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DOWN A CANDLE-LIGHTED PATHWAY

By One Who Knew Linda
[Anna Talbert McPherson?]

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AN APOLOGY

Most of this story was called to mind anew several years ago with the thought of having a memorandum for our children of those series of events in the family's history which they were too young to remember. The manuscript was all but forgotten until (for reasons now past recall) I gave it to one of our sons and his bride to read. I had not anticipated that anyone but the family should see it, but in some way it went from place to place until possibly half a dozen people waded through it.

Later, by one or two of these people it was brought to the attention of a member of the Allegheny Publications Committee that such a story had been written, and it was suggested that the account would be an encouragement to young preachers and their wives if it was made available to them. It is upon the insistence of these that I very hesitantly and almost reluctantly hand over the narrative, for I am humbly aware that there are hundreds of pastors' families whose annals are far

more worthy of being preserved than the annals of our own. Still, while deploring the fact that these are not given to us, I have not felt it to be sufficient reason to conceal what God has done for our family.

It is true that for us, as for many others, life speeds on with little of the sensational to record, but could it be that to tell of the grace which God gives in the everyday grind and drudgery of the lowly place may be just as helpful to others as a story of the sensational? God grant!

Linda

* * * * *

CHAPTER 1

So Gordon was going to Africa. Going as a missionary! Linda Kent had not known this before. And more staggering than the revelation that Gordon was a missionary volunteer was the revelation that followed. Gordon wanted Linda to go with him as his wife!

O... O... what had she let herself be led into? She had not expected their friendship to go this far so soon.

They were in the parlor of the girls' dorm at Christian College. He had asked to see her there about a very important matter. And this was it!

Linda had the feeling of being hurried faster than she wanted to go. "Wait, Gordon, wait.. . I must think. I must pray."

"But I must know now, Linda. Tonight." He said it kindly, then explained, "You're graduating soon I'm leaving on the Glee Club tour tomorrow. When I get back, there will be scarcely any time left. I want to be your escort at the commencement activities and then. . . your husband. Say that you'll let me."

Silence hung between the two. Good, obliging Gordon! He had shown her so many little kindnesses in their occasional afternoon walks together, had treated her as a queen -- gallantly! But O, she was not ready to make such a momentous promise.

Filtering through her thoughts came the realization that Gordon was talking again.

"I have another venture I hope to further along with my duties for the African mission," he confided. "The extermination of the tsetse fly, Linda, that arch enemy of health and life. If I can find a way to get rid of that pest, I'll feel my life's ambitions are fulfilled."

The extermination of the tsetse fly -- a good cause, yes, but a wave of disappointment swept Linda as Gordon talked. Could she make such an undertaking the supreme object of a lifetime of sacrifice? Seeking lost souls was her passion. Nothing less could lure her or satisfy her.

"No, Gordon." Linda knew what God would have her say, and she held back no longer. "No, Gordon. With all my heart I appreciate all you've done for me. You've never been anything but gentlemanly and gracious, but I cannot give you such a promise. God has something else for me. I'm sorry I led you to hope for such a future. I guess... I didn't know just how I'd feel until. . . until you asked me. . . ."

"Then it's final?"

"Yes, Gordon, there's no other way."

The young man's voice was husky and a bit unsteady, but still ever so kind. "I want you to be happy, Linda." It was all he said.

Before Linda knew what was happening, Gordon was gone.

The girl fled to her room and knelt by her bedside. As soon as she did, a strange voice seemed to deride her. "There, you lost your chance! And a good one too! You've always thought you would like to be a missionary. Now here you are, less than three months from your college graduation and you've turned Gordon down. All the other Christian young men, especially the missionary candidates, have their companions chosen. Now, if you ever go at all, you'll have to go alone!"

All this was probably true, thought Linda, but never could she forget the impression God had given her long ago of the kind of young man He would be pleased for her to have -- a young man completely devoted to the work of the Lord, the only kind that would make her heart supremely happy. And she thought she had seen him! But, as the voice said, he already had a girl. Still, if it had been he, Noel Winters, who had asked her what Gordon had asked her tonight.

