I opened my sleepy eyes slowly and gazed dazedly around the room. Voices . . . soft-spoken voices . . . floated to my ears. Carefully and slowly I eased my body up to the head of the bed to a sitting position. A soft cool spring breeze coming through the south window in the bedroom shook the sheer curtains lightly, making them tremble with what I thought was happiness and excitement.
I looked through the sheer curtains to the sky. Was it dawn? I wondered. Was it time to get up already? A faint glimmer and twinkle in the canopied blue heavens answered my questions. A big bright star, always a favorite of mine, danced merrily and brightly overhead, seeming to laugh at me, hunched over my knees in thoughtful observation.

"Go back to sleep, John," I heard Mama's voice saying. She crooned the words softly to Papa, like she was calming baby Ann when she awoke from a bad dream.

Papa cleared his throat and thumped his foot on the floor beside the bed. "How can I sleep, Mildred?" he asked, addressing Mama. "Jacob Hornby's the most contemptible neighbor a man ever had."

"You are acting childishy," Mama remonstrated in that same sweet voice, "and it grieves me dreadfully, your treatment of Jacob. God is displeased too; and John, it . . . it frightens me to have the disfavor of God."

I heard Papa shift uneasily and impatiently on the side of the bed. "God has nothing to do with this, Mildred!" he exclaimed in an aggravated tone of voice. "Besides, I'm a real for-sure Johnny Bull. You know that. A proud lot we are!" he boasted. "And no Jacob Hornby's going to tell me where to put that fence line."

"It's such a little thing!" Mama lamented sadly. "Such a trifling thing -- to make such an enemy over it and to lose one's soul, John."

Papa must have gotten up from the bed. At least it sounded like he did; for I heard the floor boards creak like they always did when someone walked across the floor.

"I . . . I wish you'd get converted, John." Mama's voice had a sound of tearful pathos in it.

"Go back to sleep!" Papa ordered, more sternly and shortly than I had ever heard him speak to Mama. "I'm John Jebson. A proud 'Johnny Bull' who knows where his fence line should be. . . ."
"And the devil is laughing with glee over your unyieldedness, John dearest. Johnny Bull or no Johnny Bull, so long as you're a tool in the devil's hand he knows he's got you Why, John, the devil will drive you to murder if necessary, to get your way. You remember old Fred Tate. . . ."

"Hush, Mildred! What do you think I am? You shock me! I may be proud but I'm certainly not that fiendish as to . . . to . . . murder a man!"

"'Whosoever hateth his brother . . . is a murderer,'" Mama quoted. "I guess I know where my own fence line should be, Mildred! My farm's been surveyed. . . ."

"So has Jacob's, dear."

"That's what he says!" Papa retorted hotly. Mama made no answer to that, knowing full well the futility of trying to reason with Papa when he was "worked up."

As noiselessly as I could, I scooted down in bed between the clean-smelling sheets and was soon sleeping soundly.

It was Mama's soft voice that aroused me out of a dreamless sleep some time later. "Peter," she called. "Peter, it's time to get up. Breakfast is ready."

I jumped out of bed with the smell of fried bacon whetting my ever-ready appetite to its endurance and made a hasty toilet before running down the stairs to the kitchen.

"Good morning, my Peter," Mama said pleasantly and affectionately. "And how did my little man rest during the night?" Then, before I could ever answer she said, "why Peter, your hair! It's all tangled! Did you forget to comb it and to wash your face?"

"I . . . I tried," I stammered, remembering how hastily and how rapidly I had gone through the motions.

"Go up to the bathroom, little man, and don't come down until your face is washed nicely . . . the way Mama taught you to wash it . . . and until your
hair is combed neatly back in place. What's worth doing is worth doing right, Peter, remember?"

Shamefacedly, I trudged up the stairs to the bathroom. This time I took extra pains with my toilet, deciding it would have been far better and less time consuming had I followed and obeyed Mama's orders in the first place, and when I came down to the kitchen some little time later, my efforts were rewarded bountifully by Mama's profuse compliments.

"There!" she crooned softly, taking my fat cheeks between her dear hands and kissing me soundly on the forehead. "That looks more like my boy! Oh, how very fine you look with your face washed and your hair combed! Why Peter," she said, standing back and surveying me with pride, "you look more and more like your father with each and every passing day."

"Thank you, Mama," I replied. "I hope I can be as fine a man as Papa is. Only..." I stammered slightly and I felt my lips begin to quiver, "I . . . I want to always stay saved and sanctified. I want to go to Heaven!" I exclaimed emphatically, looking up into Mama's beautiful eyes. "why doesn't Papa get saved?" I asked quickly. "Oh, Mama, I want Papa to go with us to Heaven!"

