

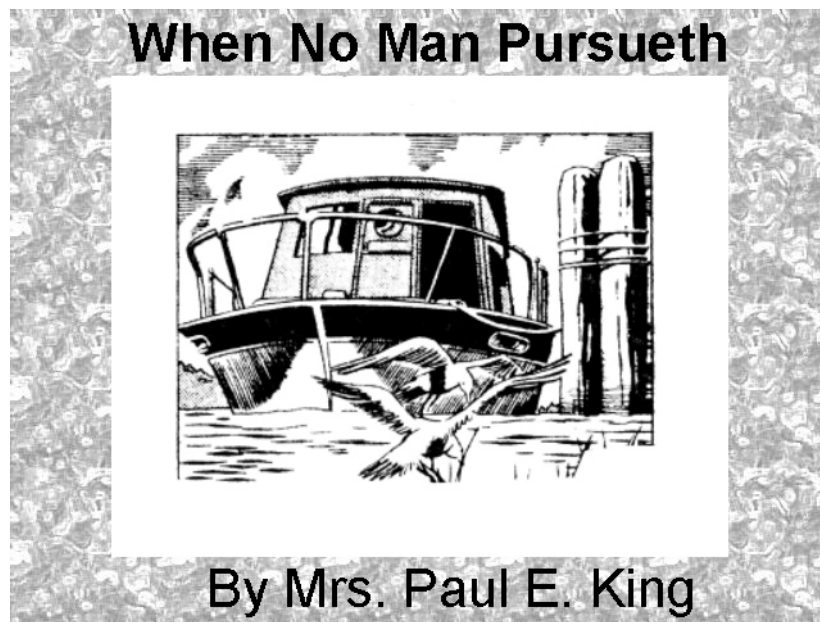
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WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH
By Mrs. Paul E. King
(Chapter I)

Matthew Gregory locked the door of his hotel room and stuffed the key in his pocket. His luggage, which had been brought up earlier by one of the porters, was placed on the luggage rack at the foot of his bed.

He walked to the window and gazed down upon the hustling, bustling crowd of hurried shoppers as they went from one store to another and, in his observance of people, he became suddenly aware of the fact that the sky wore a brooding, darkening look. A real storm was on the way. What should he do? he wondered. And just why had he felt God urging him so strongly to come to the village and go to the beach? What lay behind it was still enshrouded in mystery.

Matthew changed into walking clothes and putting a raincoat over all, he started for the beach. He drew his neck deeper into the upturned collar of his raincoat. It had been a wild day of drifting squalls and transient gleams of sunshine and now the gale that struck was one of the wildest he had known. It swelled quite suddenly out of the breezes of a superb summer. He hastened his footsteps as rain fell in sheets. He grimaced to himself as he sauntered forth, remembering the damage that had been wrought upon his property which lay just fifteen miles to the west of Covesport.

It was just such a storm as this that had played havoc with his own home. Two days ago, it was, he got back from a meeting. He put the car in the garage then started down the garden for the house. The ground he walked was sodden with long rain and the cedars beyond the lawn plunged heavily to and fro in melancholy unrest, flinging great drops upon him as he passed and before he reached the door even he saw the damage. So it was, that while he was having his own home repaired and feeling the urge of God to come to Covesport, he registered at the hotel.

He was reminded of that other storm. The force of the gale was terrific. He had to bend himself nearly double to meet it. With difficulty he forced his way to a little summerhouse that overlooked the shore. It belonged to a friend of his, away now on vacation. He marveled to find it still standing, but it was sturdily built and would probably endure as long as the ground beneath it remained unshaken.

Matthew stood inside the shelter until the gale had spent itself, looking forth upon the heaving waste of waters. The tide was rising. He could see the great waves swirling white around the rocks. Several landslips were visible from his point of observation. The village was out of sight, tucked away behind a great shoulder of cliff; but an old ruined cottage that had been uninhabited for some time had disappeared entirely. Stacks of seaweed were thrown up upon the deserted shore and lay in great masses above the

breakers. The roar of the incoming tide was like the continuous roll of thunder.

It was a splendid spectacle, and for some time he stood, with his face to the driving wind and rain, gazing out upon the empty sea. There was not a single vessel visible in all that wide expanse. He turned to go, but paused, arrested by some instinct that bade him cast one more look downwards along the howling shore. In another moment he was staring intently down upon the group of rocks not more than two hundred feet below him.

Two figures . . . a man and a woman . . . had detached themselves from the shelter of these rocks, and were moving slowly, very slowly, towards the path that led inward from the shore. They were closely linked together, this he saw plainly. But there was something in the man's gait that caught the eye, and upon which Matt's whole attention was instantly focused. He could not see the face, but the loose-slung, gigantic limbs were familiar to him.

Slowly the two approached till they stood almost beneath him, and there, as upon mutual impulse, they stopped. It was a corner protected from the driving blast by the crumbling mass of cliff that had slipped under the recent gale. The rain was falling heavily again, but neither the two on the shore nor the solitary watcher on the perilous edge of the cliff seemed aware of it. All were intent upon other things.

