Randall Clark switched the headlights of his car off as he turned down the small lane leading to and past the old familiar homeplace. Nostalgia, so painfully sweet and poignant, washed over him with such sudden force that he experienced a hurting sensation. Tears slid down his sun-bronzed cheeks and fell onto his trousers. He longed to see his mother; longed to wrap his arms around her small, dainty form and tell her he'd come home for a few
days; but logic prevented him stopping, even, as he passed by the neat little
bungalow which, though still early by city standards of living, was wrapped in
the blanket of the summer's beautiful twilight. Already, his mother was in bed.

He was thankful for the moon. Thankful, too, that he knew the road as
well as he knew the back of his hand and could steer the car safely to where
the bend in the road heralded and greeted the mountain at its feet.

Deer darted with almost lightning speed across the road as he eased
the car around the bend, the sound of the motor frightening them, he was
sure. He turned on his headlights and saw the beautiful creatures grazing by
dozens along the grassy slope adjacent to the mountain. His heart began
doing crazy little flip flops, so highly reminiscent of the first three times his
father had taken him hunting with him, until he discovered he was actually
crying.

"Oh, Daddy! Daddy, I miss you so!"

His voice broke and, parking the car in a small space at the base of the
mountain, Randall dropped his head over the steering wheel and sobbed. If
only his father were living, he'd know what he ought to do. For so long as he
could remember, he'd had his father to turn to and to lean upon. He had
sought out his wise counsel and heeded his advice and found out that,
always, it was the best. His father was a man of God; a spiritual giant really.
His mother too. But he had found it easier to open his heart to his father
since he was of his own sex.

The sudden and totally unexpected Homegoing of his father had left
both his mother and himself in a state of shock which lasted for months. It
was almost as though the world had ceased to exist for him, Randall recalled,
after his father's death. They had been such a closely-knit family; each
embraced and shared the same deep spiritual values, and love was the
predominant factor in the home.

Randall opened the car door now and got out. His reason for coming,
besides wanting to share time with his dear mother, was so he could be
alone and pray until he became certain-sure of God's will for him where
Janeece was concerned.
He opened the trunk of the car and removed his previously readied backpack containing nylon tarp, plastic ground sheet, foam pad, sleeping bag, pillowcase, flannel shirt, cup, spoon, breakfast and lunch, if necessary.

He and his father had camped out frequently during his growing-up years and he had loved every minute of those close-together campouts. It was during those times when, over the dying embers of a camp fire, he was able to open his heart to his wonderful parent and ask questions which had lain long inside and to which he wanted an answer. Many things were settled for him during those times, both spiritual and otherwise. Always, his life had seemed to have such clear direction, until Janeece entered the picture.

Randall felt tears sting his eyes at thought of Janeece. The dark-eyed, dark-haired beauty had entered his sheltered, uncluttered and totally peaceful life and way of living with uncanny winsomeness and charm. At first he paid little attention to her and her many considerations of and for him; but eventually she got him to notice her and that's when his clear as-a-blue-sky experience with God began to have shadows and shades of gray in it. That's why he felt he must pray through on the relationship -- clear through -- either yes or no. And that's why he was going to camp out. He wanted nothing to distract him from his purpose. Absolutely nothing.

He gathered up his gear, locked the car, and started walking up the unmarked but extremely familiar "trail," praying and seeking for God's will with every step he took. It weighed heavily upon him, the matter of dating Janeece. And the shadows. Mainly, the shadows. Why should he have these "shadows" and fears if God was smiling upon his dating her? True, he had never done much dating before he met Janeece. Not that he wasn't a normal young man with desires for a life companion; he was. But he had purposed within himself to get his schooling out of the way before becoming involved with a lot of dating.

"Oh, God," he moaned, "Thy will. Only Thy will! Nothing less. I've come to get this thing settled."

Stars twinkled more brightly now as the evening shades darkened into a perfect late spring night. Randall sensed the Divine Presence; he knew the answer was on the way. After all, he wanted nothing more nor less than what God knew was best for him.
After a half hour of walking he came to the very spot where his father and he had camped out many a beautiful night. Twice, even, in the winter; and on one of those memorable and never to be forgotten camp-out winter nights, snow had fallen as they slept, snugly warm in their down-filled nylon sleeping bags beneath the overhanging branches of the fir tree.

