Janelle Landers lit the candles on the solid cherry dining room table then stood inside the ceiling-to-floor windows and watched for Josh's car to turn down Hummingbird Lane. Tonight she'd prepared another of her husband's favorite meals and, even now, the ambrosial aroma was filling the house with its tantalizing odor and its tempting fragrance.
She felt her brow furrow in a wrinkle, and just as quickly as she became aware of what was happening she "unfurrowed" it. She was too young to become wrinkled and old looking. She prided in and prized her good looks. Yes, for a woman in her late forties, she still had the blush of youth in her cheeks and on her face. Her beautician and cosmetologist told her so over and over again. And furrowing the brow could well become a habit and this habit would surely produce wrinkles where she didn't want wrinkles. Frankly, she didn't want wrinkles anywhere, period!

Without furrowing her brow this time, Janelle felt she could hardly understand her husband anymore. Since Deborah's visit home from college Josh had made a change. But then, Deb herself was changed. All this talk about the Lord Jesus Christ and of His coming back after the Christians was too much for her, Janelle decided.

Sometimes she felt like shaking Debbie, the way she did occasionally when their daughter was little. If she hadn't gotten in with Tamara Reisinger she'd never have taken up with Bible reading and Bible studying. But she had, and she did, and now not only was Deborah saved and sanctified wholly (as she had phrased each experience that had happened in her soul and taken place in her heart) but Joshua too had embraced the same and had had a radical heart change and a complete turn-around from his old life and former manner of living and conversation.

At thought of Tamara, Janelle felt anger stir in her heart when she remembered how she had consented for Debbie to bring her best friend home with her during the winter break at the college where each was a serious student.

Tamara was a tiny black-haired thing with eyes as dark as coal and as piercingly perceptive as any of the wisest people Janelle had ever known. She looked like a mere snip of a teenager instead of the young woman of twenty, which she was. She was of Jewish extraction and blood and had been a devout Jewess, brought up and reared by strict Jewish parents who followed the teachings of the rabbis to the minutest detail and to the letter of the law.

Among other college subjects, Tamara had chosen geology, studying frequently with a friend who used a Bible as one of her additional study guides. Finding the Bible extremely interesting and "magnetic," the friend
read it in orderly fashion -- book after book, chapter after chapter -- "just to be reading" (Her words to Tamara.) Being the power of God, and since "the Word was with God, and the Word was God," Daneesha -- Tamara's friend -- was led to an experience of saving grace through the Word of God. She in turn shared each new thing she had read and learned from the pages of the Book with Tamara, not realizing or knowing that she was witnessing to her classmate. It was all a seeming study/learning course for both. But it was the study of the Bible which led each to a personal relationship with Christ.

Daneesha became an earnest student of the Word, reading, often, for long periods of time to Tamara, whose heart was never hard but only open and tender. Portions in the New Testament regarding Jesus as Messiah had shaken Tamara visibly several times. But she was a student and students were learners, or supposed to be such, so she began reading Daneesha's Bible for herself.

Over and over she read the troubling portions of scripture until one day in her openness to learn the facts, she cried out, "O God, if this is true that Jesus is indeed Messiah, then let me know. My heart wants to experience the ecstasy those hillside shepherds experienced and felt when the Angel made the pronouncement and announcement that Christ was born, a Savior and the Messiah. Hear me, O God. My heart is wide open. . . ."

Janelle's heart trembled now as she recalled Tamara telling her that after she had prayed that prayer, she knew she was born of God: His peace filled her heart and soul and waves of holy joy washed over her, whispering softly to her heart with each new inrushing, "Forgiven. Forgiven through Jesus' blood. Washed in the blood of the Lamb -- God's sacrificial Lamb."

In disgust and anger, Janelle made a hasty retreat away from the window. She wanted to forget what Tamara had said to her on that winter evening; but it was difficult to forget. Especially since Tamara took it upon herself to tell her that unless she, Janelle Landers, became as a little child and was converted and born again of God, she'd never be able to get into Heaven.

"If she thinks she can change me the way she did my daughter," she remarked angrily, "she's mistaken. I'll never change!" and she set her chin in defiance as she made the positive declaration.
And why should she change? she thought now. With Josh's promotion two years ago came the fulfillment of every earthly dream and desire she'd ever had and longed for. Their house was an architect's dream and her clothes were designer labeled, fashioned and made for her only by an exclusive designer. No longer were the dresses she was wearing seen on others at parties, clubs, functions, and such like places. Ah no! Her clothes were one of a kind. Of course, Josh's money paid quite a price for her vanity and her "exclusiveness" where dressing was concerned. But it was worth it: frequently, she was on the Best Dressed list of the Society Page in both of the city's largest newspapers.

Yes, Janelle Landers had climbed the ladder to society's fame. She was now a woman of fashion, social fame and class, and she had neither the desire nor the intention to cede her social prestige and status. No, not for Deb nor Josh. Never! She meant to enjoy herself now that she had reached the pinnacle to which she had aspired all her life.

She checked on the roast and looked at the clock just as Josh opened the door and entered the house.

"Mm!" he exclaimed. "Something in here smells deliciously wonderful." Smiling broadly, he hurried to Janelle and kissed her. "And you smell deliciously fragrant yourself, Mrs. Landers."

"It's the perfume you gave me, Josh. I love it."

"Thanks. Hey, who's coming? The candles look beautiful on the dining room table. So who's coming?"

"You."

Josh laughed. "I'm honored and flattered. But my birthday's a good three months away, my dear."

"Oh, Josh, you funny man! Must a woman always have a special occasion to do something special for her husband?" Janelle asked seriously.

"No, of course not. But knowing my wife, I'm sure there's a special request forthcoming."
Wrapping her arms around his neck, Janelle said softly, "Get washed up; the supper's ready. We can talk as we eat."