Suddenly the woman raised her face. She was speaking, but no sound or echo of words was audible in that tumult. Only her face, lifted to the beating rain, with love mirrored in it, told Matthew something of their significance. Her face was hidden from him almost at once by the man's massive head; but he had seen enough to verify a certain suspicion which had long been quartered at the back of his brain.

He drew himself back from the cliff edge and sat upon the damp grass. Again the eyes swept the horizon; there was something of a holy fire in them; a hatred so profound and intense for sin that it stirred every fiber of his being and filled him with holy boldness and fearlessness. He was drenched through by the rain but he was not aware of it. Now he knew why the Holy Spirit had prompted him to come!

He turned to the hotel without further lingering and, stunned and shocked by what he had seen, he paced back and forth in the room, groaning

deep inside. At length he picked up the receiver of the telephone. "Do you have a Clarke Grange registered here, Hal?" he asked the hotel clerk who was a personal friend of his.

"Let me check for you, Matt," the clerk replied. "I just came on duty. Been gone a couple of days. Mildred's been ill. . . ."

Matthew waited with bated breath.

"Matt," it was Hal. "He's here. Room 206. Know the fellow? He lives about fifteen hundred miles from here, according to this register."

"Yes, I know him, Hal. Met him in the Navy."

"Want me to give him a message from you when he returns?"

Matthew was silent for a long while, thinking. When he spoke, his voice was steady and even. "Yes, Hal, give him a message. Tell him to come to my room. Nothing more. Just say that an old acquaintance of his is desirous of seeing him."

"Shall I tell him who, Matt?"

"Don't, please. Let it be a surprise."

"Will do as you say, my friend."

"Thanks much, Hal. I sure appreciate you." Matthew put the receiver back in place and sat down in a chair. He buried his face in his hands. "Muriel!" he cried. "Muriel! Then it is true. It is true! Oh, may God open your eyes and save your soul! Oh, Muriel!"

How long he sat thus he had no idea. Time slipped away like an ebbing tide. His deep moans and groans were as ceaseless and incessant as the roar of the incoming waves along the shore. His face, ordinarily pleasant and handsome, was like the face of an old man, but without the tolerance of age.

The town clock struck the hour of seven. Still he sat, weeping, praying and groaning. A short time later a knock sounded on his door. Matthew was instantly on his feet. Going to the bathroom, he took a cold, wet towel quickly

across his face and his eyes then stepped to the door and opened it. "Good evening, Clarke," he said, trying to sound cheerful and pleasant. "Come inside. It's quite a surprise, your coming to Covesport. I certainly didn't expect to see you this far east."

Clarke stood in the doorway as one stunned. "Matthew! Matt Gregory, wh . . . what are you doing here?"

"Perhaps I should ask the same of you, Clarke. But do come in."

Clarke entered with a heavy, bullied air, as if he were entering against his will. Shaking hands with Matthew's outstretched one, he glanced at him rather suspiciously. "I really am surprised to see you," Clarke said rather moodily. "I thought you lived in Knoxville."

"During my mother's last years, yes. We stayed with my mother's sister.., my aunt.., in Knoxville. A short distance from here is, and always has been, our home town," Matthew said without preamble.

"Why did you wish to see me?" Clarke said, his eyes shifting uneasily from Matthew to the floor and back to Matthew again. "We never had much in common," he said by way of reminiscence.

"Can't an old acquaintance desire another's company without suspicion arising?" Matthew's benignity was unassailable, but there was a poignancy to it somewhere that made Clarke instantly uneasy and suspicious again.

"It's just that this is such a shock," Clarke answered, sitting on the edge of his chair.

Matthew had flung himself into a deep easy-chair and was lying quite motionless with his head back upon the cushion. An open Bible rested on a stand nearby. Clarke looked at him with renewed uneasiness, then he looked away again. He could not help but feel that there was some moral tension somewhere, but he had never possessed a keen perception. He could not say wherein it lay.

He retired into his shell and sat back in the chair facing Matthew in silence. Had the man seen him even? he wondered. It was frustrating indeed. Suddenly, without moving, Matthew spoke. His words were slightly more

deliberate than usual, very even, very distinct. "To come to the point," he said, "I saw you on the shore this afternoon. You and Muriel West."

"What?" Clarke gave a great start and stared across at him, gripping the arms of his chair.

Matthew's face, however, remained quite expressionless. "I saw you," he repeated.

With an effort, Clarke recovered himself. "I wondered how you knew I was up here. Where were you?"

There was an abrupt tremor behind Matthew's eyelids, but they remained closed. "I was on top of the cliff, on the grounds of a friend, watching you."

Dead silence followed his answer . . . a silence through which the sound of the sea half a mile away swelled terribly, like the roar of a monster in torment.

At last Matthew's eyes opened. He faced Clarke squarely. "Your sin will find you out, Clarke. It has already done so in part. What are you going to do?"

Clarke's face paled, his hands dropped heavily from the chair arms, and his whole frame dropped slowly forward. He made no further attempt at evasion. Quite suddenly, his face darkened. He seemed to hesitate upon the verge of vehement speech. But he restrained himself though the hot blood mounted to his temples. "You don't like it because Lois is marrying me and not you!" he shouted, rising to his feet and coming towards Matthew. "Furthermore, it's none of your business what Muriel West and I do."

