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**THE BITTER YEARS**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**  
**(1st of 6 parts)**

Jennifer sat up in bed and looked toward the door, feeling more convinced than ever what she must do. The conviction which had for months stirred gently but almost continually inside her breast now became a sudden confirmation. She dropped her head on her knees, drawn up to her chin, and

cried softly. Her long, thick, dark hair fell loosely around her face, making a veil for her tears and an acoustical barrier of sorts for her muffled sobs.

Moonbeams danced and frolicked among the leaves of the trees, occasionally breaking the barrier of green to covertly peek through the gossamer-sheer curtains at the bedroom windows and throw a silvery beam across the coverlet on the bed and the fair face of the one lying on the pillow.

In the distance a late night train rumbled across the tracks, whistling shrilly at each crossing, and the whir of machines in the factories continued their endless and relentless noise while the inhabitants in the city, for the most part, slept.

Jennifer lifted her head and looked toward the door again. Her mother's light was off, she noted. She was thankful for this; thankful that her mother was sleeping better lately.

She pushed the sheet back then got out of bed and walked to the opened windows, being careful not to make noise. For a long while she stood there, motionless, thinking; marveling at the dream. It was so real. So very real.

A warm, playful breeze parted the branches of the trees beyond the window and the moonbeams played across her face, upturned now and stained with tears. For a moment, brief though it was, the beams turned her tears into diamonds, dazzling like gems, costly, rare and beautiful. A night bird in a bush below the windows trilled a softly-sweet song that floated up to where she stood, like one rooted to the spot.

Quietly, she dropped to her knees on the floor, whispering softly heavenward, "Thy will, O God, not mine. Thy will; only Thy will. Please, prepare Mother for this. Let her have the same confirmation."

She leaned her arms on the windowsill, reveling in the glory of His presence and marveling at the deep inner calm of her soul since she knew what God's will was for her during the summer months. The joy of instant obedience to His voice was beyond human understanding, she thought, joyously happy and blest.

In the intense silence of the late night hour, Jennifer's thoughts wandered to the father about whom her mother used to talk when she was very little. She wondered now, as she was so frequently prone to do, what it would be like to have a father. She felt sure it would have been one of the most wonderful things a child could have. God had planned for the ideal home to have both a loving, caring father and mother in it, she knew. But her home had been the exception, it seemed. She had had a father, to be sure, but she had no recollection whatever of him; when she was still very small, he had disappeared. Vanished. And for what reason, she didn't know. Neither did her mother and she knew if he was living or dead.

Jennifer listened in breathless silence to the softly sweet refrain of the night bird's song beneath the window. A mocking bird, no doubt, she thought, recalling the nest she'd seen in one of the Crape Myrtle trees on the lawn. The male seemed to take supreme delight in serenading the patient mate sitting on the eggs in the nest. What compensation for an ordinary and routine task! she mused thoughtfully. And how wonderfully considerate, thoughtful, and kind God was, to have thought about something so lowly as birds and provide them with the ability and the talent to make music and song in the midst of labor and work and, as in the case beneath the window, the waiting period too.

Songs in the night! she thought, feeling wondrously joyful in her soul. God had given the bird his song in the night but she, too, had her songs -- in the plural -- in the night. In that period of darkness and blackness when not a single ray of light was visible, God had never once failed to put: song after glorious song in her heart, which, as she either sank or quoted the Spirit-inspired words, broke through the curtain-shroud of darkness and gloom and let the beauty and the sunshine of God's wonderful glory shine through.

She was thankful that as a very young child she had learned to lean upon the Lord and to trust Him implicitly. Maybe it was because she had had no earthly father that the bond to her Heavenly Father had become so unwaveringly strong and binding; or maybe it was simply because she had found it a most blessed and delightful thing to choose to believe the promises of God and His Word rather than listen to the voice of the adversary of her soul. Whatever, or whichever, she had proven over and over, again and again, that God -- her Heavenly Father -- was changeless and unchanging; that always -- always!--He was faithful to keep His promises and that He was near to help her whenever she needed Him.

She lifted her heart in praise to God now as she knelt inside the opened windows. She had ever so many things for which to praise the Lord. First and foremost, she was thankful for the life changing new heart the Lord gave her when she was converted and, subsequently, sanctified wholly. Oh the glory and the joy and, yes, the pure bliss and freedom in Christ since she, Jennifer Denise Brown, turned every part of her being over to Christ and died out to sin, to self, and to people and peoples' opinions.

Self was the hardest of all to die out to; how it struggled to survive -- to live! But she continued steadfastly in prayer and fasting and waiting upon God, and oh, the glory and the victory that was hers when she was sanctified wholly and became "crucified with Christ!" From that glorious moment on, her heart overflowed with Divine Love and an indescribable joy. It was as if she had a river flowing constantly and endlessly inside her being. So she praised the Lord for taking her soul out into the deeps of His Divine Love.

Recalling some of the snide remarks and cutting words made by a few of her classmates and peers regarding her not having a father -- at least one whom she had no idea about either his existence or whereabouts if, indeed, he was still alive -- she thanked the Lord for the healing power of His love and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, which wrapped her soul and her entire being in the warmth of His tender care and understanding and compassion. In Jesus, she had a Friend of all friends. She praised Him for His faithfulness to her; for being her Heavenly Father.

Next, she praised the Lord for giving her a mother who loved her and cared for her total being -- the spiritual and the physical. Also the emotional. What a priceless gift the Lord gave her in her mother! She, it was, who had suffered most deeply when the man whom she had loved and trusted had suddenly and without warning or announcement whatever, vanished from her life. Not until a sister of her husband told her that Glenn was a compulsive and very badly "hooked" gambler, did her mother know of his "addiction." And then only after he had disappeared. This same sister-in-law felt quite certain that her brother -- Jennifer's father -- had deserted his family to take up living on an island abroad, where gambling was an accepted and established way of life, so he had told his sister, Jennifer's Aunt Elise.

Tears flowed freely from Jennifer's eyes now as she thought about her mother and the heartache she had endured and suffered. And they had been

married only nine years and three months, she recalled her mother having told her. What a shock it must have been to her!

"God had sent you into my life by that time," her mother told her. "God, plus you, helped me to get through the hurt and the pain--and the trauma," she had added.

Did her father ever, at any time of his young life, have a desire for God? Jennifer wondered again, as she had done so many, many times.

