I stood near an ancient oak on the fringe of the crowd that had gathered, waiting for the sale to begin. My car was parked, along with others, in an alfalfa field adjoining the house. I remembered the field well; as a small boy I had played in that field. Hidden in it, too. Especially when the boys who belonged to the family started picking on me and making fun of me for being a foster child; a "nobody-wants-him" child -- their words.
I suppose I wasn't much to look at; I was always too thin and too pale, and extremely tall for my years, and shy. But I could no more help this or control it than I could help being a foster child. It cut deep when I learned that my mother, like my father had done two years before, had taken off for parts unknown and left two older sisters and me to fend for ourselves, not caring that we were all still just children and knew nothing at all about taking care of the basic needs of life.

A widowed neighbor, hearing us cry, came over to see what was wrong and discovered the note with its frightening message. She took us to her home and, in as gentle a way as possible, she told us about our mother's departure.

We huddled together like three little frightened animals and wept until it seemed we had no more tears to shed. Our kind neighbor wept with us and held us close to her bosom, crooning softly to us and telling us we could stay with her, that maybe our mother's love for us would bring her back. But such was not the case. After a month and a half, our good neighbor fell and had to be hospitalized. We became wards of the state and were put into foster homes, each of us in a different home, separated for the first time ever in our lives.

I was shifted from one foster home to another for various reasons, and for reasons which, at the time, I was too young to understand. And then one day, at age nine, I was put into the Stanley home, where I was given a tiny room all to myself. The room was small, as previously stated, but it looked out onto a lush meadow where a crystal-clear brook babbled and meandered in a crazy crooked way through its lush green. I felt like I was a king in a palace room. Finally, and at last, I had a room I could call my own.

I took care of that tiny room like it was a thing of priceless worth, always making my cot with utmost care and putting my few earthly possessions neatly inside the dresser drawers of the antique dresser that stood rigidly, ruggedly, and stately-right against the wall a few feet away from my bed. At night, I pretended the dresser was a sentinel guarding me and my palace.

The Stanleys were good people and kind to me. Their three nearly-grown sons, however, seemed to have resented me from the moment I set foot inside the door. The two Stanley girls smiled and accepted me as just
another member of the family. To them, I became the baby of the family, thus
taking away the stigma from LaRonda, who was, indeed, the youngest (and
thus called "the baby") of the family. (LaRonda became my ardent admirer
and went out of her way to literally shower me with love and kindness, telling
me over and over again and again that I had been sent to take away her
"chagrin" and "great burden" and "deep humiliation over "being called "the
baby." "After all, no nearly thirteen-year-old enjoyed a title and/or reputation
of such infamy and disgrace" LaRonda's exact words.)

Mrs. Susan Stanley was, to me, a princess; a real mother. I loved her
instantly and immediately. Her smile, and the gentleness with which she
touched my cheek and my shoulder, melted any and all hardness I may have
had inside my young heart. I felt her love! It flowed like a deep, calm and
placid sea from her heart straight into mine. I knew, instinctively, she was my
friend. Knew, too, that she loved me and cared about what had happened to
me. My desire, immediately, was to please her and be obedient to her. To
her husband, also.

Had the kind parents known about, or been aware of, the treatment I
received from their sons, they would have meted out punishment accordingly
and swiftly, I'm sure. But the boys were cunning and sly, treating me
courteously and rather humanely when either parent was around then
unleashing their jealousy and hatred/ abhorrence of me and toward me when
neither mother nor father was near. I lived in constant fear of them when
working with them, which was frequent and often, for each member of the
household had his just share of work to do. Unlike their parents, the boys
were churlish and selfish, hating me for becoming a part of the household
and sharing their father and mother.

I was sixteen years old when Mr. Stanley died suddenly from a heart
attack, leaving Mrs. Stanley, LaRonda, and me alone. By now, the oldest son
was married and the other two had moved into apartments of their own;
LisaAnn was away in college and LaRonda would be enrolling in the fall.