Matthew lay quite motionless in his chair, inscrutably still, save for twiddling his fingers. "It's true, Clarke; but she's still a free woman and if I can do anything about it I shall see that she never marries you. You are not worthy of her."

Clarke's great dark eyes flashed fire. Hotly, he said, "I warn you, Matthew, I will tolerate no interference."

Matthew sat forward in his chair. "I'm not easily scared, Clarke. Or had you forgotten? It is 'the wicked who flee when no man pursueth.'"

"Cut the Scripture! You're still the same religious fanatic you were during those seafaring days. But I warn you, Matt, you interfere with my marriage to Lois Hill and you will pay!"

"What do you intend to do about Muriel?" Matthew asked. "She is my first cousin and she is engaged to be married to a wonderful fellow. But I need not remind you!" he said, a hint of irony in his voice. "You can't have but one wife, Clarke. Why do the ladies in such a wicked manner? But then, as I recall, this was always your pace. But God's not going to tolerate it, Clarke. There's a reaping day out there.

Clarke paced back and forth nervously. Matthew, watching him, noticed the dark handsome features of the man and was instantly reminded of his pride. At heart he was a coward, but he possessed the power to make foolish women all but swoon at his feet. He was a perfect actor too! Foolish women! Dare he class Lois Hill foolish?

"I warn you!" Clarke was repeating. "My affairs are my own. Do you hear me?"

Matthew rose and walked toward Clarke. "Your affairs may be your own," he said steadily, "but this involves more than just your affairs: it involves Lois and Muriel, and by God's grace I will do all in my power to set Muriel right and straight again. You beguiled her, just as you beguiled Lois. Did you tell Muriel of your engagement to Lois? And has Muriel told you that the boy she promised to marry is in an army hospital abroad suffering from wounds on the battlefield, and that he is counting the days till he can return home and make her his wife? Do the girls know that you were twice engaged while we served in the Navy together... ? Have you told them, Clarke? How many other young women have you promised to marry?"

"Cut it!" Clarke stormed. "Why tell them? What they don't know won't hurt them."

"Why tell them? you ask," Matthew interrupted. "The reasons are numerous. How do I know that you have not already been a much married man? God be merciful on your soul is all I can say if you are 'playing' that

kind of game. This is one of the prevailing sins of the day and you, Clarke, like a great majority of people in this wicked day and age, seem to have forgotten that God will take a hand in meting out judgment upon you someday. It's going to be sore punishment and judgment, Clarke. Better think it over."

He ceased speaking and there fell a dead silence, broken only by the lashing, driving rain upon the windows and the long, deep roar of the sea.

Across the lengthening silence Clarke's voice came to him as, opening the door and making an angry exit he exclaimed loudly, "Mind your own affairs, Matthew. I warn you."

(Chapter II)

A few seconds later, after Clarke had gone, Matthew softly shut and locked the door then returned to his chair. Great gusts of wind were being flung against the window pane in his room. The wind howled near and far with a fury that seemed to set the walls vibrating. Now and again he heard the roar of the waves above the howling wind as they crashed mercilessly upon the shore.

He dropped his head in his hands and prayed for Divine wisdom, to do the right thing in God's way. Clarke must be stopped from seeing Muriel; and, at the same time, he must convince Muriel that what she was doing was wrong and evil. Then there was Lois. He must stop her from marrying one so totally unworthy of her pure love. What were Clarke's intentions? Matthew wondered, shaken visibly by the man's ungentlemanly actions. How dare he flirt with another when he had won the love and promise of marriage from one so noble and good as Lois Hill? It was beyond Matt's human reasoning.

A hurt, greater far than anything that had ever before befallen him, filled his heart to near-breaking proportions. Lois Hill, engaged to marry a flirtatious "woman's man." The thought was nauseating. It hurt him dreadfully. Dear, sweet Lois. The one woman in all the world that he had loved was deceived by Clarke's pretension of "religion." The man had beguiled her with his flattery and his handsome features. Forgetting about the love she had once avowed was for none other than Matthew himself, she had forsaken him and given her promise of marriage to one so unworthy as Clarke Grange.

Matthew arose and shook himself. The very thought of it was too repulsive and repugnant to dwell upon it for any length of time whatever. He had lost Lois but he would try to help Muriel see how utterly wrong she was in allowing Clarke to court her and keep company with her.

Totally oblivious of the drenching rain, he headed into the storm. He knew Muriel would be at the little cottage. What if Clarke were there now? He hadn't thought of this before and the thought struck him with a sudden sickening jolt. Almost at the same instant, he threw his shoulders back. With head raised high and with a boldness surging through him like a mighty overflowing river, he plodded bravely onward.

As he neared the neat cottage nestled snugly and compactly in among the pine and oak trees, a single light flickered feebly through the kitchen window. He moved forward as one on a mission . . . a most important and urgent and pressing mission with victory and triumph its ultimate goal. He stepped onto the porch and knocked lightly. All was stillness and silence within. Suppose Clarke was there!