He had not looked kindly upon her mother's conversion and subsequent sanctification (seven years after they were married), her mother had told her. But did he never, ever, have a desire and a thirst for God and things spiritual? Was there such a thing as being "drowned" in worldly pleasures and desires? she wondered. And could one who had an unquenchable and insatiable desire for these pleasures become blinded by their fascinating but temporary glitter and appeal? Did her father never know or, even, hear what God's Word said about sin and its wages? Surely, surely, someone, sometime, told him, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Quickly and decidedly Jennifer thrust the nagging questions aside, knowing that wondering and not praying could only cause confusion in the mind and lead one to all kinds of imaginations and wrong thoughts.

She bowed her head and began to pray in earnest. Suddenly she heard her mother's soft footsteps on the carpet.

"Jennifer. Jennifer," she called in little more than a whisper.

(2nd of 6 parts)

"Jennifer. Jennifer. Honey, where are you?" Adelaide Brown cried, as she saw the empty bed.

"Here, Mother; by the window," Jennifer replied, rising from her knees and hurrying toward her mother. "I thought you were asleep," she said softly, as they met halfway between the bed and the windows and fell into each other's arms.

"I was, my dear, until a few minutes ago. It was such a restful sleep; so refreshing. But why are you not sleeping?"

"I was just now trying to pray. Before this, I felt I just had to praise the Lord. Oh, Mother, He has been so good and gracious and wonderful to me. He leadeth me, Mother. Yes, He leadeth me. Just like the song says, He leadeth me. I am amazed. Awed. I know where I am to go this summer and what I am to do. God confirmed His will to me this night."

"Jennifer. . . ."

"Yes, Mother?"

"You will go with my blessing upon you. The Lord visited me a little while ago in a dream. He showed me the mission and the. . . ."

"Oh, Mother!" Jennifer cried, breaking in in glad surprise. "I was so afraid what this may do to you. My going, I mean. I know your body isn't strong right now and I . . . I was concerned. I asked the Lord to prepare you for where I am to go. I had hoped I could go to our own camp and then stay on and help out in the month-long Daily Vacation Bible School our pastor and wife have set up in ten-day meetings each for the children that will be bussed out from various parts of the city.

"Brother and Sister Fullerton asked each of us to pray earnestly about where God wanted us to be of service to Him for these summer months, hoping we would all be able to help them during these daily, month-long special services for the underprivileged children from the city. I wanted to go there, Mother, and help. Oh, how I did want to! But each time I prayed, I felt reticent about giving Brother Fullerton a definite answer that I would help. I said nothing to him, but I continued to wait upon the Lord."

"You have done the right thing, my child," Mrs. Brown replied, adding, "Let's sit down, shall we? It's doubtful that either of us could sleep if we went to bed now; we're too caught up in the wonder and the amazement and awe of God's marvelous leading and manifestation."

"Could we just sit here on the floor, Mother, with the moon peeking in among the leaves and shining its gentle-soft beams into the room? Your face looks positively ethereal. I don't understand how Daddy could have left

anyone so sweet and gentle and lovely and godly as you. Oh, Mother," Jennifer cried; "I love you so much. I wanted to do something nearby, for this summer, so I could be with you. I don't want you to be alone. That Mission is so far away. If only Daddy would not have left you. . . ."

"Jennifer, I have told you many times that I am never alone: Always, the Lord is with me."

"I know, Mother," the girl answered softly. "I wish you could go with me. I'm not afraid of going by myself; but I shall miss you dreadfully. I feel God has a very definite purpose and reason for sending me there, even though I don't know what it is. Mother," she said quickly, "did you ever tell Daddy about the wages of sin, and that it was death? Did my father never -- not ever once -- seem to have a pull toward God? Was he a . . . a rank heathen?"

Pulling her seventeen year-old daughter close to her side, Adelaide Brown said, "When you say 'rank,' honey, if you mean was your father a vile heathen, which is one meaning of 'rank' when it is used as an adjective, I Would have to say that he was not. As for the 'heathen' part, I would have to say that I was as much a heathen as he was before Jesus found me and saved me.

"Your father and I were high school sweethearts. He was a brainy-brilliant fellow, and he was fun to be with and to have around, He was personable, amiable, and amicable. Everybody loved him. At least, everybody I knew loved him. But neither one of us was religious."

"But why, Mother? Why would he just take off without letting you know his reason -- or reasons -- for doing such an unholy thing?"

"Sin causes people to do many things over which they seem to have no Control and for which they regret the rest of their lives, Jennifer. Sin, once it has fastened itself around its victim, is like a heavy chain or fetter, which only the power of Christ and His redeeming blood can break.

"Your father and I came from irreligious families: Neither his parents nor mine went to church except for funerals and wedding's. Glenn wanted a college education, and so did I. We put off getting married until we were through college, feeling it was the wise thing to do. We were married shortly after.

"The wedding was a simple ceremony in a small roadside chapel in Indiana. We had read about the lovely little chapel in a magazine years before, and seen the pictures of the chapel with the accompanying article. We decided then, that when we were married, we would say our vows in that little chapel in the wooded area in the presence of the man who served as the pastor there. His wife and their oldest son stood up with us. Neither your father nor I wanted a large, expensive wedding: we preferred something simple but something special. We fulfilled our desire in that little chapel."

"I'm sure it was beautiful, Mother."

"Very beautiful, honey. And now that I know the Lord, and know that marriage was instituted by God, I realize that what I felt that sunshiny day in the chapel was a feeling of deepest sacredness and awe; a feeling of rightness. I was so ignorant of spiritual things and spiritual insight then. I couldn't explain or define what I felt, so I never mentioned it to anybody. Your father told me many times that I was quite the sentimentalist. Then he would laugh and tell me he loved me in spite of this 'weakness,' as he phrased it in teasing."

Jennifer sighed a heavy and a long sigh. "I wish I could have known my father," she said softly, adding quickly, "I wish he hadn't gone away."

"I've wished that dozens of times, my dear," Mrs. Brown said. "But I'm not going to dwell upon things I can't understand nor upon things of the past for which I have no answers. I am happy in the Lord, and I will never be able to praise Him enough for the little tract that someone put in our mailbox. I must have read it over at least a dozen times or more after finding it, and the more I reread it so much brighter became my understanding of what I was reading."

"I went to the store that same day and bought a Bible. It was the first time in my life that I had a Bible in my hands. I read the tract again and, as I read, I tried to find the books in the Bible which were given as scriptural references in that little paper. That's where your 'heathen' question regarding your father hit me hard, Jennifer: I was, indeed, a heathen: I had no idea where to look for what I had read in the tract. But I persevered; I was determined to find the truth of the little tract's contents out for myself. And as I

found the wonderful verses in the Bible, I felt like I had unearthed a gold mine of precious gems.