I suppose it was the shock of her husband's sudden death that brought
on Mrs. Stanley's illness; but whatever its cause, the dear, kind woman who
had become a loving mother to me, two months after LaRonda left for
college, went to live with a caring niece, where she remained until her death.
Fearful of being put into yet another home, I packed my few belongings and left the area completely. And now, here I was at the sale, a man of twenty-five with a good job and a lovely young lady whom I planned to marry shortly, God willing.

I stood watching the motley crowd of sale goers, recognizing the three men who were once my tormentors but not being recognized by any of them. Their countenances, still churlish and surly looking, seemed even more so than when we all lived together under the same roof. I felt sorry for them, and even more sorry for their wives and offspring. (Mother Stanley had taught me, by daily living and godly example, how to love even my enemies; she led me to Christ.)

How I came to be at the sale was, in itself, a miracle. You see, I hadn't so much as known, even, that the Stanley place was to be sold. Especially so soon afar Susan Stanley's death. (She was gone less than a month, I learned via the obituary column of an old newspaper which was left in my place of business by I knew not whom.)

Since I no longer lived in or near the area of the Stanley residence, I was even more surprised to discover not only the paper with the obituary in it but a later paper announcing the sale of the property and household goods.

I knew I had to go to that sale; I felt drawn to it like a magnet draws metal. Mother Stanley's Bible had special significance for me; she read from its pages daffy to me. We had our very own private devotions every night in my "palace" room. "A special love-bonus for you," she told me as we sat together in the tiny room after the regular family altar prayers and Bible reading were over downstairs.

I listened almost reverently now as I heard the auctioneer begin the sale. Memories so painfully sweet washed over me like waves washing in to shore. I felt tears trickle down over my cheeks like tiny streams running off course. I sucked my breath in quick-like, trying to stifle the sob that I felt inside of me, wondering again, as I had done so many times when I lived with the Stanleys, how the boys (now all grown men) could live beneath the roof of a house in which God was loved and reverenced and honored and worshipped and they could so resist Him and His proffered love.
I spied LaRonda in the crowd and knew that sometime before my departure I must get to see her. LisaAnn, too, if I could find her and recognize her. LaRonda was beautiful. A smile tugged at the corners of my mouth as I recalled her "utter humiliation" -- "the baby." I was sure, watching her now, that we would soon be laughing together over that long-ago "cross" of hers.

My heart seemed to almost cease its beating and I was brought quickly out of my pleasant reverie as I saw the antique chest of drawers hoisted up onto the auction stand. My chest of drawers from my "palace" room! My nightly "sentinel" when I was a boy!

"A fine piece of furniture," I heard the auctioneer comment. "And in excellent condition. What am I offered for it?"

For some strange and sentimental reason, I heard myself reply, "Two hundred dollars." I couldn't let just anyone have that treasured piece of furniture: too many memories were hidden inside its antique "heart."

From somewhere to my left I saw a head nod as the auctioneer asked for $250.00. LisaAnn? It was LisaAnn! In her arms a tiny baby was cradled lovingly and tenderly. She looked angelically sweet. Like LaRonda, the presence of God in her heart was still very much evident on her face and in her being.

I ceased my bidding. It was only right that she should have it. My only regret was that it could not have been given to her; it seemed all wrong that she should have to pay for it.

Piec by piece and box by box I saw the house "dismantled" and, suddenly, I experienced the full meaning of the adjective, transitory. With powerful impact, I realized that nothing of earth's possessions had eternal value; that someday, and in the not-too-distant future at that, someone strange and perhaps totally unknown to me, would be bidding and buying my possessions; those things that were once my treasured things but which I could not take with me to the grave.

With new and deeper and greater spiritual insight, I grasped the meaning of the scripture verse, "Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).
It was a long time in coming but, finally, the box of books, with Mother Stanley's old Bible in it, was auctioned off. I felt like a king with a rare and priceless gem. I paid for my treasure and pulled the much-worn old Bible close to my heart as I carried the box to the car then hurried back to the sale.

I looked for LaRonda and finally saw her, alone, near a lilac bush. She was crying.