"Hush, Linda!" spoke up the same voice that had been scorning her for what she had done. "Hush! Noel Winters doesn't even look at you."

"I know," Linda acknowledged, "but if. . . That wouldn't have scared me so. If it had been he, those icy fingers wouldn't have strangled me and choked off my words. There is someone, somewhere, who I can be sure is God's choice for me, and if not

I trust Him. Life without a companion would be better than to get the wrong one."

Linda stayed long on her knees. Her thoughts strayed back to the first time she had noticed Noel. It was in a college chapel service. After others had testified, this youth arose. Tall, fair-haired, with open countenance, he radiated almost boyish exuberance as he told of what the Lord had done for him.

Linda was captivated at once by his openness, his genuineness, his unmistakable devotion to God and the way of holiness. And then he ended his little talk by expressing his willingness for service anywhere, mission field or at home.

Here was her ideal! Linda had scarcely dared to hope that she should ever find one who so perfectly fit into her fond dreams of a life companion. But here he was! She recognized him at first sight.

Linda had walked out of the chapel that day with Kidie Elliott. "Who was that. . . that last boy who spoke?" she asked, her heart fluttering so that she could hardly make her words audible.

"Noel Winters, I believe. He's a junior. Some say he's the most spiritual boy in the school."

"I could have guessed that," Linda said only to herself and went to her room.

Other scenes kept trooping into Linda's consciousness as she meditated this night by her bedside. There were the times she had stopped at the window where the dormitory stairs wound upward and had peered out for a glimpse of her hero in the thronging crowd below as they gathered in front of the dining hall nearby. Yes, it was easy to spot him -- tall, flaxen-haired, always with that open smile. Boys slapped him on the back in friendly greeting and called him "Winters."

When the last green leaf had turned to gold and tumbled to its season's rest on the college campus, when the autumn air, before so warm and sweetly pungent with burning bonfires, became crisply bracing even in sunny Virginia, Noel began wearing a cheery yellow and black plaid jacket, and Linda, laughing to herself, had started calling him "Yellow Jacket."

Another memory crowded close upon the heels of that one. There was the surprise class period on the first day of the last semester. Linda had matriculated for an advanced Greek class. Dr. Morris called the roll, each student taking his seat alphabetically, and before Linda knew what was happening, there sat down beside her none other than. . . Noel Winters! One would have expected there to be some interlopers in the line between the K's and the W's, but no, Linda and Noel were seated beside each other, and that without any stretching of honesty. Linda's heart bounded within her. She wondered how coincidence had managed such a marvel, then she settled down into a shy reserve. Who can say what it is in love that feigns indifference? And from whence comes the timidity that hides the deepest emotions, the bashfulness that holds a princess farther from her prince than from those for whom she cares far less?

A new self-consciousness stole over the girl. She had never felt this way before. She was conscious of her voice when she recited, conscious of her clothes, conscious of her hands. She noticed such little things now -- the sound of Noel's footsteps as he came down the hallway to the classroom day by day, the gay light of the yellow jacket as it first met the corner of her eye when he appeared in the doorway.

Then one day Noel lingered beside her at the end of the class period and let the others pass out of the room before them. Linda's heart trembled like a leaf in the breeze. Foolish, she knew.

"Miss Kent," Noel's voice was formal and businesslike, "do you happen to room near Ann Stowe?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Winters, right across the hall." Linda hoped her manner was as indifferent as his had been but she could not be sure.

"Then perhaps you won't mind taking this envelope to her?" How gracious and manly he is!

"Certainly not. I'll be glad to take it," Linda acquiesced, and with a "thank you" and a courteous bow he was gone.

Linda slipped the missive under Ann's door. She was sure there was a rosebud in it and a note. "Wonder if she knows how fortunate she is," Linda mused. She recalled her play name for Noel and laughed a little ruefully to herself. "Yellow Jacket," she repeated. "The only sting being that he doesn't notice me!"

Abruptly, the chimes in the tower called Linda, still at her bedside, from the reflections of the past to the realities of the earlier hours of the evening which had just come and gone.