"It was impossible to put the Bible down: I read on and on and on, until I could not stand the strange tug and pull on my heart strings. In desperation of soul I cried out to God, imploring Him to please help me, saying simply, 'Oh, God, if You're really real, please help me and relieve me of this strange feeling in my inner being. Forgive me, please.'

"That simple plea brought instant and immediate victory and peace to my soul. Oh I was happy! I was truly beside myself with holy joy. The house seemed to be filled with the glory of God. Everything looked new and beautiful. I thought the world had changed; but it was I who was changed. The Lord gave me a new heart: I was saved and I knew it for myself."

"I guess I'll never be able to understand why my father turned against you for becoming a Christian," Jennifer said sadly. "Nor why he resented you for giving your heart to the Lord. Oh, if he could only have known the joy of the Lord!"

"Jesus' words state the reason, dear: 'If they hated Me, they will hate you also.' He was speaking (in John's Gospel) about the world, and the sinful men in the world, when He told the disciples this. Your father was a worldly-wise man, making big money in his business. And he was also very proud. The thought of his wife becoming a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ was extremely humiliating to him, I'm sure."

"But why? Being born again and sanctified wholly is the most wonderful thing in the world. A genuine Christian is the most wonderful person there is to live with and be around. A Christian home is a harmonious and joyously-happy home. Look at us, Mother; our home is . . . well, it's simply heavenly."

"That's because you and I know the Lord and share the same interests and love things that are spiritual, Jennifer; things that center upon and around Christ. Your father's interests were completely and totally different. I feel certain, though, that there were times when he was under conviction. I sensed this keenly; and I prayed the harder and more earnestly for him, pleading with God to save his soul.

"I had no inkling whatever of his terribly wicked habit of gambling, and I was shocked beyond words when your Aunt Elise -- my sister-in-law -- informed me that he had indulged in this for years, adding that he was 'quite lucky' -- her words -- almost all the time.

"There were times that I wondered where all the money was coming from. Especially so when he paid this house off in seven years' time. I asked him about it, and he said he'd been having prosperous times. I believed him: I was so trusting. So naive.

"When we married, he told me to never worry over, or become concerned with, any of his business affairs. He said he would take care of all business matters; that this was his duty and his job and, as such, he would provide well for my every need, a promise he certainly fulfilled and kept."

Jennifer shivered momentarily. Then she said, "Oh Mother, what if the house was paid off with . . . with . . ."

"I know what you're going to say, honey. I've thought of this many times. And of the money he left in the checking account, too. But you and I are innocent. We don't know where it came from. He did have a good business, this I know; and it was legitimate and honest. And now, don't you think we should try to get a little more sleep before the sun pokes its cheerful face in through the leafy branches of the trees? You'll soon have to begin packing for your trip, my dear, God willing. I want my daughter to be rested up before she leaves: mission work is exhausting."

"I know, Mother. That's what Patty told me, when her parents and she were at our church representing the mission. I'm glad I know Patty and her parents; at least I'm not going among total strangers this way."

"I'm glad, too, Jennifer. I love you. Goodnight -the second time around for the night," Mrs. Brown said, laughing softly as she left the room for her own bed.

"Goodnight, Mother. I love you too -- so very, very much." And Jennifer slid beneath the soft sheets on the bed and the gentle breezes fanned her to sleep.

(3rd of 6 parts)

Jennifer tilted her seat forward and looked through the windows of the speeding train. The scenery flashed by in rapid succession. She must have slept for a few hours again, she knew, for when last she had looked out through the window beside her seat the sun was just beginning to stretch its rosy fingers into the tips of the few visible fleecy-white clouds that sailed serenely in the sky and now that same sun was "full-blown," riding high overhead and filling the world with its light and its brilliance.

A shiver of excitement tingled through her. The world was beautiful. She felt wonderful: the Lord was not only her Savior He was also her Shepherd. He was leading her; riding inside the coach with her. From the time she put the first item into the piece of luggage for her departure to Palmetta Rescue Mission along the coast, she sensed that God had a special assignment for her. What it may be, she did not know; nor did she worry about it. Her Shepherd knew; this was enough for her.

She got to her feet and stretched luxuriantly, thankful that for the present time the seat across the aisle from her and the one in front of her was empty of its occupants. She speculated they could have gone to the dining car or, even, up to the coach with the vista dome, from where one could view the breathtaking scenery from front, back, sides and even upwards, at the sky. She had gone up there herself last night before settling down in her seat for sleep. She had sensed the Lord's presence unusually near as she sat looking through the dome's arched glass top, watching the brilliance of the shimmering stars, the moon and the mountains. Praying was so easy, though it was all done in silence. Her Saviour-Shepherd listened; He heard: He assured her heart that He had. And when she finally came down from the vista dome car and made her way to her own coach and the reclining seat, she fell asleep almost immediately.

She stood for a while then stretched again before getting the bag of fruit from the compartment above her seat. Her mother had been so kind to her, and so concerned that she eat properly: She had prepared the sturdy little tote bag lovingly, Jennifer knew, as she took out one of the largest Red Delicious apples she had ever seen and bit into it. It was delicious indeed! It could wear its name honestly and proudly, she thought, as she took a second bite of its juicy-crisp goodness.

She prayed for her mother as she ate, thanking God for her parent's gentle love and her marvelous unselfishness and total commitment to the Lord. Where might she--Jennifer--be, had it not been for her mother's spiritual guidance and prayerfulness and unfailing love? she wondered. She felt tears form in her eyes, and she realized that already she was homesick; she missed her mother. They had never been separated for long periods of time. And never ever for six weeks!

Fearful lest full-fledged homesickness would inundate her and thwart the purpose God had in sending her down to the mission, Jennifer closed her eyes and asked the Lord to help her and to not allow one single thing to mar His purpose and plan. Missionaries left home and lands for years, she knew, and they made it: She was going, not for years, nor even one year, but for only six weeks!

She felt ashamed of herself and told the Lord so. Immediately a wonderful peace calmed her fears. She was going on business for Jesus, whatever it may be: This was a settled and for-sure fact. Her beloved mother belonged to the Lord; He would take care of her and watch over her while they were separated, she knew.

She ate her apple and a pear then she settled down with her Bible and a missionary book she brought along to read while on the train. It would be nightfall before she reached her destination and good reading helped the time to go by faster. She hoped she would again see the young lady whom she had told about Jesus in the vista dome car last night. Greta was her name; she was a German exchange student, she had said. She seemed greatly interested in what was being said, and asked many questions. Jennifer was glad that her mother had reminded her to slip a few tracts into her purse for just such a time. Greta accepted the tracts eagerly and promised to read them when she returned to her coach and to her seat, where the lighting made reading possible.