Making my way through the crowd, I walked up behind her and said softly, "Hi! How's the baby?"

She turned around so quickly that she almost fell. Then, in a happy little squeal of delight, she exclaimed, "Johnny! Johnny! You . . . you're here. Oh, I'm so happy." And then her arms encircled me tightly. We wept together.

"I don't mind being called the baby anymore," she said after awhile, laughing so hard I thought she was going to cry again, this time from laughter. "But don't forget it, young man, you are the real baby; you're three years younger than I am."

We laughed again. Then, laying my hands on her shoulders, I said, "And now, I want to know why you were over here crying."

"Because . . . well, because someone bought that box in which Mother's old Bible was; the one she allowed you to keep in your room on the dresser. Oh, Johnny, I know she'd have wanted you to have it. And if I wouldn't have had to help with something in the kitchen I would have bought it and kept it until I found you. For, you see, Johnny, LisaAnn and I've been praying ever since you left that we'd get to see you again, and now that our prayers are answered we'll never let you get away. We love you, Johnny. Why don't you come home? You are more of a brother to us than our biological brothers are. You and LisaAnn and I are bound together in Christ. This makes a strong bond."

I wiped the tears from my eyes. Then I said, "Yes, we do have a strong bond holding us together, my dear motherly-sister. And now that I am being reunited with my two dear 'sisters,' I don't want to ever again stay away so long. I live nearly one hundred miles from here. That's not far, when one has a good car and good highways such as we have here, LaRonda. And now, to
set your dear little mind at ease, it was I who bought the Bible and box of books."

"Johnny, you mean it! Really?"

"Yes, really!"

"Come," LaRonda said, linking her arm through mine and leading me away from the crowd. "LisaAnn and I have a surprise for you," she added, as she led me to a van parked not far away from the tool shed in which Dad Stanley loved to putter and relax by making things.

"Surprise! Surprise!" she called out gleefully as she opened the door and held out her hand for me to enter.

"Sh-h! Sh-h!" LisaAnn cautioned her effusive sounding sister. "I just now got them asleep."

"Well, we'll put them to sleep again, later on; right now, I want my Jennifer to meet the greatest uncle she'll ever have."

"Johnny!"

LisaAnn's softly-whispered exclamation brought fresh tears to my eyes. In an instant, we were in each other's arms.

"And now you must meet our little ones," she remarked, leading me to the back of the van where two of the most beautiful children I had ever seen lay sleeping soundly and peacefully in spite of our joyful exuberance.

"My Jennifer," LaRonda said, pointing to a small basket.

"And my Johnny," LisaAnn added proudly, touching the rosy-cheeked fellow with her finger. "Your namesake," she said with a smile. "You'll never know how much joy you brought into LaRonda's and my life, Johnny. And to Mother's and Dad's, too."

"I . . . I . . . thank you," I said hoarsely. "I am highly honored." It was all more than I could imagine, or believe, almost.
"Tell us about yourself, Johnny," they said together. "Are you married?"

"Soon, God willing. . . ."

It was not until noon of the following day that I got away. But I knew that I would return. Soon, too. To think that God had looked down upon an "orphaned" boy and had taken extreme pity upon him and sent him, via a foster home, to the home of a Christian man and woman -- and two "sisters" whose love and kindness had been badly needed -- was almost more than I could take in. But it was true, and I was living proof that the wonderful chain of events were every one of them God-ordered and God-ordained in and for my life.

The road homeward seemed like a silver ribboned thread. Uncle! Uncle Johnny! It sounded wonderful. I felt like a prince. No, like a king. God had blest me over, above, and beyond anything I deserved.

In my heart, I purposed with renewed hope and faith to continue praying until my two biological sisters and I would be reunited and I could witness to them about this blessed Christ whom I found and who was my personal Savior and Sanctifier and my very closest and dearest Friend.

Believe in miracles? I did. Yes, I did! God had worked one miracle after another in my life and the end was not yet.

Lifting my head upward, I said a loud, hearty, "Praise the Lord!"