He knocked again, more loudly this time, and the door swung ajar. "You . . . you've come early," Muriel started to say then stepped back abruptly and stood in shocked silence when she saw Matthew.

"Were you expecting someone, Muriel?" Matt asked in mock surprise.

"Oh, hello, Matt. It's nice seeing you. Do come in," she invited, evading his question. "Whatever in the world brings you out on a night such as this?" she bantered lightly.

She led the way into the living room with a certain impetuosity that was not wholly spontaneous. "Sit down." She motioned to a chair. "I'm terribly busy . . ." she demurred.

"Packing?" Matthew asked involuntarily, a certain uncanny suspicion and intuition gnawing at him.

Muriel gave a small gasp and toyed nervously with the edge of a throw pillow beside her on the sofa. "What makes you ask that?" she asked suddenly, her face turning pale.

Matthew moved to the edge of the chair. He began to speak and as he did so Muriel saw the drawn lines on his face. "I have something to say to you," he began, "and it's something so horrid and dreadful that I hardly know where or how to begin. . . ."

He broke off, his shrewd glance flashing over her, keen and elusive as a rapier.

"I want to ask you . . . what are you doing? What are you going to do?"

"I . . . I'm afraid I don't comprehend, Matthew," she said, speaking coldly. "Anyhow, I can't stop to answer any silly questions. I think you had better go."

"You must listen to me!" Matt said. She caught the grim note of determination in his voice and was aware of the whole force of his personality flung suddenly against her. "Muriel," he continued, "you and I are cousins by birth. Bill is your promised husband and one of my dearest friends. Isn't it a . . . a shame and . . . and dirty the way you're doing him? And for a man who cares little more for good, pure womanhood than . . . than a beast, almost? How can you do it? How can you forsake a man as good and holy and wonderful as Bill Peters for . . . for a mere playboy, Muriel? How?"

She drew back slightly. Matt's words seemed to have stunned her into dormancy. "Wh . . . what are you talking about?" she demanded weakly.

"Your infatuation with Clarke Grange, naturally! I saw you, Muriel. You and Clarke on the beach. . . ."

Muriel's hand flew to her heart. Her face turned the pallor of death. "Go, Matt. Go!" she said hoarsely, trying to rise.

Matthew arose. "Let me finish," he said. "Do you think you will be happy, Muriel? Happy, with a man who has been twice engaged and who is, now, engaged to be married to one of the finest, purest, sweetest women in the world? Lois Hill by name. Will you be happy with a man who gets his thrills out of life by seeing how many women he can attack and. . . ."

"Stop it! Stop it, Matt! I . . . I . . ."

But Matthew's righteous indignation against sin and evil would not be silenced. "Don't try to stop me, please, Muriel. I must finish. Do you think you will ever forget what you have turned your back on . . . of everything pure and good and holy and godly . . . what you have sacrificed to this fetish you call love?.., how you forsook God and His way for your life; how you broke the heart of one of the best and noblest men in the world? A man who is eagerly counting the days when he can return and make you his own?" His voice was not very steady, and he paused but he did not look at her or even seem to expect any reply.

Muriel gave a great shiver. She felt cold from head to foot.

"Be a noble woman, Muriel," he urged. "Beg God's forgiveness and His pardon. It will be worth it. You know that. Sooner or later you are bound to reap all that you have sown. This man isn't worthy of your love. I know him well. He'll break your heart. I warn you!"

She lifted a haggard face. There was something in the plea that compelled her. And so looking, she saw Matthew as she had never before seen him. She saw his soul, stripped bare of all reserve, a vital, burning flame, God-fearing, shining in the desert. The sight moved her as she had never been moved.

Matthew crossed the room to where she sat dumbly on the edge of the sofa. "You were expecting . . . him," he said tearfully but fearlessly. "You thought I was Clarke. You gave it away in your greeting to me."

Her white lips quivered. "Please . . . go, Matthew!" she exclaimed pitifully as she passed a trembling hand across her weary eyes. Her powers of resistance had begun to totter.

"You mast give Clarke up!" Matthew insisted. "I fear you will lose your soul and burn in hell's fire unless you do. He'll drag you down go the depths of sin. You can do it if you want to, Muriel! Flee to Christ for pardon and mercy. I will help you all I can. You do want to get back on God's narrow but high road, don't you, Muriel? You want to get back to God . . .?"

She uttered an inarticulate sound that was more bitter than any weeping and covered her face.

Instantly Matthew straightened himself and turned away. He walked to the window and leaned his head against the sash. He had the spent look of a man who had fought to the end of his strength but meant to fight on till breath left his body, if necessary. The thunder of the waves upon the shore filled in the long silence. Minutes crawled away, and still he stood there with his face to the darkness . . . praying. At last, a voice spoke behind him, and he turned. Muriel had risen.

She stood in the lamplight, quite calm and collected. There was even a smile upon her face, but it was a smile that was sadder than tears.

"It's been a desperately big fight, Matt. I . . . I'm so ashamed of myself. I never dreamed I'd backslide and . . . and turn my back upon God and Bill. I didn't intend to do it, but I got so busy working and running back and forth to the hospital looking after Mother until my prayer life and Bible reading were completely forgotten. I didn't mean to do it. I didn't, Matt! Oh, I want to get back to where I once was with the Lord. Pray for me, please!"