Jennifer felt burdened now for the soft-spoken blonde-haired Greta. She seemed sad, she recalled, and a bit frightened. Was she lonely? Jennifer wondered as she bowed her head to pray. Homesick, perhaps? In trouble? Having a problem that seemed unsolvable? Or, maybe, a habit that was binding her and fettering her until she felt utterly helpless and hopeless?

"O God!" Jennifer cried out in silent prayer. "Whatever Greta's problem -- or problems -- may be, help her. Rescue her. Save her. Send her Thy light. Give her the joy of Thy salvation and the peace of Thy forgiveness. Use the tracts to bring her to Thee, dearest Jesus. Open her understanding so that she may comprehend spiritual things and find her satisfaction in Thee. Thou art the way, the Truth and the Life: reveal Thyself to her, please. . . ."

Jennifer prayed until she felt the burden lift from her heart then she began reading in her Bible where she had left off the day before.

"Oh, there you are!" a familiar sounding voice exclaimed in glad surprise.

"Greta!" Jennifer cried, getting to her feet and welcoming the young woman with a warm hug. "I was hoping -- and praying -- that I'd get to see you before either of us reaches our destination," she added with a smile. "Sit down, please. I have the entire two seats to myself. Thus far, all the way down here, no one has occupied this seat beside me, so you'll not be taking anyone's seat by sitting here."

"Thanks," Greta replied, "that's great. I've been hoping I'd get another opportunity to talk to you. Jennifer's the name, right?" And she sat down in the seat beside Jennifer.

"Jennifer Denise Brown, right. Just call me Jennifer, though. And you are Huldah Greta, but you prefer being called Greta."

"What a marvelous memory! You did better than I, Jennifer. I had completely forgotten your middle name. Oh, you are reading from a Bible!" she exclaimed reverently. "How unusual for a young lady to carry a Bible with her! And even more unusual and extraordinarily amazing, to see one so young as you reading a Bible in public. You are not ashamed? Not embarrassed?"

"Not in the least, Greta. I love the Bible: it is the Word of God. In John's Gospel we read, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"The same was in the beginning with God.

"All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.'

"See, here it is, Greta, just as I quoted it to you: In St. John 1:1 through 5," Jennifer remarked, placing the opened Bible on Greta's lap while she pointed to the verses she had just quoted.

"The Bible is the Word of God; just like John stated it -- 'the Word of God.' I love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart and mind and soul. No, I am not ashamed to be seen reading the Bible. Is anyone ever ashamed of one he or she loves?"

"Is that a question you are asking?" Greta's eyes searched Jennifer's face.

"It is a question, Greta, yes. And I know that I, personally, am never ashamed of those I love. In fact, I am always eager and anxious to tell people about them; I like to introduce them . . . ."

"Like you did to me last night, Jennifer? You see, you are the very first, and only, person to ever talk to me about Jesus. And about my soul. Before your conversation last night, up in the dome car, I never gave a single thought to my soul. That's a sad statement, I know, but it's true. I always thought when anyone died that was the end. Period! And with that kind of thinking, well, why not live life to its fullest? Needless to say, I was jolted clear out of myself by what I read last night after I returned to my coach and read the little papers you gave me."

"Everything in each of them is true, Greta. It's the Word of God."

"Oh, I'm not disputing that! Something got a hold of me. Frankly, I'm frightened. Scared! The words in those little papers -- tracts, I believe you called them -cut me through and through. I . . . well, I can't get away from what I read. It startles me."

Jennifer felt her heart leap for joy. God's Word, so stated Hebrews 4:12, "is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."  
"Do you believe what you've read, Greta?"

"I don't know how not to believe, Jennifer. It's as if they've been burned on my heart. I tried to get away from them; tried to shake them off, like I've been able to do with many of the unpleasantries of life. But there's no shaking off with those words: The harder I've tried, the more embedded and rooted they've become: I need help. I recognize myself -- finally -- for what I am. . . ."

"What's that, Greta?"

"A sinner, Jennifer. A wicked, vile, miserable and wretched sinner who needs the Savior more than anything else in all the world." Tears were flowing from beneath Greta's eyelashes now.

"And I know a kind and loving Savior who's wanting to take that heavy load of guilt and shame and sin away from you this very moment, Greta. The Bible tells us that if we confess our sins -- to God -- He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You may have peace and joy in your soul this very moment."

"That's what I need, Jennifer. And oh, I want it! I've been so miserable; searching, searching, searching, but always looking in the wrong places."

"Open your heart to Jesus as I pray for you," Jennifer instructed kindly and tearfully. "Tell Him you're sorry for your sins and that you want Him to forgive you and to come into your heart."

Greta squeezed Jennifer's hand tightly. "I'm ready," she said, not ashamed of her fastly-falling tears. "Please, Jesus," she said, sobbing brokenly, "come into my heart. I'm such a wicked sinner. But I need You and . . . and . . . Lord, I want You!"

Jennifer knew instantly when Greta's faith pushed through and stormed the gates of Heaven until she knew she was born again. It was wonderful and

glorious. And genuinely real! They had a camp meeting in seats number 21 and 22 inside coach number 24.

The stream-liner rolled smoothly over the tracks. To Greta, the wheels seemed to be singing, "Born again. Born again. Born again. . . ."

(4th of 6 parts)

Jennifer gathered her belongings together and waited for the train to stop in front of the station. At last, she was at her destination. She wondered what the days ahead would bring. Little matter; she was here on business for Jesus. He was leading her.

She looked through the window at the gently swaying palm fronds outside, wanting to sing out loudly and clearly, "Jesus Led Me All the Way." She was so blest. The day seemed to have skipped by on silver feet after Greta's marvelous conversion. All the way down to the extreme southern end of the coast, her happy heart was like an overflowing, unending river of joyous praise and adoration to the Lord for saving the German exchange student, whose destination was reached a little over an hour after she was converted.

Greta had stayed with her until she had just enough time to rush up to her own coach and get her things together for disembarking. And once out on the platform she, Greta, -- had run alongside the train's coaches until she came to where Jennifer was sitting, inside her coach. Then she lifted her arms upward, and in a sweeping gesture she waved them back and forth, mouthing to Jennifer, who lip-read proficiently, "Free! Free!" And then the train moved slowly away. The last Jennifer saw of Greta, her face was shining like that of an angel.