Again that carping voice almost upset her equilibrium. "You have given up one who wants you for his wife, for Noel, and he is not even interested in you. He has another.

For an instant a murky fear chilled the girl. For a moment she felt a wee surge of panic. Was she or was she not to discover that one and only one in whom she could find a mutual intersharing of interest, holy living, and love? Here she was. The end of her college life was only two and a half months away. Where else would she ever be associated with so many clean, Christian young men? Had she been imprudent, after all, in holding so aloof? In keeping such fine reserve? Of all the boys that had sought her companionship, might there not have been one who could have stood out in her dreams as resplendent as -- Noel Winters?

No. There was only one answer to this, for he was the only one that exemplified her ideal. And since, with such as Linda, the best will be had, or none, the prayer she prayed that night was characteristic.

"It's all in Thy hands, dear Lord, to give or to withhold. Thou knowest better than I what things are best for me."

Thus, the girl, not having encountered this matter in her consecration of months before, was learning the sacred secret of step-by-step dedication, of step-by-step dying-out to all that is not the will of God, a step-by-step acquiescence to all that constitutes His will.

She went to bed with a sweet, blessed peace quieting her submissive heart.

The next day being one into which three classes and two laboratory periods were crowded gave little time for Linda to review the decision she had made the night before. It was just as lunch in the great dining hall was finished, and just as she was making her way among the hundreds of other students to an exit, her mind occupied with the several illustrations yet to be drawn for her botany notebook, that she heard a voice behind her.

"Miss Kent-

Her name had been spoken softly, but the sound of it drew Linda sharply from her thoughts. Turning, she saw directly behind her -- Noel Winters. Could it be he that had spoken! Yes, for he was looking straight into her eyes. How noble he appeared! True, he had on only a school suit topped by the yellow plaid jacket, but there are some people whose demeanor is so wholesome, so genuine, that they do not need grand attire to distinguish them. Noel with his open smile, his honest eyes, his fair hair and splendid form stood as a prince before the girl. And there was no envelope in his hand that might be for Ann Stowe!

"Do you happen to have Monday afternoon open?" he asked abruptly.

Linda caught her breath. "Why, no.. . I don't."

The students milled past them, jostling, joking.

O what had she said to him, her prince, her.. .? In the split second that had elapsed she thought she detected disappointment flit over the young man's face. Stammeringly, she sought to retrieve the situation.

"Please pardon me, but I guess I didn't understand your question. So much confusion. . ." Could Noel Winters know it had been the pounding of her heart that had engulfed his words?

"I was asking about an afternoon walk. Would you be free to go with me on Monday?"

Linda laughed. "I certainly did misunderstand you before." What a narrow escape from tragedy!

"Yes, indeed, Monday is open, as far as I know now, Mr. Winters."

"Then you will accompany me?" Noel's face was again hopeful.

"Why, yes, I'll enjoy being with you." What little words they were to hold such meaning! "What time had you planned to start?" Linda felt that her equilibrium, which had so nearly vanished, was again more securely in hand.

Gladness lighted the boy's eyes. "Will two o'clock be all right?"

"That will be fine." Linda was visibly enthusiastic. "I'll be ready at two."

After the exciting interview the girl threaded her way in and out of the crowd that funneled from the side exit and fled to her room. Awe filled her being at the thing that had just taken place, this.. . providence of God, for what else could it be? She felt as though she were walking on sacred ground and must tread softly, or this new happening might yet suddenly escape her, so unreal it still seemed. Kneeling by her bed, she could only bow in wonder and commit her way -- this new way -- unto the Lord.

Strange how one's plans can change so quickly. If anyone else had suggested a walk on Monday afternoon, the day before the notebooks were due, Linda would have scorned the suggestion as an utter impossibility. Until as recently as fifteen minutes ago, that day had been reserved for the final winding up of the notebook drawings. Now she found herself planning to stay up late this night to do them so as to leave Monday free. It was the only alternative other than that of getting a poor grade on her notebook, and that was unthinkable. Accordingly, Linda worked with her pen while others slept.