With the thunderous roar of the waves breaking incessantly upon the shore, Muriel prayed until the peace of God came back into her heart.

"You . . . you may go now, Matthew," she said, rising to her feet. "God has graciously forgiven me and taken me back."

"But what about Clarke?" Matthew questioned. "You . . . were packing, Muriel, were you not? Were you and Clarke going away together . . .?"

"Yes, Matt. Clarke wanted me to marry him. Said we'd go away and find a Justice of the Peace and be married. He has sea duty again soon and he wanted to be married right away. Oh, Matt, how could I have done Bill this way!" She sobbed brokenly now.

"Would you like for me to stay until Clarke comes, Muriel?"

She studied his face a long time. "You really are concerned, aren't you, Matt?"

"Very concerned. I'd like to remain until you send Clarke on his way . . . or allow me to do it, Muriel."

With a fixed gaze and a determined look on her face, Muriel spoke calmly. "Thanks, Matt. That won't be necessary. I will face Clarke alone at the door and tell him myself. The Lord will help me. But I wonder if he will show up at all: he was to have been here twenty minutes ago."

"He's quite a coward, Muriel, in spite of all the pomp and show he displays. Perhaps something I told him has intimidated him. I shall be praying for you. Good night. Be strong in the Lord!"

Muriel stood in the doorway, watching the retreating figure of her cousin until he was swallowed up in the darkness.

Closing the door, she locked it securely then hurried into the bedroom to unpack the luggage. There was a song in her heart, now that the burden and condemnation for sin was gone. She had just finished putting the last dress on a hanger in the closet when she heard Clarke's knock on the door.

Turning the porch light on, she unlocked the door and stood inside.

Clarke started to enter. "Clarke, don't!" she exclaimed. "I have something to tell you, right here on the porch. Forgive me for . . . for everything. I'm not going with you. I got saved a little while ago and I see things in a clearer light and with a more illumined perspective. You must leave, Clarke. I'm sorry and... and embarrassed, too, that I ever allowed myself to think that you really loved me. Go, Clarke. May God be merciful to your soul. . . ."

"Whatever has come over you, Muriel?" he thundered, invectives spilling freely from his tongue now. "Has . . . has Matthew been here? I warned him not to interfere with my affairs. . . ."

"But I thank God that he came and he did interfere!" Muriel exclaimed. "I had been merely infatuated with you, Clarke. Matthew helped me to see this."

Clarke's nostrils dilated in anger. His fists clenched and unclenched and his face turned from white to red. "This . . . this . . . foolishness . . .! You . . . you are serious, Muriel?" he asked angrily.

"Indeed I am, Clarke. You must never come back here."

Giving her a scathing look, he stomped towards his car. "Very well," he shouted in thunderous tones. With those words, he drove madly into the night.

Muriel locked the door behind her and with a look of victory and triumph she prepared for bed, humming a hymn as she did so.

Matthew, reaching the hotel soaked and exhausted, took a hot shower and went to bed. He had one more mission to fulfill. He would make it a point of duty to contact Lois when and if the Spirit led him. Praying for God's continued guidance and victory, he fell asleep.

(Chapter III)

Matthew woke early the following morning. So early in fact not a creature could he hear stirring in the hotel on slippers he crossed the room to the window. He stood with his back to the room and his face to the sea. The storm had completely and fully spent itself during the time that he slept and a deep calm lay over the town.

The moon was below the horizon but stars blazed everywhere with a marvelous brightness. It was a beautiful night . . . or early, early dawn -- and he was taken quickly back to another such perfect night a little more than eight months past.

He had come from a revival meeting, showered, then dressed before hurrying away to see Lois. Her mother admitted him, greeting him with her usual kindness and pleasantness but with a hint of sadness enshrouding her, he noted. "Lois will be down soon," she told him as she hurried up the stairs.

At the sound of a quiet footfall, he turned. Lois had emerged. At first sight he fancied that she was ill, so terribly did her thick black hair emphasize her pallor. But as she moved forward he reassured himself.

He went impetuously to meet her and in a moment he had her hands in his; but they lay in his grasp cold and limp, with no responding pressure. Her great eyes, as they looked at him, were emotionless and distant, remote as the lights of a village seen at night across a far-reaching plain. She gave him no word or smile of welcome.

A sudden dark suspicion flashed through his brain, and he drew her swiftly to the light, scrutinizing her closely, searchingly.

"What have you been doing?" Matt remembered having asked dumbly.

She fathomed his suspicion and answered, smiling faintly, "Nothing much, Matthew. Nothing. . . ."

"There's something wrong, Lois. Something awfully wrong!"

She did not contradict him. With a slight gesture of weariness she sat down. Matthew remained on his feet, looking down at her, waiting for enlightenment.

It did not come very readily. Seconds passed and terminated into minutes before she spoke "I . . . Oh, Matt, I don't know how.., to tell you!" she moaned

"What's the trouble?" he asked anxious "Tell me, Lois."