If for no other reason than to be God's witness to Greta, the trip down was profitable, Jennifer thought silently as she waited in line now to get off the train. One soul was of maximum worth to the Lord, she knew. And this day, not too many hours past, there was singing and rejoicing in Heaven over a sinner who had repented and was born into God's blood-washed, blood-bought family. Had this been God's purpose in sending her this great distance? she wondered, feeling joyously happy if such were the case. The Lord had sent Philip from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which was desert, to speak to an Ethiopian eunuch, she recalled; (Acts 8:26-39) "an eunuch of great

authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians," the scriptures stated. And the man was converted. And baptized. Then the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and he was found preaching at Azotus.

Jennifer smiled, thinking that if Greta was the reason for sending her on her long journey, at least she hadn't been "caught away." So there would still be some kind of work for her to do before leaving for home when the six weeks were fulfilled, she knew. Always, her mother and her Sunday school teacher had taught her and told her to do everything and anything she did, as unto the Lord, stating that if she used this as her guideline her work would always be fruitful; it would be blest of God.

She moved with the flow of passengers down the aisle of the train coach toward the front, where the conductor had opened the side door leading out to the platform of the busy station. Her heart was beating wildly with excitement and anticipation, wondering down what avenues of service the Lord was going to lead her. Silently, she reaffirmed her vows and her total commitment to Him and His kingdom work, be the task menial and lowly or not, dirty or clean -- whatever -- she was at the Lord's disposal to be used wherever He chose to place her; she was His humble, devoted and loving servant. His will was her delight.

She stepped down the few steps of the train onto the lovely brick platform and was greeted warmly and lovingly by Patty Marchent.

"You're here!" Patty cried happily. "Oh, Jennifer, you'll never know what this means to me to have you here! Someone near my own age! You're like a breath of pure air in a smoke-filled room or like a ray of sunshine in the gloom of night. You're like a . . ."

"Hold it! Hold it!" Jennifer cried, cutting Patty's unfinished sentence short. "You give me the impression that you're not happy, Patty; that you're experiencing burn out."

"Oh, Jennifer, I'm so burdened down over other people's problems and seeing their wasted lives until I sometimes feel I'll die under the weight of it all. The devil certainly knows how to get people's lives all messed up and tangled and fettered, believe me!"

"You . . . you're not . . . discouraged, I hope . . ." Jennifer said quickly.

"Not in general. And certainly not in working for King Jesus. No. No, a thousand times no, in working for Him. But some cases have a tendency to discourage you. But come, we're going to stop over at the Shrimp Boat for a delicious snack before we head for home. Mother and Daddy couldn't come: they're working with a family at the mission. A sad, sad case. But they're beginning to see signs of change; of softening and tenderness. God is working. This is why they felt they dare not leave tonight."

"I'm glad you came, Patty. I pray the Lord will make me a blessing at the mission. I'm so anxious to begin helping."

"God sent you down here for me, I believe, as much as for anyone else. I needed your encouragement and your presence. One gets a lot of transients in a mission, hence you can't make lasting friends. Since my two older sisters married and moved away, it gets a bit lonesome here at times. My folks insist that, come fall, God willing, I will be going away to Bible school. I need the change, and the fellowship of those my own age; but I'm concerned for my parents too: They need me. Their load is unbelievably heavy and their schedule is almost always full and tight. It seems so sad to me that no one feels called, or led, to come to the mission and serve as a missionary for the Lord here."

"That is sad, Patty. It makes you wonder how sincere and deep some persons' commitment and consecration is," Jennifer stated thoughtfully.

"Mission life is anything but glamorous, Jennifer."

"Are you . . . inferring . . . saying . . . that because it is not glamorous some choose not to come?"

"Simply stated, there's something a bit more appealing -- in fact, a whole lot more appealing -- about going abroad as a foreign missionary than to labor among the derelicts of humanity in a mission at home."

Jennifer was silent for a while. Then she said, "That's sad. A soul is a soul, be it in a mission station at home or on foreign soil. God puts no greater premium on a soul won for Christ abroad than the one won at home. To Him, every soul is equally important and valuable."

"That's a fact," Patty admitted. "But many people can't seem to see this, nor realize it. They want to sail the briny seas for Christ and minister in some remote jungle or village, while the asphalt jungle of humanity at home is every bit as lost and as doomed. Well, here's your luggage. Let's be on our way. You'll love the Shrimp Boat: the food's scrumptious and the place is clean. Hungry?" she asked, smiling broadly.

"I'm sure I'll enjoy it, Patty. It's just so nice seeing you again. It's beautiful down here."

"I love it. I'll miss it if I leave for Bible school. But Dad said change is good for a person sometimes. And he very definitely feels that I need a change at this point and period in my life."

Jennifer sighed. "Growing up can bring one some painful situations, can't it? But then, God never intended for us to remain children all our lives and to live in a world of makebelieve. It's situations like you are facing that drive one more closely to Him."

"That's for sure!" Patty exclaimed emphatically as she pulled into the tree-shaded Shrimp Boat parking lot.

It was late when the Marchents and Jennifer finally settled down for the night. There were so many things to discuss and talk about: things like the new little mother who had dropped in at the mission parsonage only minutes after Patty had left to pick Jennifer up at the railroad station.

The tiny, dark-haired woman had emerged from the shadows of the azalea and hibiscus bushes that grew in a large area next to the mission parsonage -- after night had fallen, the Marchents said. Huddled close to her side were three small children who cowered in fear when Mrs. Marchent approached them with outstretched arms.

"Why were they afraid?" Jennifer had asked quickly, feeling waves of pity and compassion surge through her being.

"They've been abused, Jennifer," Mrs. Marchent replied, looking tired and sad. "The little mother is full of bruises; and she's dreadfully undernourished. Fortunately, the children are not undernourished. I'm sure the mother's portion has been going to them."

"But who abused her? And why? For what reason, I mean?"

"Her husband, Jennifer," came Mrs. Marchent's reply. "He threatened to harm the children. She feared for their lives; as well as her own. In a rage, he left the house, she said, shouting, 'I'll take care of you when I get back.'

"She gathered a few pieces of clothing together for each of the children and herself then fled, locking the door behind her. She said she figured the locked doors would keep him busy for a while trying to get inside, since he generally forgot where he put his house keys, and this would give her more time to get the children and herself to safety."

Jennifer felt weak and limp after hearing the sad tale. "That . . . that's . . . sad!" she cried, as the tears flowed.

"This is why we're here," Brother Marchent had told her. "We're like a lighthouse in many respects; only we try to rescue men and women whose lives are wrecked on life's sea by sin instead of rescuing ships and boats. The cross on top of the mission has led many a human wreck to safety and food and shelter and, ultimately, to the Christ Who died to save sinners. It's worth every effort expended and worth every tear we shed and every prayer we pray, Jennifer. You'll see what I mean, tomorrow, God willing. Get a good night's sleep, little lady; you'll need it."