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CHAPTER 2

Monday dawned, bright and beautiful. To Noel and Linda, swinging across country with light, easy strides and breathing in deep draughts of the bracing air, the day was golden. Noel led the way to a little sheltered glade where a rustic seat awaited them. Below, part way down a rather sharp incline which broke off at their feet, a thread of sparkling, singing water rushed in merry ecstasy. The lilting jollity of the little waterfall was in perfect harmony with the gay spirits of the two young people as they proceeded with remarkable agility in becoming acquainted with one another. The fact that they had a mutual Friend, the blessed Lord Jesus, gave them a strong tie at the very start.

Noel read a few verses from the tiny Testament he had brought along, and they both asked in prayer God's blessing upon their fellowship together. There was no lack of subjects for conversation. The matter of their missionary interests came in for a great deal of animated discussion, and each noted, with personal satisfaction, that they saw alike on this very important subject -- that they were open to a call either to go or stay. To Linda it was remarkable how easily she could talk of her most sacred experience with Noel. Up until now she had not felt free to converse intimately about spiritual things except with very few of kin or acquaintance. She recalled in a flash those occasions with Gordon when she had held back in her storehouse of soul secrets the rich treasures of her heart. So few could understand. But this afternoon a lovely thing had happened. She had found that Noel understood.

How full life had suddenly become for Noel and Linda! The very shortness of time before commencement made every occasion together the more treasured. Another Monday walk was planned. It was as though they must make up for all the good times they might have had together that year if they had found each other sooner.

This Monday was a day of fitful showers, but Noel and Linda, equipped with an umbrella, set out to prove that their admiration for one another could weather even an April squall. They went through wooded paths and across rushing creeks on precarious stepping-stones, then climbed to a moss-lined cave sheltered by overhanging ledges. Noel secured the umbrella on an overhead branch and arranged a blanket on the broad rock which was to be their seat.

"O how cozy!" Linda whispered.

"I thought you would like it after we got here," Noel beamed. "What do you think I brought this time?"

Out of his pocket came a little old, brown book of evident ancient vintage.

"Not so much for looks," he fondled it in his fingers, "but really priceless in its way -- an old edition of the Methodist hymnal. No music scores in it, but I want you to hear the words of some of the hymns, as exalted, almost, as the Bible. In fact, they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Listen!"

Linda's heart filled with praise to God at the blessedness of it all. She watched Noel as he read. His face was radiant. His voice rose and fell in earnest, reverent cadences. And how wonderful it was that he enjoyed sharing these deep spiritual things with her! It was this whole-souled abandonment to God she saw in Noel that impressed her.

"Here's one we may need some day to bolster our faith," he smiled. Then he was including her, Linda, in his future!

"Peace, troubled soul, thou need'st not fear; Thy great Provider still is near; Who fed thee last, will feed thee still; Be calm and sink into His will.

The Lord, who built the earth and sky,
In mercy stoops to hear thy cry;
His promise all may freely claim;
Ask and receive in Jesus' name."

They both laughed a little at the thought, but, feeling as they did now, even the prospect of poverty could not be so bad if they had one another. . . and the promise.

Noel continued to thumb through the thin, yellowed pages.

Linda watched the creek bubbling on its way several feet below them. She watched the rain, stretched like a curtain of silver gauze before their eyes, and felt that even the rain was enchanting, with Noel! But what was that slight movement among the branches? Suddenly in plain view an old-fashioned wooden bucket slid mysteriously, silently past them, suspended on a slim thread of wire, which, until now, neither of them had noticed. Breathlessly they watched it until it stopped directly underneath a slender spring of water gushing from a ledge. Then, filled to the brim, it made its silent way back again into the foliage whence it came.

The two onlookers exclaimed in amazement at the little scene just enacted before them. Evidently the household on the hill above them had contrived this ingenious way of getting pure, fresh water for their needs.

". . . which is the earnest of the fulfillment of our promise -- 'The Lord will provide,' "Noel remarked. "Though He should have to draw for us water from the rock and send us manna out of heaven, He will faithfully supply every need."

