gail felt a minuscule shower of tenderness and softness flow warmly somewhere inside her breast.

She gasped in awe and amazement. It was so unlike her to feel this way since Stephen's death, she realized. She had been so bitter. Oh, so very bitter. And for all these many months, too. It had filled her entire being until at times she felt almost like she could taste it. Like gall.

Tears began flowing from her eyes. The bitterness had affected her, she realized. And it had reached its poisonous tentacles into the lives of others, even. It was like this. Its end results? She knew the answer to her
heart's question: Death! To a tender conscience and to compassion and love for others.

It had been a long, long time since Gail Thompson had been broken. Truly broken. Even at the memorial service for Stephen, she had been like a stone; stoic, cold, icy, frigid, unmoved. Outwardly, that is. Inwardly, she was cold, bitter, bitter, bitter. And frightened. Terribly so. And now . . . now . . .

The dam of tears burst like a flood. A deluge. She wept. She sobbed; uncontrollably so. Indeed, she was still Gail Thompson, R. N. Superior! But here, in Honeysuckle Place, she was Gail Thompson, R. N. Little girl: Terribly frightened. And in need of help.

For the first time ever in all of her young life, she spoke His name: "O God! God!" she cried, and the rising wind seemed to catch the exclamation and carry it through the valley.

(Chapter 2)

The wind was rising. Gail became aware of its fury when she heard the tendrils and loose branches of the woodbine tapping loudly against the shutters of the windows outside the dining room.

She hurried to the window and looked out upon a sea of dark, heavy looking clouds. She must make a quick trip into town, she realized; her stock of staples was almost depleted.

Chiding herself for waiting so long to do this absolutely necessary thing, she made a long list of everything she would be needing, checking the pantry shelves over twice to make sure she hadn't forgotten a single item. Shopping was not one of her best-loved-to-do things. Usually, she waited until she was out of something which she absolutely needed and would then be forced to go after it. A bad habit, she knew. And no reason for it at all, she told herself; not since she now had all the free time any woman could ever want or wish for.

She had gotten into the habit when her nursing profession seemed to require most of her hours. Too, she had become accustomed to taking her main meals in the hospital's cafeteria. She had done very little cooking for
herself since she became a nurse. Strange, too, since she enjoyed cooking and baking.

She took a quick shower, put on some warm clothing, and was soon on her way to the modern, well-stocked grocery store in the village four miles away. Already, snow had begun to fall.

She made a quick stop at the bank to cash a check then, seeing the snow falling heavily and rapidly, she hastened away after the groceries.

The parking lot at the grocery store was full of cars. Everyone for miles around must have had the same idea or necessity as she, she thought, finding a parking space in a distant corner of the lot.

Gail could not remember, ever, of seeing so many people inside the commodious store at one time. She took a grocery cart and, checking her list, she began filling the cart with what she needed. She was anxious to be on her way home; she knew how quickly a blizzard could come up. She had no desire to be caught in one. None whatever!

She pushed the cart down one long aisle after another, checking her list repeatedly to make sure she didn't miss anything on it and, eager though she was to be getting home, she discovered that she was actually enjoying the time spent inside the store. For one thing, it was extremely pleasant to hear the voices of people whom she knew nothing about; strangers, really; but voices, nonetheless. There seemed to be a festive air inside the store; people calling to each other and laughing heartily. Yes, it was good to commingle in this fashion, Gail told herself. It was refreshing indeed.

Her thoughts raced back to City Hospital where time never stood still but rushed on day after day in a blur of perpetual activity and duty and busyness. And people. Always, there were people. Many people. And she loved it all. She was a part of them and of their lives. She seemed to thrive on the excitement and the work and the people. Her life was uniquely intertwined with it all. Until Stephen's death, when the light seemed to have gone out of her life and time seemed to have stopped.

She felt tears sting her eyes. Quickly she brushed them away. For a fact, she missed City Hospital. But her private duty cases had still kept her vitally alive and active in her profession even though she wasn't always in
City Hospital as before. The pain was too sharp after Stephen's death. She had too many memories of times shared together there: their first meeting, first date, his internship and her training on the same floors, their meals together in the cafeteria. So many beautiful memories. And dreams. And hopes. Shattered, every one!

Gail pushed her well-loaded cart toward the checkout counters, where every line seemed to stretch well into the store aisles behind them, and waited.