A silent tear slid past Mama's eye and trickled down her rosy-pink cheek. "Papa's going to get converted, Peter. Don't ever doubt it. He is! Just wait and see. We have all been praying and . . . ."

Just then Papa walked in from the outside and that ended our little secret but sacred conversation. He looked tired and wan, I thought; kind of like he hadn't slept well.

"Where are the girls?" he inquired, referring to Suzanne and Elizabeth.

"They'll be down shortly, dear John," Mama replied, setting a plate of hot biscuits on the oven door. "They're having their private devotions."

"I want my breakfast now, Mildred! No sense in eating cold biscuits." Papa's voice sounded cross; not at all like his dear usual self.

Mama's eyes wore a hurt kind of look but she obediently arranged the tantalizing bacon around the eggs on the big meat platter; then she spooned
the delicately browned fried potatoes into a vegetable dish and filled another with the still-bubbling, gently-simmering milk gravy and set it all on the table.

I said my "thank You, God" prayer for the food after which time Mama asked the blessing on it before we commenced eating.

I missed Suzanne and Elizabeth around the table. It just didn't seem quite right without them. Every now and then I thought I heard a faint moan and groan from the girls' bedroom above the kitchen. Too, I seemed to detect a certain uneasiness about Papa every time the faint groans oozed through the ceiling from the room upstairs.

Papa didn't eat much breakfast that morning. Said he wasn't as hungry as he thought he had been. Pushing the chair back from the table with a scraping sound, he excused himself and hurried outside.

It was when Suzanne and Elizabeth and I were almost at school that day that I noticed a difference in James Hornby's attitude toward me.

"Hey, Jim," I called, running as fast as I could toward him, "wait up. Jim! It's I, Peter!"

But James seemed only to quicken his pace. "Jim!" I called again, more loudly. "Jim, wait!" Falling in step with him and panting from exertion I stuttered, "Wh . . . what's wrong, Pal?"

"Leave me alone, Peter!" he growled. "I . . . I'm not supposed to talk to you -- not ever!" He looked as if he might cry when he said it.

"You . . . you what?" I stuttered, feeling suddenly dazed and almost too shocked to talk. "why, Jim, we're buddies, you and I. Real buddies. . . ."

"Yeah, I know. Don't rub it in. It hurts, Peter. Dreadfully!"

"But . . . why should it hurt, Jim? Why need it hurt? Real buddies don't act this way. I am your friend, Jim. Sure as I'm here talking to you, I'm your real friend. I . . . I love you, Jim an' . . . an' Jesus loves you too."

"Yeah, I know." Jim looked at me with hurt in his young eyes. "It's stupid, Peter! Stupid and dumb. . . ."
"Wh... what do you mean?" I asked tremulously. "This fuss over the line fence. Dad says I must never never speak to you again. But... but Peter, I... I don't want to be like... Dad."

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and laid my hand on Jim's arm. "Jim," I said, "it... it's not wrong for you and me to be friends. In fact; it would be terribly wrong and sinful for us not to be. The Bible says, 'Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.' So you can see by that that God doesn't want us to be enemies..."

James scratched his sandy head thoughtfully. Turning bright eyes to meet my own he said emphatically, "You're right, Pete. Of course you're right! It's as plain to me since you said that as the nose on my face is!"

We laughed heartily over that and after our little laughter subsided I added solemnly, "You and I will just naturally always be the very best of friends, James."

"And you're a real pal, Peter. My daddy almost had me believing that you'd be like your dad and he are towards each other." He heaved a great sigh of relief. "Whew!" he exclaimed happily, "I'm sure glad you haven't changed, Peter. Real glad and... and happy!"

When James and the girls and I walked home from school that afternoon we saw a strange sight. The line fence had been erected. Rather, I should say two line fences were erected! and each was no less than two feet away from the old original stake markers put down by the surveyors!

"See what I mean!" James exclaimed as we stared fixedly at the strange "line fence." "Our fathers hate each other. I wish they'd be like you and I are, Peter... friends. Real friends!"

Suzanne and Elizabeth seemed dazed and awestruck by the sight. Then I saw a shiny tear slide from beneath Elizabeth's eyelashes and tumble unceremoniously down her pretty cheeks. "It... it's the devil's walk!" she exclaimed, shuddering fiercely.
James looked at my sister as if she were some great intellectual somebody. His face registered deep admiration as he said, "What a name! That's what we'll call it, 'The Devil's Walk.'"