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CHAPTER 3

As April had made its fickle way onto the calendar, it now had made its way off again, having touched the trees with pale spring green, the grass with emerald, and the campus pines with a new, rich verdancy. As May, not much more trustworthy than the preceding month, tripped along into the limelight, it brought with the opening of the fresh, young season, a perfect setting for the unfolding of the blossoms of admiration for one another the two young folk were experiencing.

For both Noel and Linda, the hours bulged with all the special activities that attend the last days of a college year. Too soon the last Monday was upon them, and with it Noel and Linda's last Monday afternoon walk. Noel came for Linda as soon as he gathered some things necessary for their outing. Linda was as slim and graceful as a little wood nymph in her white jersey dress. Dark brown ringlets played about her face. Words would have been superfluous as the young couple met, such "fair, speechless messages" did their eyes exchange. Again they chose the sheltered ledge above the brook. Again they watched in wonder the silent wooden bucket slide to the bubbling spring and then, full to overflowing, slide back again from whence it came.

"No better picture of my love for you, Linda," Noel began, "full to the brim and overflowing."

Noel was searching her eyes now. Sunbeams slanted through thick layers of new green leaves above them and played on his face. A thousand golden lights danced in his hair.

"I'm not setting out in this life with my affections centered on this world's goods, little girl. In that respect, I have nothing certain to offer you. Nothing." There was a quiver in his chin and the sparkle of a tear in his eye. "But with all the hardships we may face in life, I offer you the true and abundant love of my heart and will do my best with God's help to provide for you. If you can give me your love under those circumstances, Linda, I'll be the happiest boy in all the world.

He paused. Now he was waiting for an answer. Her answer. The little breezes held their breath and even the grasses were still. It was as though all nature waited to hear what she would say. Here it was then -- the thing she had known would come, had hoped would come. Yet now that it had, the question loomed so very momentous. Her answer would mark her whole life's destiny! Well that was all right, wasn't it? Had she not dreamed of this very hour? Decided her answer long ago? Even when Gordon... She had known then what she would have done if it had been Noel asking her. Linda's eyes glowed with the certainty that this was God's doing and that His smile was upon it. "I do accept your love, Noel, and yes, promise you mine." "Then we shall be one, praise God! And together we shall forever serve Him." Noel's face was beaming. Enthusiastically they talked and planned.

There was much to discuss concerning the future and, of course, of special interest, was the setting of a tentative date for their marriage. Linda would gather together things for their future home while Noel took his last year's work in college. Both this summer and the next would be

filled with his scheduled tent meetings, then he would come for her in the early fall. That would give plenty of time to get to conference in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Finally the months of separation, except for an occasional short visit, came to an end, and the long-looked-for day arrived. The simple wedding was solemnized in Homestead, Virginia, Linda's home town, by a relative, an aged saint of God, Rev. Hathaway. It was followed by a two and a half days' journey to Noel's home in Fairplains, Nebraska, in the five-year-old Model T Ford Noel's father had given the couple for a wedding present. Conference week was more truly endured than enjoyed. No doubt the uncertainty of their future location accounted largely for this. When the announcement did come of Noel's appointment to Mentor-Twin Falls charge, the entire Winters family was immediately astir with the thrill of adventure.

Linda wondered if all preachers wives experienced the bedlam of thoughts that crowded her mind. Would the people resent her youth and inexperience? What would be the spiritual status of the church? As little as was her natural interest in matters domestic, being more inclined to study and art work, Linda found herself pondering, too, what kind of a situation the place afforded as her starting point in making a home for Noel and herself. The parsonage, she knew, was in the smaller of the two country towns. Would there be water in the house? Or even electricity? Well, maybe that would not matter so much if there were hills and trees to look at. Whatever its condition, it was the place God had chosen for them and it would be a little heaven here below.

While she gave herself up to waiting what seemed like an interminable week until time to go to their new charge, Linda found herself absently fancying a pleasantly charming picture of their future home. There, nestled in the shelter of two low-lying hills was a cozy white bungalow, scarcely discernible through the lacy greenery of the great trees. The whole place smelled and breathed of trees. There was a white picket fence, too, where flowers of all colors looked through the slats to see what was going on outside. Circling the lawn of velvety green, ran a singing brook spanned by a rustic bridge welcoming the newcomers to home and happiness. There were other houses, to be sure, not crowding in upon the house of dreams, but near enough to be friendly. Linda knew the odds were against her, but it all could be that way.