Lying in the twin bed now, in the room Patty and she shared, Jennifer prayed and wept until, exhausted, she fell asleep.

(5th of 6 parts)

Dawn was barely awaking when Jennifer opened her eyes and sat up in bed. Where was she? she wondered. Then she remembered. With gladness in her heart she sprang out of bed and rushed to the window and pulled the draperies wide open. A gentle southerly breeze greeted her with warm caresses and orange blossom laden kisses. It was delightful.

For a brief moment she wondered how anybody could live other than a holy and godly life in a place of such exquisite beauty and loveliness as the mission grounds, then she remembered that sin was no respecter of persons or places: Satan made sin look even more attractive and desirable and

alluring in places of beauty, in many cases and instances, she knew. The Garden of Eden abounded with beauty and loveliness -- things that were "pleasant to the sight," yet Adam and Eve sinned. And that in the very midst of everything beautiful and pleasant and lovely! Sin was no respecter of either people, places nor circumstances, she realized with renewed and sudden alarm as she began to dress and tidy up the room.

Patty had told her that she was an early riser and Jennifer found her words to be accurate and true, like always. Patty's bed was made and the spread over the sheets and pillow was smoothed out until not a wrinkle was seen. She followed suit with her own bed, wondering what new experiences God had in store for her for the day.

She read the Bible then had prayer, a well-established and joyous habit for her and with her, then she left the room in search of Patty and Mrs. Marchent.

"Oh, hi." Patty greeted her cheerily as she stood in the living room archway. "Hope I didn't disturb you when I got up."

"You didn't," Jennifer remarked, laughing lightly. "But I wish you would have awakened me when you got up. I want to do however your folks and you do."

Patty laughed now. "You wouldn't want to get up at the unearthly hour I do, Jennifer. Mother chides me all the time for getting up at four-thirty. But I enjoy it: it's unusually quiet and peaceful then, and I know that I'll have at least two hours to stay quiet in the Lord's presence. I bathe my soul in His glory and my spirit is calm and peaceful when I enter the arena of the world with its myriad, diversified and complex problems. I guess you might say that I 'escape' from things earthly and earthy for those two blessed hours, and feast on heavenly manna. I know this, Jennifer; it's the only thing that's kept me going without breaking physically and sometimes, emotionally."

"I can easily understand this and believe you, Patty, after hearing and listening to what your folks said about that mother and her three little children last night. I'm anxious to meet her."

"Let's go over to the dining room, then," Patty suggested. "It's almost time for breakfast over there. Generally, we eat here. But I'm as anxious as

you are to meet Mrs. Peters and her children. Mother told me she's quite pretty and seemed really sweet; but oh, so fearful. She'll feel strange, no doubt. Let's welcome her."

"I'd like that," Jennifer said quickly, asking, "who does the cooking over there? -- wherever over there is."

"Mr. and Mrs. Andrus are the cooks; but, of course, everybody at the mission has work to do, unless illness hinders."

"You . . . mean the people who stay . . . work? I thought they were. . . ."

"Down and out," Patty added quickly to Jennifer's stammering-tongued sentence. "Exactly."

"Many are, Jennifer. But even they must work. At least Daddy tries to get them to work. He wants them to stay busy and to develop a sense of worth and pride by becoming useful citizens again. Come," Patty said, "we'll become a part of mission life this morning. We were going to give you a little time to rest up after the long trip down."

"I've come to work, Patty, not to rest."

"Thanks. You can't believe how thankful I am that God sent you here." And Patty grabbed Jennifer's arm and led her through a small citrus grove to a large, pink, stuccoed building whose front ran parallel with a busy street less than one hundred feet away.

"The men stay in this building; the women are housed in the smaller building to our left," Patty informed Jennifer.

"Flowers! Flowers!" Jennifer exclaimed almost breathlessly. "It's so beautiful here."

"Everything is, Jennifer, except the sin that fetters these poor people. And some of them are extremely intelligent, too. Well, here we are," Patty said as she opened the screen door and ushered Jennifer through.

"Good morning Brother and Sister Andrus," she called. "I brought company for breakfast. Jennifer Brown, meet the Andruses."

"We heard you were coming," Mrs. Andrus said cheerfully. "We're so glad to meet you and we're happy you're here."

"I'm happy to meet you folks," Jennifer said sincerely. "Now let me help with the breakfast, please."

"Our crew is already set up and waiting," the pleasant-faced woman said. "Thanks much, Jennifer. We try to incorporate as much help as possible from the mission, praying that we may help them back to a life of usefulness. We have a Brown here at the mission. Dropped in three weeks ago. A real quiet sort. But then, it's kind of nice having one a bit less talkative. Some go on and on and on. Not all, mind you; but many do. You girls may want to help that little Mrs. Peters with her children, though. She came last evening. A really nice lady she seems to be. But she has her hands full: three little ones like stair steps."

Patty and Jennifer hurried away to help the frail looking Mrs. Peters with her three offspring.

"You have beautiful children," Jennifer declared after Patty and she had introduced themselves to the very tiny mother.

"Oh, thank you," Mrs. Peters replied with a shy smile. "I'm very fond of my little ones. They've been the joy of my life."

"And little wonder why," Patty exclaimed, trying to coax the oldest child to allow her to put her into a highchair.

"She's easily frightened," Mrs. Peters stated, adding, "They're inhibited and intimidated." Tears filled the dark eyes.

"I understand, Mrs. Peters," Patty said consolingly. "Mother and Dad told us about your coming. I'm the daughter of the Marchents, in case you didn't get my last name. Or perhaps it just didn't register. I help my parents here at the mission. Jennifer came down to help us during the summer months."

Mrs. Peters studied the two carefully then, smiling, she said to her oldest, "Roxanne, Patty and Jennifer love you. Let Patty put you into the high

chair. It's breakfast time. Um-m! Smell that bacon! Soon you're little tummy will be filled with good things."

Obediently, Roxanne followed Patty over to where high chairs stood along one wall, and when Patty lifted her up into the chair, she smiled. Carefully, Patty pushed the chair over beside Mrs. Peters while Jennifer pushed chairs over for RuthAnne and RoseAnne and put them into them.

All through the breakfast hour, the girls helped Mrs. Peters, seeing to it that the little mother had more than enough on her own plate. The children ate well, and when they could eat no more and their cup of milk was emptied, Jennifer and Patty washed faces and hands then played little games with them. In a little while, they were smiling and laughing and joining in singing, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know," and "Deep And Wide."

"This has been the most wonderful morning of my life," Mrs. Peters said. "The children are happy and . . . and I feel happy here, too. And . . . and I'm not afraid here. Oh, you are wonderful people! Wonderful!"