She heard the cry of an infant somewhere in the store and was transported, mentally, back to City Hospital and her pleasant months spent in pediatrics. Children could be such lovable little creatures, she soliloquized, smiling.

"I suppose you'll be having all the family home for Thanksgiving again, Mildred?"

From behind her, Gail heard a woman's soft laughter, followed by her equally soft reply: "All nine of them, Amanda, the Lord willing. Harry says we'll be having to increase the size of the dining room at the rate the grandchildren are coming on." Again there was that soft laughter.

"How many new grandchildren this year?" Amanda asked.

"Four new ones; a total of twenty-four now." Gail gasped. She was captivated by the conversation. Twenty-four grandchildren! Twenty-four plus nine times two -- the mate of each of Mildred's married children -- plus the two grandparents equaled forty-four. Forty-four people! The nurse was overwhelmed with awe. And how many aunts and uncles and cousins? she wondered.

"We love every minute of it," the woman, Mildred remarked.

"Turkey?" her friend questioned.

"And ham," Mildred replied. "Also a large beef roast. Natalie's husband and Jim's wife are beef eaters."
And of course everybody enjoys hot and cold beef or ham sandwiches that next day, not to mention turkey and all the many leftovers. Harry and I love it when we hear someone sneak down the stairs at night for a midnight snack. Some years, all us adults are down there together. Just for the sake of being together when it's quiet, I guess. I know I don't generally care for anything to eat. Harry nibbles a bit on something light and easy on the stomach as he and the boys -- men, really-visit together."

Amanda laughed, and said, "You and Harry have the Thanksgiving spirit all year long, Mildred. I know you enjoy Thanksgiving Day itself, but so far as having the same wonderful spirit of thankfulness all year long, both of you have it. You're quite a remarkable couple. No wonder your children and their families love to come home."

"The Lord implants a spirit of everlasting thanksgiving in the heart of those who have been redeemed, Amanda; those who are His children. It's a natural thing. . . ."

Gail pushed her well-filled cart forward for checking out, her ears ringing with the grandmother's words about the spirit of everlasting thanksgiving being in the heart of those who were God's children. Then the impact of the conversation she'd heard struck her with full force: Thanksgiving Day! It was a mere two weeks away! She hadn't even thought about it. "Any coupons, Ma'am?"

The clerk's pointed question brought Gail quickly out of her private thoughts. "No. None," she replied quickly, watching as the check-out girl efficiently moved the things from her cart to a waiting bagger, whose eyes scanned the groceries and paper goods which were then sacked carefully but quickly according to content and size and product.

It was snowing heavily as Gail drove her car out of the big grocery parking lot. She was anxious to get home, but skid marks along the road served as grim reminders that she dare not drive fast; she must go slowly and carefully. The roads were slippery-slick; she didn't want to get stuck by sliding off the road. No, indeed.

She was on the side road leading to the neat Cape Cod house called home when a pick-up truck came toward her. Who could it be? she
wondered, as they passed each other. And then she recognized the man. "Mr. Trowbridge!" she exclaimed out loud.

The attorney had been to the house checking on her again. Well, he had seen her. Without a doubt, he had, she mused silently as she pulled her car into the garage and began carrying grocery sacks to the kitchen door, which she unlocked quickly.

She saw the piece of paper when she inserted the key into the lock on the door. Quickly she carried it, along with several bags of groceries, into the warm kitchen and placed everything on the table. She would read it -- or look at it, or whatever -- when her groceries were all brought in and were put away neatly inside the refrigerator and in the cupboards and on the pantry shelves, she decided. Clutter was one thing she could not stand or tolerate or endure. Positively not!

When the last bag was emptied and put away, Gail hurried to the table and picked up the paper and unfolded it. The attorney's name and address stared back at her in neat but bold design. Beneath this, she saw a handwritten message.

"My dear Miss Thompson," it said, "one of my elderly clients had to be placed in a nursing home today. His days on earth are limited, the doctor says. He had a small flock of beautiful chickens and a handsome rooster. It was his wish to find a good home for these much-loved, well-cared-for fowl; someone who would love them and care for them like he did. Immediately you came to mind. You, of all people, have the ability and the strength and the 'humaneness' to care for these chickens. They are yours -- your very own -- from an old man whose life on earth is almost over. Please, for his sake, take good care of them. I put them in the hen house (out near the shed where Mr. Morris used to keep his tools and lawn mower).