Then suddenly, Father Winters, as anxious to spy out the land as anyone else, decided one day to take the family out to the new charge in his Model A. Under Father's excited urgings, the purring Ford spun lightly over the sandy roads, sending clouds of yellow dust whirling into the sky. As the one hundred or so miles lengthened out behind them, Linda could see that her visions of low-lying hills were fast disappearing below the rim of a prairie, for prairie it surely was.

"Beautiful country, son!" Father exclaimed enthusiastically, to which statement all the other Nebraskans heartily agreed. Linda scarcely restrained herself from looking at him in astonishment. She had not been used to calling country "beautiful" that had no trees, no hills. Attractive for farming purposes, perhaps. Surely not beautiful as real scenery went.

And then, a half mile across floor-level land, they saw the church -- a nice white frame building set in the center of a few houses, a store, a feed mill and a bank. It was easy to spot the parsonage as it was situated more closely to the church than were any of the other houses. They found it to be a gray, plain dwelling with only a window box of fading fall flowers as the sign of

any beauty. Three scrubby trees in front of the house and a fair-sized lawn completed the store of greenery. The trees yielded no shade for the windows or for the porch, which was small and fitted into the ell made by the location of the three downstairs rooms. But, considering all it could have been and was not, Linda determined that the little gray house in the West was capable of being made into a little gray home in the West, and there warmed in her heart a deep prayer that God would help her do it.

Immediately her mind began to whirl with calculations and plans. It was hard for Linda to assent to borrowing money with which to buy their furniture. "We can do with store boxes for awhile," she said. But Noel, while hating debt as much as she, was sure that with their generous promised salary of \$1400.00 for the year, they could easily soon pay back the \$150.00 he planned to borrow. So, the few days left before their moving in, Noel and Linda spent in shopping for necessary house furnishings, always with an eye to putting color into those drab little rooms.

In the evenings, Linda pulled threads and hemmed the curtains by hand with great precision. When, the very week of their arrival in Mentor, Noel announced a prayer meeting at the parsonage, and Linda had only one pair finished, she hung those at the window nearest the road. She had to admit the arrangement left the room looking lopsided. "But at least, the people will know I'm making an attempt," she consoled herself.

The furnishings of the room were restful and pretty, all of their own choosing. Blues and shades of rose predominated to produce a most harmonious effect. Dorothy's bit of a lace doily Linda displayed on the library table between the rows of books. She had mentally planned to put it on an end table when Dorothy first gave it to her before she left home, but since their funds had not permitted them to invest in a davenport or an end table, it found its place on the aforesaid table of learning. Ethel's yellow luncheon cloth bravely cast its bit of sunshine throughout the barn-like kitchen. Linda had spread it on the table of the unpainted breakfast set. She would paint the breakfast set, she promised herself, as soon as the curtains were done, not knowing that it would be spring before her promise was fulfilled. The only other pieces of furniture in the kitchen were a work table with its bucket and dipper, and the two-burner Perfection oil stove. Beyond the back porch on a little platform was the pump. Linda put the hollyhock spread, that Aunt Alice had given her, on the bed, and folded the silk covered comfort that had been Cousin Ethel Hall's wedding present, at the foot. At the village store, she found a piece of flowered cretonne out of which to make a cover for her trunk which she set in front of the window. All in all, the bedroom looked more like a flower garden than did any spot outside.

Linda sat down in a chair in the living room, with her back to the front window, where she could look into the kitchen through the door to her left and into the bedroom through the archway straight ahead. Everything was as cheery and cozy as she could make it with what she had, she concluded, except the archway. It was still too big and bare. There was Evelyn's gift of fern bowls with the triple chains. She decided to hang them there, one at each side. Probably they would look out of place, being meant for windows. But the archway needed them worse. It was exactly the effect she wanted, one which finished out the harmony of the two rooms to perfection. Noel liked it, too, and to prove it, he stooped and kissed her before she knew what was coming. Perhaps it would not be so hard, anywhere, to make a house a home, with lover's kisses like that to help out!