"We are Christians, Mrs. Peters. Jesus makes and keeps us happy and joyful. Do you know Jesus? Have you ever asked Him to come into your heart and to forgive you for your sins?"

"No. No, I haven't. I used to go to church. But that's been years ago. I was a little girl: my grandmother always took me with her. Then she died, and I never got back to church or Sunday school again. I had a wonderful grandmother. She loved me and I loved her. She often told me about Jesus, and how much He loved me."

"He does, Mrs. Peters, even yet," Patty declared. "That is such good news. I wish I could believe as I did when I was a little girl. So many fearful and frightening things have happened in my life the past four years until I . . . I guess I'm afraid to . . . to believe that anything good could happen to me now."

"Jesus said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,'" Jennifer spoke up. "But He said to be of good cheer, that He has overcome the world. Jesus wants to give you inner peace and soul rest, Mrs. Peters."

"Pray for me, girls, please. And I'll be praying too. I know my grandmother had something that kept her joyful and happy all the time."

"There's a Bible in your room, is there not?" Patty asked. "We keep a Bible in every room."

"I've been reading," Mrs. Peters admitted. "Only, I wish I knew where to read about what Jesus said and did. I haven't been able to find that."

"Wait here," Patty said. "I'll bring you a New Testament and Psalms. Everything Jesus said is printed in red." And she hurried away. In a little while she was back with the Treasure. "A personal gift to you, my dear Mrs. Peters. Read it, and you, too, will come to find the joy and the peace and happiness which your beloved grandmother must have enjoyed and possessed through Christ."

"Oh, thank you, Patty. Thank you. Is . . . it . . . really mine? My own, I mean?"

"It's yours to keep; with love from all of us Marchents. And Jennifer."

Overcome by the kind gesture of love, Mrs. Peters, in tears, rushed over and kissed both Patty and Jennifer, exclaiming, "Thank you! Thank you! Mine! Mine! My very own Bible!"

Jennifer looked over the tiny woman's shoulder and saw the men staring at what was happening. Or was it because they noticed that Mrs. Peters was new to the mission breakfast table? Or maybe it was because they saw she -- Jennifer -- was new there.

Embarrassed, she looked away and began to busy herself with the three little Peters girls who, by now, were wanting her to walk to the door with them.

Turning from the door and the departing Mrs. Peters and her children, Jennifer looked across the dining room and saw a man at the farthest table staring at her.

"Patty," she said, in a barely audible voice, "don't look now; but who is that man to the extreme left at that farthest table? He's staring at me. Kinda' gives me the creeps."

Patty, in a covert way, took in the company of men in their part of the dining room then in a quietly casual way she answered, "Oh, that's the Mr. Brown Mrs. Andrus told you was here. I don't think you have any need of fear, Jennifer. He's . . . well . . . different. But I don't believe he'd harm anybody. He's much too quiet, though. Daddy said sometimes he'd like to get inside his brain and see what he's thinking," and Patty laughed. "Of course this isn't possible, as we know. But we're praying for him. God knows why he's here. It's for some reason, obscure though it is to us."

"What is his full name, Patty; do you know?"

"William Brown, he told Dad. Why are you asking?"

"Because . . . well . . . oh, Patty, what if he is my father?"

"Your what?" Patty asked much too loudly. Then, seeing Jennifer's eyes, she said softly, "I'm sorry, Jennifer. What did I say that was wrong?"

(Part 6)

"You . . . you really and truly mean it, Jennifer?" Patty asked in shocked silence when they were outside and walking through the citrus grove. "'Your . . . father isn't dead?"

"We don't know, Patty. But there's just as much a possibility that he's alive as there is that he's dead. He's been gone all these years but that doesn't mean that he died. He could still be living. He'd only be forty-two years old, and that's not really real old."

Patty shook her head as though trying to clear it of muddled thoughts. "I am shocked," she stated. "Truly shocked. It just goes to show that it never pays to presume. Well, hardly ever, I mean. Once in a while you may be right. But look how wrong I've been in presuming that you were fatherless."

"I am fatherless, in the actual meaning of the word, Patty. I have been all of my life; ever since I was an infant. But the Lord gave me a wonderful

mother. I have many times wished I had known the love and the protection and the care of an earthly father. But God sent me the Lord Jesus Christ -into my heart -- and He has been, indeed, a Father to me. A Heavenly Father, always standing by me and with me and in me. Whenever I have needed Him, He's sent the help I've needed."

Tears were swimming in Patty's eyes. "I . . . don't know what Mother and . . . and I'd do without Daddy," she said, brushing tears away. "Oh, I can't bear the thought, even," she cried.

"The Lord's grace is always sufficient," Jennifer replied. "Mother and I have proved this time and time again. And as for that Mr. William Brown, well, there are ever so many Browns in the world. I don't know why I should have allowed this to . . . to . . . grab my heart like it did. I suppose I've lived so long with the hope and the dream of someday meeting and seeing and finding my daddy until the name just did something to me. Now, where do we begin, you and I? I know there's plenty of work for us to do."

"We'll have a Bible study in the women's and children's dorm, Jennifer. Daddy and four of the men from the church in the city have regular, daily Bible studies and classes for the men here. Mother and you and I will look out for the women's spiritual welfare. Usually, we don't have as many women as men. In fact, it's rare, ever, to have the dorm full. Oh, you get drop-ins -- emergencies -- but, mostly, these are only one-nighters. Now in the case of Mrs. Peters and her children, well, this is different: they'll be here longer, I'm sure."

The weeks passed by rapidly and Jennifer often paused and wondered where they had gone to. She loved the busyness, tired and weary though her body was by nightfall. It was such a good feeling, knowing the Lord had used her to help a soul to find Christ. Mrs. Peters, born again shortly after receiving the New Testament and Psalms from Patty, was a real soul winner, having unusual insight and spiritual discernment in working with and praying for the women who had habits of chemical dependencies and their accompanying evils.

On an errand to the mission kitchen for Mrs. Marchent nearly four weeks after her arrival, Jennifer came face to face with William Brown. She was startled momentarily as she saw him standing alongside the pavement that led to the kitchen door at the back of the mission.

Mustering her courage, she smiled at the man. "Hi," she said. "What a beautiful day the Lord has given us again!"

The man stared at her like he was in shock. His lips parted but not a single sound came from them.

Again Jennifer smiled. "I'm a Brown too; did you know that?" she asked. "It's such a common name; but I'm glad I have an easy last name. Some last names are real tongue twisters. Not Brown. Did you ever have relatives from the northern part of the United States?" she asked casually.

