"So what was that all about?" Janene asked Carol as she slammed the phone down. "And why the sudden thundercloud expression? Honestly, Carol, you wear your moods like you've been trained for it."

"Oh, cut out the sarcasm, Janene."
"Sorry, my friend. I wasn't being sarcastic, nor even trying to be. I was merely stating an indisputable fact. So what's wrong? Why the sudden dark mood?"

Carol dropped into the nearest chair and scowled. "That was Caroline, my super-good, obedient and compassionate twin"

"So-o?"

"Stop being so catty!" Carol ejaculated. "It's bad enough having one's goody-goody twin call, telling you that you should be home with your ailing mother. I don't need any snide remarks from you."

"Sor-ree! But is it because Caroline hit a 'sore spot' and . . . and maybe spoke the . . . the truth? It always hurts when the doctor probes around then zeroes in on that certain sore spot . . ."

Janene left her sentence trailing provocatively. Carol looked askance at her.

"I thought you were my friend" Carol hurled out angrily, adding, "What a friend!"

"But I am your friend" came the quick-spoken reply. "A true friend. And true friends don't coddle when truth needs to be faced. So Caroline called; I say good for her. It's high time you went home to see your mother. I'd give everything I have if I'd have a mother. I had one, to be sure, else I wouldn't be here. Some woman had to have given birth to me. But I don't know who it was nor where she is, if, indeed, she's even living yet. No one seems to know anything about my mother. And very little is known about me, even, except that I was found, one chilly-cold morning, in a tiny basket by the kind matron of the Hope Orphanage.

"As I got older, I thought the name of the orphanage was really quite pretty. Hope speaks volumes to me. It's like, maybe you don't have what you'd like or need but you can dream, or pretend, that you have it. Hope has always been like a shiny-bright jewel to me, putting rainbows in the dark clouds around me and sunshine where everything's dismal and black."
"You and your little-girl childishness!" Carol exclaimed with disdain. "Don't you think it's time that you should be grown up in your imagination? Such stupidity. Ugh!"

"I'm thankful that I'm still able to dream and still able to hope," Janene said softly and kindly. "I will never resign myself to the dungeon of dark despair and give up hope of someday meeting my own dear biological mother. Unless, of course, I get proof positive that she is dead."

"What a foolish young woman you are! Mothers can be so . . . so . . . constricting. So demanding and . . . and trying and tiring"

"Demanding, Carol? By wanting to know where you are going and with whom, perhaps?" Again Janene allowed her words to have impact by her silence.

Carol glowered at her friend. "You are absolutely and positively unreasonable!" she remarked angrily. "You, who never had a mother around whom you have to live . . . you . . . trying to tell me! Ridiculous! Absurd! What do you know about mothers?"

"Perhaps it may surprise you, but I believe I know quite a lot about those wonderful women called mothers. True, I can't speak from firsthand biological mother knowledge. But the kind matron at Hope was everything any child could wish for and desire in his or her blood mother. Mrs. Channing was strict. Very strict. She demanded obedience and respect from each of us and she got it. She earned her respect by her gentleness and kindness and goodness, coupled with firmness and consistency on her part. Just why did you run away from home, Carol? You did run away, didn't you?"

The change of subject matter, to totally abrupt and unexpected, and the point-blank question itself, caught Carol by surprise and completely off guard.

"I suppose you'd enjoy knowing that curfew was 11 o'clock, no later" she said. "And if, 'by some unforeseen circumstance' Mother's words, 'you just can't be home by then, please call me" Again, her words. I was dating Marvin, a good-looking red head with daring to match his head of thick, wavy red hair. We had fun together. Great fun. I enjoyed being in his company. He was exciting to be with. Mother felt he was having a bad influence over me.
She forbade me to go out with him. I thought I'd die, and I wanted to. Without Marvin my life was dull and colorless and lusterless.

"But there's more than one way to skin a cat, so goes the old saying. And since Marvin was not allowed to come to the house and pick me up in his car, he devised another method, even more daring and adventuresome and exciting: his father had a small airport and he owned two small, private planes. Mary sent me a letter by a friend, telling me to go for a walk to a certain isolated spot in the woods not too far from our home; he'd land the plane in the meadow in the woods and we'd go away together in the plane.

"You can't imagine how excited I was. It was a beautiful day. I did my work around the house, as usual, and when I was finished I walked out to the front porch, sat in the swing for a while, then walked out to our mother's flower garden and, very casually and slowly, walked from there into the adjoining fields and beyond, until I came to the woods.

"Marvin was right on schedule. He landed like a pro in the meadow and when I got into the plane and we became airborne I felt like I was dreaming. Marvin's smile and his words convinced me of the reality of it all, however. He said he was taking me away to a place where we could see each other as often as we wanted to.

"He brought me here, to this little city, got me settled into a couple of rooms with some friends of his parents, who in turn, helped me to get the job I now have. And when I saw the ad in the paper of the young woman who wanted another young woman to share expenses of an apartment with her, and I answered that ad, well, this is how come I'm here. And up until now, Janene, I've enjoyed being with you in this cozy apartment. However, I don't enjoy sarcasm."

"Carol, believe me, I'm not sarcastic. And I honestly didn't say anything meaning to be, or sound, sarcastic I think, if you will be honest with yourself and with me, you will have to admit that this is so. If I may be so bold as to ask you, what happened to Marvin? Where is he?"

Janene saw a look of pain constrict Carol's face. Tears flowed from her eyes.
"You don't need to tell me," Janene cried, feeling suddenly very sorry for her friend. "I . . . I didn't mean to hurt you. Forgive me, Carol. I should not have asked."

"It's all right. Perhaps it may help to heal my deep hurt if I tell you," Carol admitted. "And since I told you as much as I have, I may as well tell you the rest.