It was not many days until Linda detected that there were other problems more serious than interior decorating confronting them. Mentor proved to be the center of a prosperous farm community. People were smug and self-sufficient on their broad acres, and the church was patronized for the most part as a convenient "conscience-salve." Howbeit, whether the church was felt to be an asset or no, mud roads supplied a welcome excuse for many absenting themselves from its sanctuary on rainy Sundays. It did not take Noel long to decide that a revival was needed. He went over plans with members of his church board and found them favorable. Accordingly, on the second Sunday, Noel announced that a revival would begin on the Sunday next.

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CHAPTER 4

It was on one of those afternoons when the air was whispering with the autumnal fall of leaves that the shadow of the little Ford danced over the pattern of gold lace on the country road where the sunlight had sifted through the branches of the wild cherry beside the fence row. Noel and Linda were making their first round of pastoral calls prior to the coming revival. Their hearts were glad in the service of the Master. Linda felt again that unspeakable lift of exhilaration that she had felt in anticipation of doing the bidding of the King -- that blessed sense that it was good to be alive and good to be a Christian.

"They're wonderful people," Noel mused. "They've just been fed on chaff so long, Linda, they don't know real food when they see it, that's all. You can't blame the people altogether. Hirelings among the shepherds. That's what divides and scatters the flock -- hirelings as worldly as the most self-centered farmer here. No one to point the way to heavenly riches."

Linda liked to hear Noel talk. She knew she need not answer. Noel just needed someone to listen, someone to whom he could pour out his thoughts.

"Linda, we've got to make a difference in this community. By the grace of God, when I leave, no one will be able to excuse himself by saying he was never shown the Way. Somehow the Lord must show us how to dig them out of their ruts of complacency and self-righteousness. The revival's not starting any too soon. We'll have to have one for a foundation to build on. Out of it will come a church prayer meeting, and out of the prayer meeting will spring the life of the church. Thank God, Linda, it's coming! Victory's coming!" And Noel leaned forward on the steering wheel while spurring the little Ford to greater speed as though to overtake Victory down the road.

It was as Noel said. No more substantial citizens could have been found anywhere than those bronzed toilers of the soil around the village of Mentor. Noel had noticed one in particular the first Sunday he was there. Tall, raw-boned and weather-hardened, Nels Jensen had sat forward in his seat with his strong hands on the bench in front of him as though he were drinking in lost words that he had not heard in many a day. The Schaeffers, the Langbehns, the Mowrys, the Teagues, all were promising timber if they would yield to Holy Ghost truth.

All through that week, the shepherd and the shepherdess toiled and prayed, and prayed and toiled. Linda sought out the singers and musicians and planned ahead for special music for every

service. As often as she could she would illustrate the songs with a chalk drawing. Perhaps this would help to bring the people out.

Sunday came, and the revival started. The evening service was disappointing, if the minister looked only at the vacant seats yawning back at him, but Noel determined to believe for more than the visible circumstances indicated. Nels and his wife were there, and Robert Schaeffer and his family. There were others, too, but Noel was sure he could see an unusual hunger in the eyes of these two men especially.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Noel and Linda continued their calling. Some who lived nearest the church had never yet been to a service. Among these were the Coxes with their big family of boys. "We'll see what's the matter here," Noel ventured as he rang the doorbell

"Come in!" a sharp feminine voice commanded.

Linda looked at Noel in somewhat of a frightened manner, but there was no hesitancy in Noel. "Come on," he whispered, and led the way into the kitchen, from whence the voice had emanated.

A woman was standing by the stove, hair disarranged, apron soiled. Without raising her eyes from her work, she started her tirade of words.

"Well, you can see how busy I am. I wouldn't think the preacher and his wife would expect us women of the church to be dressed up and sitting in the parlor waiting to entertain them today."

"Why, Mrs. Cox, we don't mind if you're not dressed up." Linda timidly approached her. "What are you doing? Maybe I can help."