"The Morrises always kept some chickens of their own, so your chickens are settled in nicely. I put straw down on the floor and in their nesting boxes, where they will be repaying you richly every day with fresh-from-the-nest eggs. They have all the grain and food they will need for today -- I filled the hoppers for you. Also their drinking fountains."
"In the shed, you will find an abundant supply of grain and laying mash. Like us humans, chickens must eat daily: yours will need to be fed -- daily. I know I can depend on you to take good care of them.

"Thank you much.  
"In Deep Appreciation.  
Mr. and Mrs. Herman Trowbridge"

Gail's hand trembled as she finished reading. Chickens! Oh, no; it couldn't be! The man must be out of his mind to bring her chickens. She knew nothing about them. Absolutely nothing! Well, he could just cart them to someone else! she thought indignantly; someone who wanted chickens and knew how to care for them.

On an impulse, she rushed to the phone and dialed the number listed on the sheet of expensive paper. She listened impatiently to the ring, ring, ring and when Mr. Trowbridge himself finally answered, she said quickly, "Whatever did you mean by bringing those chickens to me? I know absolutely nothing about caring for a chicken. You are entirely too presumptuous, Mr. Trowbridge."

"Come, come now! You are a nurse. Aren't they beauties?"

Gail fought to keep her voice under control. "A nurse, yes; but a nurse cares for humans, not chickens. I think it was quite an improper thing for you to do; after all, you didn't ask for my permission."

"Would you turn an emergency case away in the hospital, Miss Thompson?" The attorney asked the question bluntly and outright. A hint of irritation registered in his voice.

"No, of course not. But this is no emergency and, as I see it, it is totally unrelated to such."

"Oh, but you are wrong, Miss Thompson. This is an emergency. An urgent emergency, to be truthful and factual. You see, my client refused to leave his home and go to the nursing care facility unless his chickens were placed in good hands. I told him I had the perfect set-up for them; that they would be tenderly and lovingly cared for by a caring, gentle nurse. Under these conditions he relented and allowed me to take him to the nursing
home. So you see, you must help me. His last days on earth should be made as easy and as pleasant as possible for him. I gave him your telephone number. So, in case he is able to call you, please give him a good report on the chickens. And Miss Thompson, please put a pleasanter tone into your voice. It will mean much to the dear man. And, who knows, it may even help to prolong his days. I am sorry if I have caused you a slight inconvenience; but with you being a nurse, well, I felt sure you would be delighted to help out in this way. There are, after all, numerous ways by which one can render a kindness or a service to his fellowman. This is one of those ways. Have a good day. And if you need to know more about your charges, call my home; Mrs. Trowbridge will be delighted to help you. Good day, Miss Thompson."

Long after the noisy, crackling phone had clicked to silence, signaling that the attorney had hung up, Gail stood with the phone in her hand. She felt like she was in a state of shock. Then, coming to her senses, she placed the phone back in place and slumped weakly into a nearby chair and cried.

(Chapter 3)

It was the moaning, whining wind and the coldness of the kitchen that suddenly shook Gail out of her bout of self pity. Getting to her feet, she hurried to the kitchen stove and, lifting a lid, she saw that the fire was almost burned out. Quickly, she shoved a slender length of wood into the red embers that remained and waited eagerly for it to ignite and burn, then she added more, until the glowing fire soon had the kitchen cozily warm and comfortable.

The thought of the chickens nauseated her. Still, she could not allow them to suffer want for lack of her kindness and love for them. She should check in on them, she thought. The storm was intensifying; she could hear it as well as see its fierceness through her curtained windows.

As a wave of fresh nausea washed over her, she donned the thick, heavy shawl and, tying a woolen scarf around her head, she grabbed the gloves and headed for the hen house. She felt as weak as a mouse and was irritated in the fact that she hadn't insisted that the attorney return immediately and take the chickens to someone who would want them. The world was full of people who would have been delighted with his "gift," she told herself, as she braced the piercing-cold wind and its attending snow.
Gail was amazed at the warmth she felt when she let herself into what was once just an empty building but was now a chicken house. The rooster greeted her with a hasty stare then continued eating and scratching in the straw as though he was in diligent search of something priceless and valuable. The hens were "singing" their contented song and seemed much pleased to see her. They came running to greet her, surrounding her feet and legs and even stepping up on her shoes and looking up toward her face with imploring looks.