For days and weeks we trudged to school via The Devil's Walk instead of the ordinary and usual well traveled road. We felt private and kind of favored too, having a "road" all our own. But try as I would to share James' lightness over the matter, I just couldn't. It gnawed at my heart. Terribly so; my dear papa's attitude toward Jacob Hornby and our neighbor's attitude toward Papa.

"If thy brother have aught against thee, go to thy brother. . . . "I just couldn't get away from that verse. I couldn't! But how could I make Papa see this when neither he nor Mr. Hornby were converted and neither thought of the other in an affectionate way -- a "brother"?

I prayed more than ever. Mama did too. Day after day after day I saw her make her way to the peach orchard. I knew why she was going there. She'd been there for so long and so many times that I could easily follow the narrow little path of hard pressed earth and grasses and kneel on the exact spot where her knees had made a sort of hollow place beneath the farthest tree.

Suzanne and Elizabeth prayed too; and if baby Ann had been bigger she would have been praying too; but she was too tiny to know anything about The Devil's Walk, and how it had come to be there, so she just continued making soft, sweet and pleasant little cooing, gurgling baby sounds and noises . . . brightening our days with her very presence.

Papa, meanwhile, was growing more and more restless and cross. This frightened me, but it served only as a booster to Mama's praying and her faith. Time and time again I heard her praise the Lord over the fact that Papa was going to be saved . . . and soon!

It happened in a way I never expected. But then (as I was to learn later) a very great many of God's miracles come about in unexpected ways.

Our dear little baby Ann became suddenly and violently ill. Just like you blink your eyes, it struck her. Mama had no warning whatever. Neither did Papa nor any one of us. But then, God is All-Wise and He doesn't need to
give any one of us a warning about anything He chooses to do. Just knowing
and believing this consoled my broken heart no end.

Baby Ann's body seemed to be burning away with a raging,
uncontrolled fever that no amount of medicine could curb or bring down. At
times she flailed her sweet little baby arms about in the crib; then just as
suddenly as her restless, delirious periods came, they left, and she would lie
still and lifeless, staring upwards at the ceiling. Every now and again her dear
little voice uttered a singly moaned word, "Da Da."

With eyes that seemed to burn through Papa, she repeated the
whispered phrase as, lying still and silent as death, her eyes never left his
face.

"What is it, little Ann?" Papa asked anxiously, bending over the crib and
pressing the burning hands to his cheeks.

"Da Da. Da Da!"

It was a heart-rending plea from her tiny lips. A plea as though she
were trying to tell him something. To ask something from him.

Tears sprang into Papa's eyes. The very first tears I could remember
seeing in Papa's eyes since the day when they buried Grandmother.

"Anything, Ann. Anything!" Papa promised brokenly, still bending over
the crib and our critically ill baby.

"Je-sa. Je-sa, Da Da," she exclaimed, pointing her tiny finger toward
the sky.

Ann had never before said anything more than "Da Da." She made a lot
of incoherent baby prattle but never anything more; and now the name of
Jesus fell from her lips as beautiful and sweet as if one of us had uttered it. It
struck Papa like he was shot.

"Don't die. Don't die, little Ann!" Papa fairly screamed the words as he
dropped beside the crib. "Oh God, if You'll make my baby well I'll get
converted. Right now!" His voice sounded like a great hollow bell, deep and
booming and thunderous.
It was as if time stood still and as if none of us were in the room. Papa continued, "I will get saved, God. Right now!"

I never heard such praying in all my life. Oh, it was wonderful. Just like music. Papa prayed and cried and cried and prayed. He confessed his sins out big and loud, telling the Lord he was the meanest man in the entire valley and that he would get things straightened out between himself and Jacob Hornby and the "line fence."

It was when he mentioned our neighbor and the line fence that the glory struck his soul. In sheer ecstasy and delirium of joy, he picked baby Ann up in his strong arms and marched back and forth through the house with her, shouting the praises of God so loudly that I just knew the Hornbys would have to hear and come running to see what was the matter.

Needless to say, baby Ann's fever left immediately upon Papa's conversion and never again recurred. God knew how to melt Papa's heart! He loved his children devotedly.

Our home became a veritable heaven on earth after Papa's conversion and sanctification. His repentance was so thorough and his restitution to Jacob Hornby so genuine that the neighbor and his entire household were soundly converted shortly thereafter.

The line fence? Oh yes, I mustn't forget that! Both Papa and Jacob Hornby decided to leave it just as it was . . . "A sort of memorial to our families," the men said. "A memorial to the transforming power of Jesus Christ and of our love one for another," Papa added, when Brother Hornby said it was a far safer road to travel to school than the ordinary and well traveled road.

James renamed The Devil's Walk to "The Glory Road and The Highway of Peace and Brotherly Love." Suzanne and Elizabeth and I fully approved.