Color drained from the man's face. He brushed his hand across his eyes. For a moment Jennifer thought he was going to faint.

Without thinking, almost, she asked softly, "Are .. are you William Brown? Do you.., know him? He was my father. All these years Mother and I have prayed for him, wanting him to come home."

The pallor on the man's face frightened Jennifer; but the knowledge that her words had had an impact upon him caused her to say only one word, "Daddy!"

Like a dam broke loose or a stream flooding wildly-unleashed, the man's broad shoulders shook with sobs. Ashamed, he turned his face from her.

With tears flowing from her eyes, Jennifer rushed to him, saying, "Daddy! Daddy! I'm Jennifer Denise. You are my father; I know you are."

Lifting his head, he looked full into the fair, pure, soft and loving eyes before him. "Yes," he whispered hoarsely in a muffled tone. "Yes, I am your father. But I am not worthy of that noble title. I am a deserter. A coward. I knew you were my daughter the first time I saw you. You look like your . . . your mother -- my wife. I wanted to leave here; to get away. But something kept me here. Maybe it was because of . . . of this," he said, pulling a small New Testament and Psalms from his shirt pocket. "I'm not the . . . man . . . I used to . . . be," he added in a reverent way, sobbing uncontrollably again.

"Oh Daddy. Daddy! Do you mean you're . . . you're saved? Are you converted, like Mother and I are?"

"It's a miracle, Jennifer. Alone in my room, it... it happened: The Lord Jesus forgave me of my many, many sins. I . . . I feel new. All over, new. And so very light. The heavy burden of my heart is gone. I . . . almost . . . called your mother . . . to . . . to ask her forgiveness. But I'm not worthy of her, nor of her forgiveness. Nor yours. But it will help me greatly if . . . if you will forgive me, Jennifer. Will you, please? I've failed both your mother and you. I'm sorry."

"Oh, Daddy, you are forgiven. Freely, freely forgiven. I'm so happy I found you. How did you get here? I mean, well.., why would you come to a mission? What brought you here?"

"I have only one answer for your questions, Jennifer: God: I didn't realize this until I . . . I . . . changed; until the Lord forgave me of my sins and made me His child. You see, things started going in reverse for me about two years ago. Always, I seemed to be in control and command of everything. Everything! My business ventures all prospered and expanded rapidly. I was prosperous; I was proud. And full of conceit. Sadly, along with my legitimate businesses, I was a compulsive and totally 'hooked' gambler. I was helplessly and hopelessly chained to this vice. It was like I was shackled; fettered.

"I hated myself for my weakness. When your mother became a Christian and I observed how she gained strength from the Lord for whatever issue she faced and encountered, I despised myself for my weakness at the gambling tables. Instead of turning to God, as she so tenderly and kindly pleaded with me to do, I turned on her and vented my frustrations out upon her. I made life miserable for your mother, Jennifer, and in doing so, I hated myself even more so. Your mother and I were high school sweethearts. I don't know if she ever told you this or not."

"Oh, yes she did! And it made me so anxious and eager to find you and to get to know you until sometimes I felt I had to go searching for you. Knowing the utter futility of this, I 'searched' after you on my knees! But go on, Daddy; I want to hear what brought you here."

"First, let me say that I never -- never -- loved anyone beside your mother, Jennifer. She has always been, and still is, the love of my life. My

one vice and weakness was gambling, as I stated before. When I made my exit out of your mother's and your life, I left the States for an island where I had begun a small business and, I'm sorry to say, where gambling was in evidence everywhere. The business prospered, as I felt certain it would, until this present economic crisis loomed on the horizon. Then, quite suddenly, things took a turn for the worse. Fortunately, I escaped bankruptcy; but only barely so.

"I returned to the States, not fully convinced in my mind what to do. Upon deplaning here, I recalled the address of a former business colleague and on an impulse, I decided to look him up. I did, and this is what I discovered."

"You . . . you mean, he lived here, on the mission compound?" Jennifer asked quickly.

"He once owned a lovely home on these grounds. He sold out completely, I was told, and moved elsewhere. In the course of time, these grounds had a once-thriving restaurant on them and, eventually, some kind of mechanical works of which the latter was destroyed by fire. And then the mission came into existence.

"Greatly disappointed over not getting to see my former colleague and friend, and tired and weary from the journey here, I asked for a room for a few nights. I had meant to stay only briefly, paying for whatever my room and board may be. But something about the Marchents and the Andruses fascinated me and . . . and gripped me around the tender part of my heart: I couldn't leave. I didn't want to leave: I was reliving those few years -- two, I believe it was -- of your mother's wonderful heart change: she became sweeter and kinder than ever to me. These people here had the same thing my wife did, I realized with painfully sweet nostalgia and longing. I would observe them and their daily living, I decided, and see if they lived as consistent and sweet and holy and godly as my beloved Adelaide did.

"In less than a week's time I was fully convinced that God was and is real and that He very definitely changes lives and hearts. The love and kindness and compassion I saw manifested by these people upon the human derelicts here at the mission made a believer out of me. For curses and retching and throwing up, I saw the Marchents and the Andruses give love and kindness and tears and prayers. More than once, I was a secret

onlooker, beholding and weeping. How could they remain so sweet under such trying circumstances? I wondered. And then, always, God brought up your mother's lovely face and, in these people, here at the mission, I saw on display what I saw first in your mother after her conversion to Christ.

"I couldn't run from Him again, I knew; not ever: God's Spirit was following me wherever I went. And, were I to go to the ends of the earth, even, I knew that, even there, He would find me and track me down with His mighty Spirit. But say, hadn't we better put a call through to your mother and tell her the good news? Do you think she'll want me, Jennifer? And . . . and does . . . does she still love me, do you think?"

"Oh, Father, yes. Yes! Yes! To all questions, yes! And, please, may I spread the good news here? The lost is found; and . . . and a certain very happy daughter found her father! Oh, I am so happy! Now I know why the Lord sent me here. Yes, I know!"

"Spread the news, honey; shout it out, if you want to. I'm the once-lost prodigal husband-father who is now found and is in God's fold and His wonderful family. I'll be testifying this morning in the chapel service, you may be sure. But first, I have an important call to make."

"And I have a paper to give to Mrs. Marchent, Father."

"Take your time, honey; I won't run away again. Not ever."

"Oh, Daddy, I love you!" Jennifer cried, throwing her arms around him and crying for joy.

And all the father could say as his strong arms pulled his daughter close to his heart was,

"Forgiven! Forgiven! Forgiven! The bitter years of the past are made sweet and glorious by His great forgiveness. How wonderful! Forgiven!"

Lifting his face heavenward, he wept for joy.

The End