Gail stood still, almost afraid to move lest she step on a foot. It was obvious that these chickens were accustomed to love. Much love. In fact, they seemed to be begging for love. Her love. But her love seemed to have died with Stephen's death. She studied them for a while, then, surprising even herself, she stooped down and picked the one on her foot up and began stroking its head and back. How smooth the feathers felt! It nestled contentedly in her arm and rubbed its head along her shawl.

One after another, the chickens crowded around her and near her until each had received its gentle hug and loving strokes of caress, then they went back to their eating and singing. Only the rooster remained diligent about his business of scratching for whatever he was after in the straw.

In spite of her earlier distaste and abhorrence of the unasked-for flock, Gail found her heart feeling quite soft and gentle toward her new acquisitions -- her new charges. They were beautiful creatures, she noted; some a deep wine-red, others black and white with furry-looking legs. The rooster himself was a handsome creature of brown red. He stood tail and strong, looking stately and princely, she thought.

Almost like it was a natural thing to be doing, Gail walked to the boxes along the wall and looked inside. She gasped when she saw eggs in almost every box. Then she smiled. Broadly.

Turning to the contented chickens, she said softly, "Thank you for the beautiful eggs." Then she gathered them into the basket she saw hanging on a nail near the door.

Her heart felt lighter than it had felt for a long time as she told the chickens and the rooster good night and headed for the house, after making sure their door was secured tightly against the storm and any predators. She
laughed into the storm, realizing with keen awareness that she loved the innocent looking chickens in the hen house.

The kitchen's heat greeted her warmly as she closed the door against the driving snow and the bitter cold and set her basket of eggs on the kitchen table. Whatever would she do with all the eggs? she wondered, lifting one up in her hand and turning it 'round and 'round. And this was only the beginning, she knew; each day there would be a fresh, new supply waiting for her in the cozy nests of straw lined in neat rows against the wall of the hen house.

She placed the egg back in the basket then shook the snow off her shawl and hung it on a hanger to dry. She would make noodles, she decided quickly; noodles, with some of the egg yolks, and angel food cake with the whites.

She shoveled more wood into the kitchen stove then brought out the measuring cups and the mixing bowls. Her heart was lighter and happier than it had been in a long time. She felt that life had purpose and meaning to it after all.

It was late by the time Gail finished with the noodles and the angel food cake but she cared little about the hour; her heart felt happy and light as she viewed the finished products. Furthermore, she had no time clock to punch in the morning and, by the sound of the storm outside her door, few people would be able to get out to punch theirs.

Feeling sudden hunger pains, she reheated some of the savory beef stew which she had made the day before. It tasted good; delicious, even: better than when she had first made it; the flavors had had time to blend and to complement each other.

She fed more wood into the stove and washed and dried the dirty dishes; then she went into the living room and settled down into one of her favorite chairs. For a long while she did nothing but listen to the storm that raged across the valley. She was suddenly extremely grateful for the warmth of the well-built, well insulated house and she shivered slightly as she thought of others less fortunate than she. An involuntary note of thanks sprang to her lips and was uttered quickly and spontaneously. She surprised herself with its utterance but marveled at the good feeling that accompanied it.
Seeing Mrs. Morris' much-read Bible on the end table beside the chair, Gail picked it up and looked it over, wondering why she had never put it into one of the boxes up in the attic with the woman's personal clothing. But she hadn't. The Book had seemed to belong in the living room like the sturdy pieces of furniture that were there. It was a part of the room; like the sofa, the chairs, the end tables, lamps and drapes. The room would not have looked complete without the worn old Bible.

She let it fall open at random and marveled when she read, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Gail felt tears sting her eyes. She read the beautiful verses over again, noticing that Mrs. Morris had underlined them neatly with a marking pencil and realizing without any shadow of doubt that the holy woman was, this very moment, enjoying the glory and the splendor of that Heavenly place.