Randall eased his backpack to the soft ill-needle carpet and prepared his bed, should he receive his clear-cut answer from Heaven before dawn and want to sleep a bit before going to his beloved mother.

With his few belongings taken care of and readied for use, he sat down with his back against the sturdy trunk of the stately and beautiful fir and for a long while he let the night enfold and envelop him with its peacefulness and its quietude. He closed his eyes and listened to the gurgling, chuckling stream that ran pleasantly on its way through the forest and was less than ten feet away from his bed. Memories rushed in like a fast moving tide and clasped him fast in their poignancy. Tears flowed. God was near.

In little more than a whisper, Randall, still sitting against the tree, opened his heart to God and began his prayer vigil, knowing full well that the God who created him and the Savior who had redeemed him and saved and sanctified his soul, wanted only what was best for him. Too, he had the scriptural injunction to lean upon and to draw from, where it stated, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally; and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

Randall meditated for a while upon the greatness and the magnitude of the promise, thankful for the simple and childlike faith which he had acquired at the moment of his conversion as a little boy of ten and which he had maintained ever since. To him, God's Word was yea and amen; true from beginning to end. He felt he could approach the Throne of grace with boldness and complete confidence, since his ultimate desire was to know what the Lord's will was for him regarding Janeece.

Janeece was bubbly and outgoing and, more than this, she seemed to be spiritual. She participated in practically everything at the Bible School and she seemed to throw her entire being into whatever she did, too. She had a host of friends and was well liked by everyone who knew her. Wherever she was, people gathered around her. She had what he, Randall, felt was a
magnetic personality. The students just naturally gravitated to her, both male and female.

Randall pushed the thought of Janeece away. Rationalizing would do him no good, he realized. If anything, it only helped to confuse one, he was sure. Where spiritual values and things of eternity were concerned, especially, one could never ever rationalize spiritual things and come out victorious and triumphant. Fervent prayer and Bible searching and Bible reading plus total obedience to the known will of God, were the necessary things to keep one spiritual and victorious. He had learned this fact early in his Christian life and now, alone in the woods, he was indeed grateful for the invaluable and precious lesson of solitude and aloneness with God. All too frequently, the great majority of professing Christians shied away from the "Be still, and know that I am God" Biblical admonition, choosing, rather to be with the crowd in all its fun and gaiety and lightness.

The night closed in about him in all its sweetness and beauty. He felt like he was wrapped in a coverlet of reverence and awe, so sacred was the atmosphere surrounding him.

Praying was easy; he felt he could reach out and touch the Lord, and while there were many prayer requests which he had been praying for at the Bible School, he petitioned for none of them now, feeling he must get clear through on Janeece.

How long he prayed he didn't know; but when, finally, he felt fully confident and convinced that he had received God's sky-blue-clear directive to put an end to his dating Janeece, the "fogged-up" spiritual sky cleared marvelously and wondrously for him. He could do nothing but cry and praise the Lord, so happy and blest was he. There was nothing more wonderful than knowing the will of God and being perfectly obedient to that will! he thought, as he got to his feet and stretched his legs before retiring for the night.

With the ground sheet already having been spread and topped by the foam pad, he crawled into the sleeping bag, his heart feeling blest and as light as a feather. Overhead, stars glistened and sparkled. A whippoorwill glided silently across an opening, landed in the deep shadows, and began its loud calling, a sound that kept many awake but exerted quite the opposite effect upon him.
When next he awoke, the stars were bright and many. The whippoorwill was chanting a long ways off. A deer snorted and the rodents rustled. He smelled the clean fragrance of fresh leaves, rotting duff, pine and fir needles, hay-scented fern, and, faintly, the musk of a skunk.

Thus he napped the night away, waking to smell and watch and hear, drifting back to sleep, and waking again. When he could distinguish green plants from brown forest floor, he got up, packed his few belongings, and started down the now fully visible and discernible familiar trek toward where the car was parked.

The pack was light, his heart and soul even fighter and he felt within himself that God had good things in store for him. He had found the right direction--from God.

From somewhere nearby he heard the magnificent song and lucid tones of a wood thrush serenading the dawn and, with sudden spiritual illumination, he found the birds were once again singing in his heart.

Feeling joyously happy and light as a feather, he put the camping-out gear into the trunk then slid behind the steering wheel and headed the car toward home where he knew his mother's arms would welcome him with love and warmth and glad surprise.