His tone was reassuring. She looked up at him with more confidence.

"Matt . . . I . . . I have been thinking things over.

Matthew's heart seemed to have stopped beating. He waited impatiently to hear the rest.

"I . . . I'd rather you didn't come to see me again," she said lamely.

The shock of her words was intense. Matthew remembered gasping for air. He brushed a weary hand across his eyes "Thank you," he answered With a sound that was half-sob, half-groan, he turned his back upon her and covered his face.

For a space of seconds he stood thus, not moving, seeming not even to breathe. And Lois, trying to steady her nervous hands by twisting a single thread round and round on a throw pillow, watched him with a panting heart. Then abruptly, moving with a light, quick tread that made no sound, he crossed the room to one of the wide-flung windows and stopped there

From across the quiet garden there came the soft, sad sound of night birds -- fitful, alluring, plaintive. He heard their call but he stood without movement with his face to the night, gripping the woodwork of the sash with both hands, every bone of them standing out in bold, skeleton line.

She watched him, fascinated, for a long time, but he did not stir from his position. He seemed to have utterly forgotten her presence in the room. And still the night birds called . . . softly, pleadingly . . . till she felt dazed with listening to them. He knew it all. Lois' mother had told him: Lois had admitted it all to her.

Matthew moved at last. His blue eyes looked like those of a wounded deer His face wore a look of hurtful resignation.

Lois, seeing the wound she had inflicted, laid her head upon the pillow and burst into a storm of tears. Only when her distress had spent itself, Matthew bent down and dried her tears with his handkerchief, his lips twitching as he did so, his eyes flickering rapidly to suppress the tears so near to surfacing.

"There!" he had said consolingly. "Finish what you were saying, Lois. I am not to come to see you again. Remember? Why, Lois? Why? What evil thing have I done? I have always been a Christian gentleman, have I not? I have never taken unholy or unChristian liberties with you, have I?"

Quickly she raised a restraining hand "Oh, Matt, no! No. Never! This is what makes it so hard. You have been a holy man. A wonderful man! Oh-h . . .!" Again she burst into tears. "why did it have to happen? why did he come along?"

"It . . . it's . . . I mean, there's someone else, Lois?" The words had come out haltingly, falteringly.

She lifted tear-stained, pain-filled eyes to his. "Yes, Matt, that's it."

"Do . . . I know this man . . . who has seemingly won your love?"

"I do not know. Clarke Grange is his name."

At mention of the name, the color had drained from his face.

"What's the matter, Matt? You look strange. Do you know Clarke?"

"I know him, Lois. Yes. But go on. How did you meet him and where?"

"He came to the camp meeting by invitation from a friend."

"Is . . . did he . . . I mean, is he a Christian, Lois? Clarke was never thus inclined. But I know God is able to save even the vilest of sinners."

"He didn't get converted during the camp but he began dropping in to our church services occasionally and he . . . he went to the altar one night."

"And he was gloriously and genuinely converted?" Matthew asked poignantly.

A slight flush stole over her face. "He said he... accepted the Lord," she answered in a small, barely audible voice. "We have been going together ever since."

"This, then, is why you have not written me?" He glanced at her momentarily but his expression was enigmatically. "Do you . . . you love him, Lois?"

She blushed scarlet. "I . . . yes, I think I do."

"Better have something more solid than that," he had warned. "Broken homes come from 'thinking' one is in love with another Pray fervently about this . . . this relationship of yours with Clarke, Lois. Pray, with an open heart." He was looking at her with veiled, impenetrable eyes.

She kept her eyes downward, not daring to meet his gaze. "I . . . have prayed, Matthew"

"Then pray again. And again and again..., with your heart fully open to the voice of God," he had warned the second time. "Good-night, Lois."

They were his last words to her. Yet an instant longer he waited. The next moment he had turned upon his heel and departed. How long, long ago

that parting had seemed and yet the pain of it felt as though it had happened only yesterday.

Matthew sighed deeply as he turned away from the window. Turning a light on, he picked up his well-worn, much-used Bible and read for well over an hour. What solace for a wounded heart in the beloved pages of The Book, he soliloquized reverently.

Gently he lay the Book down and shaved and washed before slipping quietly from his room to the outside. The stars had by now ceased their brilliant twinkling, having given way to the faintest hint and tint of dawn. A soft warm breeze stirred lightly as he took a brisk walk through the streets of the town. Here and there lights came on in the houses while an occasional sleepy dog, hearing and smelling the passing figure, barked lazily and nonchalantly.

It was a wonderful morning. There was a certain kind of intoxication in the scent of the pines, newly and freshly cleansed and bathed by the recent storm, and Matthew inhaled long, deep draughts of the fragrance and freshness. The entire atmosphere seemed transformed and the sea air was wonderful and exhilarating.

He took the long road round to the summerhouse from whence he had viewed Clarke and Muriel. The sea, while never totally calm, was back to its normal patterns of movement, sending wave after wave in to shore and dashing its salty spray far up on land.

Gulls circled overhead, screeching wildly, their keen eyes sighting the slightest bit of food. It was peaceful. Restful . . . the total picture of early morning happenings and sounds, and Matthew loved it all.