She closed her eyes and thought back to the days when she cared for the kind woman. Mrs. Morris was the most patient soul she had ever taken care of. Even in her most painful hours, the dear woman asked for very little attention. Always, she kept her needs and her wants to a minimum, thinking mainly of others and how to make life for them easier and a bit more bright and pleasant. And always, she seemed to be in an attitude of constant prayer and praise.

Tears stung Gail's eyes as she recalled a night less than a week before Mrs. Morris' Homegoing. That the dear soul was suffering excruciatingly, Gail had no doubt. She wanted to ease the pain; to dull it, at the least. She approached Mrs. Morris with the injection, stating softly that she would be somewhat eased for a short period of time, at least.

The small hand and the thin, almost transparent looking arm were raised weakly. "No, Gail," she said softly. "No. The injections seem to muddle up my brain. My thinking becomes fuzzy. So long as I am able, I want to think
clearly -- of Him. Why child, did you know they offered my Lord something to 
numb His suffering and pain on the cross and He refused it? I know His 
refusal had a different significance than mine; but please, no more injections 
for me unless I ask for them. You are a strict adherent to the Hippocratic oath 
which you so solemnly took and pledged. This is admirable indeed. I only 
wish, before I must leave you, that I had the joyful assurance of your 
complete and total surrender to Jesus Christ."

Gail remembered how Mrs. Morris' eyes had rested unwaveringly upon 
her. They had seemed to pierce her through and through. She had turned 
quickly and rushed into the adjoining bathroom where she emptied the 
medication in the syringe, down the drain, and tossed the disposable syringe 
into the waste basket.

When she returned to the side of her patient, she saw her eyes were 
closed. But she could never get away from the shining tears she saw cradled 
beneath the closed eyelids. Never. Those tears remained as silent sermons, 
giving greater than ever impact to the words so recently spoken.

The night wore on. Gail recalled how little sleep Mrs. Morris had gotten. 
Twice, she thought her patient was dying and, each time, Mrs. Morris looked 
full in Gail's face, exclaiming joyously and with radiant face, "Did you see 
them, Gail? Aren't they beautiful beings? And oh, how they can sing! Listen, 
child! Hear them? Oh, Heaven! Sweet, sweet Heaven!"

She had run into the bathroom again, she recalled. To weep. It would 
be wonderful to be so sure of Heaven, she had thought, as she wiped the 
tears away and hurried back to her patient's side.

The days that followed that night were painful days for Mrs. Morris, as 
well as for Gail, who saw and recognized the inevitable signs of death as it 
stepped closer and closer to its victim. And when the end finally came, on a 
note of triumphant victory for Mrs. Morris, Gail felt totally and completely 
bereft once again. She was afraid. Until then, she had not realized how much 
the dear woman's friendship and companionship had meant to her.

Gail felt tears sting her eyes now, remembering. A voice from the 
hospital bed had seemed once more to say, "I only wish . . . that I had the 
joyful assurance of your complete and total surrender to Jesus Christ."
It was almost as if Mrs. Morris herself were here in person, Gail thought. So audible the words had sounded and seemed.

With tears streaming down her cheeks and her hands resting upon the open pages of Mrs. Morris' old Bible, she cried out, "All right, Lord, I come! Please take me and do whatever needs done to me to get me ready for Heaven. Give me the assurance that Mrs. Morris had. I'm nothing; but I want You. Jesus, I come.

In an instant of time, Gail's heart was changed. She knew she was forgiven. Her heart was so happy. And for the first time ever, she had peace with God. When she came to herself, she discovered she was laughing and crying and praising God simultaneously. Now, at last, she knew why Mrs. Morris was always full of praise and thanksgiving. Oh, it was wonderful. Wonderful!

She thought of Thanksgiving Day then and, instinctively, she knew that she must do something. But what? "Dear Lord," she prayed, with her eyes turned upward, "what shall I do? Show me, please I'm little more than a stranger around here. But please use me to bless bleeding, needy souls. . . ."

Almost instantly, the phone jangled noisily. Who would be calling her? And at such a late hour?

She hurried to the phone. "Hello," she called pleasantly into the mouthpiece. "Gail Thompson speaking."

There was a period of prolonged silence and, finally, when Gail recognized the voice of Mr. Trowbridge, she asked quickly, "Are you and Mrs. Trowbridge all right, Sir?"

Again, there was silence. After a while, the attorney stammered, "Miss Thompson, are . . . are you all right? You . . . sound . . . well, different, dare I say?"