The candles burned softly, flickering gently, making the room glow with old-fashioned nostalgia and beauty. Josh complimented his wife lavishly over the deliciousness of the food and the gracious manner in which it was served, asking, at the conclusion of the meal, "And what is thy request, Queen Esther?"

Janelle's brow furrowed deeply. Then, remembering the caution about wrinkles, she unfurrowed it immediately. "And what is meant by that?" she asked quickly.

Josh smiled. "If you'd read the Bible, my dear, you'd know both the meaning and the implication of my question," he answered softly and kindly.

Janelle felt her face flush in anger. "Must the Bible be brought into everything we do or say, Josh?"

"Honey, you know what Christ means to me. He is my Lord and my Savior. I love Him with all that is within me. Naturally, I love His Word. It's my road map and guide book to Heaven. Oh, Janelle, I love the Bible. I wish you would read it. It would make you wise unto salvation and in the things that will get you to Heaven. I want you to go there with me, my dear. Don't trifle with your soul any longer. Jesus is coming back to take His blood-washed children Home with Him. And after this great event transpires and takes place there will be tribulation such as the world has never known or seen before. Please, my dear Janelle, flee to the Lord for forgiveness for your sins. You must be born again or you'll never get into Heaven. Jesus said this. Oh, honey, I beg you to repent and to get converted. Forsake the world and these worldly things, please!"

"And change like our daughter and you have changed!" she cried angrily, getting to her feet and facing Josh. "The answer is plain, Joshua Landers, plain and positive and final -- never! Never! I'm satisfied and happy living life in the social circle even if you won't and don't go with me to the clubs and parties and dances anymore."

"These things will be burned up and destroyed one day, Janelle. And when the great tribulation enters and you are required to have a mark in your
hand or on your forehead or you can't buy or sell, then what will you do? Will your wealth save you or your prestige help you? Oh, my dear, dear Janelle, I beg you, get ready for the Lord's coming. He could come this moment. I don't want you to be left behind and go through the great. . . ."

"Stop it, Josh! Stop it!" she cried angrily. "I have made my choice, just as you have made yours, and I choose to go on living my present lifestyle. No amount of begging or pleading or cajoling will change me. And all this talk and excitement about the Lord coming back for His saints is nothing more than idle chatter. I heard my grandparents talk about this for so long as I can remember, and where are they? Were they 'raptured' away? For more than twenty-three years now they have been reposing in their coffins in the earth. And now, my dear, I'll be leaving for the big party at the Westmorelands'. I had hoped that for once you might put off this religious nonsense and accompany me as you used to do. But it's more than obvious that you have no such intent, so I shall go by myself. It does become a bit tedious and tiring, however, to be asked repeatedly where you are, Josh, and why you no longer socialize. Well, enjoy your evening; I'm sure I'll enjoy mine." And she was gone.

Josh sat for a long while watching the flickering candles burn lower and lower. Then he roused himself, snuffed out the candles and reached for his Bible, reading again in Matthew 24 and 25.

It was late when Janelle returned home from the lavish, elite and elegant Westmoreland party. She was in high spirits: her picture would appear in the city's largest newspaper on one of the two Society pages as having attended the exclusive party in the riverside mansion of one of the wealthiest families in the city.

She hummed softly as she locked the door behind her after entering the house. Strange that Josh hadn't left a light on in the formal living room! she thought as she turned the hall light on and started upstairs to the bedroom.

It was dark when she reached their bedroom; dark in all the upstairs; nor, even, was the night light on in the hallway that ran the length of all five bedrooms with their own private baths.
Janelle slipped quietly into the bathroom and closed the door, not wanting to disturb Josh. She showered quickly, slipped into her expensive designer-made nightgown then turned off the light and walked into the bedroom on softly-slippered feet. The moon, pale and lemon-yellow, peeked into the room, kissing the expensive spread with moon beams and trembling shadows, made thus by the breeze-swayed branches on the trees near the windows.

Janelle gasped. The bed was empty. Where was Josh? She turned the light on and stood in shocked silence: everything was just as she had left it -- in total and complete order.

She turned the hall light on and went into each bedroom and bath in search of her husband, only to find the scene of their own bedroom repeated everywhere she looked. Josh was not upstairs. He must have gone to sleep in the family room, she decided, as she hurried downstairs and began turning on lights and calling his name.

The family room was just as she had left it. So was the formal living room, and Josh's commodious office sitting room. Where was her husband? she wondered.

She searched the alcove room, filled with blooming, growing plants, then turned the light on in the formal dining room where Josh and she had dined hours ago.

What she saw made her sway. Then she screamed, and rushed over to the chair. It couldn't be! It couldn't! Josh's shoes were barely beneath the chair in which he sat at supper. His socks were in the shoes. His suit and shirt and underwear were all in the chair, like he had taken them off and dropped them in haste. Oh no! No!

"Josh! Josh!" she screamed. "Josh, where are you? Come back!"

She saw the Bible then, open on the table. Open to St. Matthew 24 and 25. Like burning coals the verses which Josh had marked burned into her soul -- 'Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your lord doth come." . . . Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. "They that were foolish took . . . no oil with them.. ."
"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

"And . . . the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."

"Josh! Josh!" She screamed till her throat was sore and her voice was hoarse.

"And the door was shut.' Shut!" She screamed the scriptural portion to the silence in the house And then, overcome with the knowledge of the horrors yet to come and through which she must pass and be subjected, Janelle fainted.

The Lord had come; she was left behind!

Dear reader, are you ready for the Lord's return? If not, confess your sins to Jesus, turn from your wicked ways and ask Him to come into your heart and to save you. He loves you. Do it now. Jesus is coming! Perhaps this hour.