He walked along the beach for a time, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, thinking deep meditative thoughts while the sea-spray dampened his hair and his face. He watched as fishing vessels set off for their daily deep-sea jaunts while the lobster boats with their traps filled, plowed their way shoreward toward the village and the boat docks.

A sudden tingling sensation surged through him. He loved Covesport. Every part of it. But then, that was all quite natural for a native to feel that way. Fishing and trapping lobsters had one time been his work; his livelihood

for his widowed mother and himself; until, like some other fishermen of old, he had heard God's call, "Come ye after me and I will make you to be fishers of men." And he had obeyed that call and was completely happy in simply obeying.

He heard the distant song of men returning from shrimping now. They must have had a good catch. He could tell by the way they were singing. Always, their spirits were high and they sang freely when their nets were full. He rejoiced with them, knowing the hard work and toil connected with such. Then too, he was grateful that the men were coming home to their wives with a happy and congenial spirit.

Matthew stood watching and listening until the sun came into full view; then he hurried to the summerhouse on top of the cliff to pray. He wanted God's guidance and time for him to see Lois or his mission would be a failure. He would not go to her immediately. He would wait a few days. Deciding thus, he knelt to pray.

(Chapter IV)

Luncheon in the old-fashioned dining room with its windows facing the sea at the Hill home, would have been a pleasant time indeed had Lois' state of mind allowed her to enjoy it. But a letter from Clarke had completely banished all enjoyment for her. She forced herself to eat and to appear unconcerned, but she was quivering inwardly with a burning sense of remorse.

The feeling of guilt which had gently but persistently disturbed her since she began seeing Clarke, seemed more than she could bear. Was it God's voice trying to warn her? Or was it just her old-fashioned upbringing to not become overly involved with a man whose background she knew little or nothing about? She must read the letter again, she decided, when she was alone in the privacy of her bedroom. Her few, last letters to Clarke had been cool and short. Had he sensed her inner disturbance? she wondered.

"Are you ill, Lois?" It was her mother's kind voice, filled with love and concern.

"No, Mother dear. Why do you ask?"

"You look so pale and so . . . so frightened." Lois found her mother's shrewd eyes upon her.

"I . . . I've had a letter from Clarke. It . . . it's strange. I hardly know what to make of it. I'll read it later. Perhaps I'll understand it better then. You know how it is when you scan through a thing, Mother: you generally miss the real intent of the letter or article."

Sometime later, as she looked at the letter again, she noticed the postmark. Covesport, the postmark read. That meant Clarke was in Covesport -- and he hadn't come to see her. Not even phoned her!

With trembling hands she moved the letter.

Dear Lois, it read,

Fate, or an ill force, has been too strong for me. I am compelled to break my word to you. I have no excuse to offer. Perhaps in the end, it will be best for you.

By the time you receive this I shall be many, many miles away. I'm sorry if I have hurt you. However, circumstances have arisen which make it quite impossible for me to marry you.

Good luck to you.
Signed, Clarke.

Lois read the end of the letter and sat very still. Instead of weeping and feeling a terrible sense of loss and loneliness, she heaved a sigh of relief. She was free. That was her first thought. Free, by no effort of her own. Again she sighed in a joyous way. Condemnation shot through her then. Could she have been in love with Clarke and feel this way? she reasoned sensibly. Why the feeling of relief and elation? Had she merely been swayed by his outward, physical appearance?

She dropped suddenly to her knees. "Thank You, dear Lord," she said. Tears poured from her eyes.

Days later, with her Bible in her hand, she took a leisurely walk. It was a golden day in mid-September and she lingered awhile on the shore. There

was not a wave in the vast shimmering sea. The tide was going out, and the shallow ripples were clear as glass as they ran along the white beach. Lois paused often in her walk, meditating on the greatness and the goodness of God.

Since Clarke's final letter to her, life was as smooth as a dream. Gone was the guilt-feeling, the out-of-the-will-of-God feeling. She had prayed her way back into victory. The sky above was clear and blue and she now had an open heaven when she prayed.

A pebble skimmed past her and leaped from ripple to ripple like a living thing. She turned sharply, and the next moment smiled a welcome. One of the neighbor boys had come up behind her unperceived. She greeted him with pleasure unfeigned. "You throw remarkably well, Rusty," she commented.

The red-haired boy blushed slightly while he grubbed in the sand with a stick.

"I . . . I followed you," he confessed. "I . . . I wonder if maybe you'd have a . . . a meeting at our house?"

"What kind of meeting?" Lois queried softly.

"I don't know what it is," Rusty admitted. "But we'd need your Bible and some song books. My dad an' mom need a meetin' bad."

"Oh! You must mean a cottage prayer meeting, Rusty."

"It's a meetin' where you sing and pray. Like you have in church."

"When could Mother and Father and I come? Do you have any idea, Rusty?"

"Anytime. The sooner the better!" he exclaimed. "Things are gettin' right bad at our house. I . . . I'm afraid Mom an' Dad'll split up unless somethin' happens soon."

"Then we'll be there tomorrow night, the Lord willing."