"I am different, Mr. Trowbridge, thanks be to God! I am a brand new child of God. Jesus came into my heart only minutes ago. Oh, Mr. Trowbridge, I wish you knew Him too! I have peace and joy in my heart. For the first time ever! All you need to do is ask Him to come in and. . . ."
"Listen to me, Miss Thompson," the attorney interrupted quickly "Mrs. Morris always gave liberally for the makings of a happy Thanksgiving over at the Children's Home on Crestwood Hill. What can you do toward this?"

"How many children are over there, Mr. Trowbridge, and what are their ages?"

"Hm-m. You've got me on that one. Used to be close to eighty; but I'd say there aren't more than thirty there any more. If that many. And they're all pretty small at that. Did you say you are a Christian?"

"Then I'll provide for all of them, Sir. At Honeysuckle Place And, yes, I am a brand new Christian!"

"Miss Thompson, are . . . are you sure you . . . you . . are feeling . . . all right? Did you hear me correctly? I said maybe thirty. And, and, well praise the Lord! A new Christian!"

"Kind Sir, I assure you that I heard you correctly the first time. And, again, in answer to your question regarding my well-being, I am fine. Super fine. You can count on me having all the children here for Thanksgiving Day, God willing. Perhaps you will be able to find me two capable and efficient helpers for the day while we relieve the tired women at the Home and allow them a day with their families? This, I will appreciate greatly."

"Miss Thompson, I . . . I scarcely know what to say. You . . . you surprise me. Amaze me, really! Would . . would Mrs. Trowbridge and I . . . do, as your helpers? You see, Thanksgiving is such a lonely time. . . ."

"But, what about your children, Sir? Won't they be disappointed?"

"We . . . we have no children, Miss Thompson. We used to spend many happy hours with the Morrises. Being Christians made us as one family. Mrs. Trowbridge gets so lonely. . . ."

"Then of course you must come, God willing. I know I'll have excellent help. And I'll appreciate the Christian fellowship."

"One more question, Miss Thompson; are the chickens all right?"
"Whatever will I do with all the eggs, Mr. Trowbridge?" Gail asked, laughing merrily. "Oh, I just love those beautiful creatures! And, kind Sir, I ask your forgiveness for being so sarcastic and unkind when I spoke to you on the phone. God has melted and softened my heart wondrously. Tell the owner of the chickens that I will give them nothing but tender, loving care. And, Sir, you and Mrs. Trowbridge bring the man out anytime he's able to come, to spend time with his chickens. I'll be their caretaker; they shall remain his for so long as he lives."

Gail heard a sniffle on the other end of the line. "The . . . old . . . gentleman, my client, is . . . my father," Mr. Trowbridge said. "I . . . knew you'd take good care of the chickens. Thank you, Miss Thompson. And as for the eggs, there's a family over the hill from you who could use some. They're poor; very poor. The little mother is trying to keep the family together. Her husband's in a veteran's hospital in bad shape. Then there's another poor family to the east of you who would be thankful for some. And, always, there's the Children's Home. It makes me very happy to know you have finally been converted and have received the Thanksgiving spirit, Miss Thompson. May God bless you richly. Have a good night. Bless the Lord; a new Christian!"

Gail put the receiver in place then shoved more wood into the stove. Thirty children/The mere thought excited her. Thirty children! And an aging attorney and his wife as helpers! Well, why not? At least they would feel needed and useful.

A sudden thought struck Gail. Quickly she dialed the number. "Mrs. Trowbridge," she said, when a very feminine voice answered the phone, "please try to bring your father-in-law out for Thanksgiving, the Lord willing. Yes, I understand this will only be possible if he is physically able. But let's pray together about it. I feel it would be therapeutic for him. And, oh yes, you must come out and spend the day sometime, God willing. You say you'd love to? And you'd like for us to make noodles together, like you and Mrs. Morris used to do? Then how about tomorrow, the Lord willing? I'm sure my Thanksgiving 'family' will love home made noodles. . . ."

Banking the fire in the stove, Gail turned off the lights and hurried to the bedroom. Never in all of her life had she experienced such joy and gladness as she found tonight in Christ. It was the beginning of a new year for her; a
year filled with three hundred and sixty-five days of perpetual and unending Thanksgivings.

The End