"Marvin had many good qualities about him; he was not without feeling. He called my mother and told her what he had done and where I was and that I had gotten a job. He even gave her the telephone number where I could be reached, both at work and where I was living. He told her that he loved me very deeply and that he planned to marry me as soon as he had his stint in the Air Force training. He said he even asked my mother to forgive him for 'flying' me away, but that it was the only alternative, so far as he could see, since she had forbidden him to come by and see me or pick me up in his car."

"He sounds like he cared about your mother's feelings and her pain," Janene admitted. "But I'm sure it would have been better to have obeyed what she told you. I learned early in my years at Hope that Mrs. ChanRing had only my very best interest at heart when she forbade me to participate in and do certain things. Having four children of her own there -- she was a widow -- helped me to see the fairness with which she treated us and meted out punishment to us; none greater or lesser than that which her own received. And her love was meted out in the same measure and degree. I admire this Marvin greatly for coming your dear mother. Imagine how worried and anxious she must have been over you!"

Carol reached for tissues. "Like I said, Marvin had many good qualities about him. He went to Vietnam. For a while his letters came regularly, one almost every day. Then nothing. I thought I'd go crazy. I really loved Marvin" Carol confessed, sobbing brokenly. "And I guess I'll wait for him until I die."

"Wh . . . what happened?" Janene asked the question so softly that it was barely audible.

"His . . . his parents called me one day and told me he was reported missing . . . in action. Oh, Janene, I am haunted by the fact that . . . that he may be . . . tormented and . . . abused by those . . . those wicked people over
there; locked up and imprisoned in a far-away, isolated, remote jungle area, half-starved and near death I'll always love him. And I'll wait for him so long as I live. Life is cruel. Cruel! First, I lose what was almost mine, had that horrible war not begun. And now, Mother."

"Mother? What do you mean, Carol?" Janene asked the question anxiously. "I understood you to say she was ailing. Is it critical, her illness?"

Carol's face was pale and drawn looking. "I didn't tell you everything," she confessed as tears trickled down her cheeks. "Mother's dying. Caroline said the doctor told her to call me immediately . . . to . . . come home . . if I wanted to . . . to see her . . . alive."

Janene gasped then sucked her breath in quick like. "And this . . . angered you!" she exclaimed softly, unbelievingly. "Oh, Carol, you must go. You must. Your mother loves you, I'm sure she does. Why have you been so upset over your sister calling you and telling you this? And really, you should be thanking God for a mother who cared enough about you to want only what was good and best for you. You told me your father died shortly after your ninth birthday. Can't you realize the burden your mother carried and the strain she was under, having to be both father and mother! And to think that you had a praying mother! You told me that one time -- a slip of your tongue, you said. But I never forgot it. Oh, Carol, go to your dear mother. Now! Tell her you love her. Help make her last hours easy and benedictory."

"If only it was as easy as you make it sound!" Carol cried, "I want to go to my mother; I need to go. But I'm angry with myself for having grieved and hurt her all this time. She'll forgive me; oh, how willingly she'll forgive me. But I don't deserve her forgiveness. I've been disobedient and stubborn and defiant and so unkind. If only I'd have gone to the altar the night God dealt so wondrously and sweetly with my soul. But I didn't. I wanted my own way. And look at the mess I've made of my life Oh, Janene, I've been wretched to you at times too. Forgive me, please. Oh, I love you and I love my mother. Love her!"

"Why of course you're forgiven, Carol. But we have something far more important to do than to be standing here talking. You're going to your dear mother I'll do the driving, if necessary. You're in no condition to drive Start packing; I'll call the office and tell them you will be taking two days off. Or do
you want more than that? You've got quite a bit of accumulated time, you said. Why not take a week or ten days, instead of two?"

Carol stood to her feet. "I'll do it" she said with a choking sob. "I'll call, and talk to my boss. I'll explain the circumstances. There'll be no problem getting off. I'll take two weeks. Caroline will be needing me, and this will give me time to not only get things made right with Mother but I'll be able to prove the sincerity of my repentance and apologies, as well. Please call the airport and make the earliest reservation possible for me. I'll call the office as soon as the plane reservation's made. Meanwhile, I'll start packing.

Janene drove back from the airport with a promise from Carol to call her as quickly as she learned the condition of her mother. The call came six hours later. Still heavy with sleep, Janene picked up the phone. Carol's voice was emotion-packed and trembly.

"She's gone!" she sobbed into the phone. "Oh, Janene, Mother's gone. I rented a car at the airport and drove to the hospital, where Caroline had told me Mother was. She was breathing heavily and laboriously when I entered the room. I threw my arms around her and sobbed out how much I loved her. She opened her eyes for a brief moment then sighed and died in my arms. I . . . I was too late to tell her how sorry I was and to ask her to forgive me. Oh, Janene, this will haunt me to my dying day -- I waited too long to say 'I'm sorry.

"But something good has come out of this, too: I felt God's Spirit in Mother's hospital room; He was speaking to me. In gentle and sweet tones like He had done that night years ago, He wooed me to come to Him, and I came. Oh, Janene, I'm different and new in Christ and I have the most wonderful peace in my heart. I know I'll see Mother again; she's in Heaven and I'm ready to go There now, washed in Jesus' precious blood and all sins forgiven."

"What must I do to . . . to be ready?" Janene asked humbly.

"Confess your sins to God and ask Jesus to come into your heart," Carol replied.

"Thanks." Janene said. "By the time you get back here there'll be two of us different and new in Christ; I'm going to pray as soon as I can."
"Do it right now, Janene. I'll hang up. And Caroline and I'll be praying for you too."

"Thanks much, Carol, I will," and Janene put the mouthpiece of the phone back in place then fell on her knees in prayer.