With that promise, Rusty went whistling on his way. Lois, finding her little "rock nook," resorted to it for prayer. God was using her now as in other days.

She must live close to Him and do all in her power to win Rusty and his folks to Christ.

Some weeks later, the Indian summer brought with it a heat that was almost unbearable. It culminated at last in an evening of furious storm. Lois speedily left the supper table to watch the magnificent spectacle of vivid and almost continual lightning over the sea. The splendor of the rising storm lifted her out of herself.

For a long while she stood by the little sitting room window, gazing out upon the storm-tossed waters. It had not yet begun to rain but the sound of it was in the air, and the earth was waiting expectantly. She was vaguely restless under it, curiously impatient for the climax.

It came at last, so suddenly, so blindingly, that she reeled back against the curtains in sheer physical recoil. The whole sky seemed to burst into flame and the crash of thunder was so instantaneous that she felt as if a shell had exploded at her feet. Trembling, she suddenly hid her face. The world seemed to rock all around her and for the first time ever in a storm, she was conscious of fear. Then as the thunder died into a distant roar, the heavens opened as if at a word of command and in one marvelous glittering sheet the rain burst forth.

She lifted her head to gaze upon this new wonder which the lightning revealed. The noise was like the sharp rattle of musketry or tanks, almost drowning the heavier artillery overhead. The window was blurred and streaming with rain but the brilliance outside was such that every detail in the garden was clearly seen.

An instant later she shrank backwards. A face, one she knew well and respected and revered..., was there close against the window.

Her mother, hearing a startled gasp, rushed into the room. "What's the matter, Lois?" she asked anxiously.

"A . . . man!" she exclaimed. "It looked like Matthew. But it can't be. Why would he be out on a night such as this? And why would he come here . . . after I had asked him not to . . .?"

Her words were cut short by her father. "And why shouldn't he come here? We are the best of friends, Lois. And," he added kindly, "we are brothers in Christ, Matt and I."

Out of a curious numbness that was almost a swoon, there came to her consciousness of a hand that rapped and rapped on the window pane. Beyond the window the lightning flashed with dreadful luridness upon the rushing hail that was now carpeting the garden with white balls and pellets. Beyond the window, looking in upon the family and knocking, knocking, knocking, stood Matthew.

Matthew ceased to knock. With his face pressing the pane, he spoke imperatively. What he said, no one could hear in the tumult of mighty sound. Only they felt his insistence. His urgency. And rising to meet the need, Mr. Hill beckoned Matt to the door.

He nearly fell across the threshold, so forceful and mighty was the gale. He was soaked to the skin but he seemed totally oblivious to it. "I couldn't make you hear," he said. "I tried the doors first, hammered on them, but you couldn't hear." Turning to Lois, he said gently, "Sit down; I have bad news."

Puzzled, Lois found the nearest chair and sat down.

"I had hoped to break the news gently to you," Matthew said, looking down at the floor, "but I suppose there is no gentle way of telling a person that someone he loves is dead. . . ."

Lois' face paled. "It . . . it's not Rusty's father . . . or his mother?" she asked impetuously. Anxiously.

Matthew brought his eyes up to meet hers. "Clarke's dead, Lois. Died a few hours ago. I'm sorry."

Lois sat dumfounded. "I'm sorry, too," she said in a very small voice. "Was he prepared to die? Did you hear? Do you know? What happened?"

Matthew gave her a look of astonishment. "I thought you should know better than anyone if he was prepared to meet God, Lois."

"I haven't seen him in months, Matthew."

"You haven't?"

"No, Matthew. He wrote me a short note, breaking our engagement quite a few months ago."

"Did he say why he was doing this to you?"

"No explanation whatever. But I thank God for it. I have His smile and approval upon my life again."

"She's like the Lois she used to be . . . before he came along," Mr. Hill commented.

Matthew took his hand and brushed the tears from his eyes. "Thank God!" he said. "I thought you should know about Clarke, Lois."

"What happened to him, Matthew?" she asked.

"A head-on collision. Both drivers were killed. It happened some sixty miles from here. I do hope he was ready to meet God."

"I never could figure out why he was in Covesport," Lois said. "The brief note, breaking our engagement, was mailed from Covesport, Matt. This was so strange and mysterious to me. Why wouldn't he have come by to see me? I was under the impression that he was still in New Orleans. . . ."

Matthew turned his face toward the window. Poor, innocent Lois. Why was Clarke in Covesport that day? He could answer her question, but he chose not to. The memory of what had happened that day was still very real to Matthew. He shuddered as he remembered.

"Well, I'd best be getting back home," he said suddenly. "I am to preach at Smuggler's Notch tonight. I'll have to hurry. My clothes are a bit too wet to get into the pulpit, I fear!" He laughed as he said it.

As he drove homeward, Matthew heaved a sigh of relief and wafted a prayer of thanks heavenward. He was glad God had had him wait. He never had told Lois of Clarke's two-timing ways. God had worked it out in His way and in His time. There would be no need now of Lois ever knowing the real Clarke Grange.

Another thought struck him then. Lois was still unmarried and unattached. A thrill of elation surged through him; he drove through the storm with a singing heart.

The End