"No, I'm not soliciting any help, but it is a job fit to kill one, to get ready for such a doings. Besides that, my little boy has been sick all day, and I ought to be nursing him instead of working for the church."

"Working for the church!" Noel and Linda looked at one another in astonishment.

"Why, sure! What do you suppose I'd be doing today?"

"But we don't quite understand. . . ."

"Well, if you don't, it's because you're new here. Hasn't anyone told you that tonight is the Fall Festival? All summer us women have been working on our fancywork and quilts and things for the bazaar part of it and today we're getting the eats ready. It's a job, I tell you, to fix for the whole countryside. Besides us faithful members, a hundred or more will be here that never come inside the church ordinarily. It's the way we have of getting a good start on the preacher's pay, so you ought to be interested in it."

"Mrs. Cox," Noel collected himself together, "for our sakes and for Jesus' sake, please drop your heavy burdens. Not only do we not ask this of you or of any of the others, but we frankly do not approve of it."

"O I suppose you won't be grateful when we do get it all done. I never did think the preachers appreciated all the work we went to, though I will say the last preacher's wife we had dug in and worked as hard as any of us."

"Wait a minute," Noel insisted gently, "if this is the only way you can get the preacher's salary, I'd rather you wouldn't pay us anything."

"Huh! that's all very well to say. . .

"I mean it though, Mrs. Cox. Have you never heard of God's way of providing for His servants -- that of each member bringing into the storehouse his tithes and offerings?"

"Huh!" the irate woman sneered again, "you'd starve on that method before you'd been here a week!"

"I'm willing to try it if you are," Noel declared honestly.

Such a challenge had the effect of bringing momentary silence to the kitchen. Only the sound of the frying chicken broke the awkward stillness.

"See here, Mrs. Cox," Noel was determined, "isn't there some way to stop this thing before it goes any farther? I definitely don't approve, and besides. . . the revival!"

"No, there isn't any way to stop it! Everybody knows we have the Fall Festival on the third Wednesday of October every year, and that's today. Surely someone told you that! Now that we've got all this food ready, you want us to get some money out of it, don't you?" With this, their hostess wheeled from the room.

Noel took Linda's arm and gently led her outside. For the first time in his pastoral experience his eyes were stricken with grief. Not that he was nurturing a personal hurt. It was the weight of heart a true shepherd feels for his poor, misguided sheep.

They went to the parsonage and by way of prayer presented the whole matter at the throne. They sought divine wisdom in dealing with the sin of the community, they pled for mercy and awakening for the people and for a love in their own hearts that would enable them to lay themselves out for the salvation of their flock.

On this same afternoon, Noel was scheduled for an interview with his superintendent in nearby Harlan concerning church plans for the year. Linda had planned to go along and do some shopping. The ensuing hours in the city sped by faster than either of them had anticipated, so they partook of their evening lunch in town and drove back to Mentor with just enough time left before service to change their clothes hurriedly and ring the first church bell.

Dusk was settling into near dark. The moon shed a silvery radiance over the far prairie, and sweet, cool breezes brushed their cheeks as Noel and Linda in their Model T neared their little village. Despite the peace of the night, a stealthy apprehension brooded over the two. It could not be, could it, that the people would really go ahead with their plan? Why had they themselves not heard of it before? Had the church been suspicious of the disapproval of their pastor? If Noel had only known it a few days ago, he felt sure he could have sidetracked the whole thing. Without hard feelings, too. O well, no use to worry about it until he knew for sure. But . . . what were those lights ahead? The festival was on for sure! The church basement was aglow with lights, the sanctuary above was dark.

Neither spoke for a moment.

"O . . . Noel!" Linda clutched his arm with a little wail of disappointment.

"Never mind, dear, God is able. We'll just go right ahead with the work of the Lord." It was so comforting to hear Noel's calm voice.

Too plainly they saw that the people had had their feast as scheduled, and were now intermingling in after-dinner amusement and social conversation.

Noel and Linda went into the sanctuary, turned on the lights and, when time for service came, rang the bell. Presently two or three children came from the basement and said their parents had sent them to invite the pastor and his wife to come down. Noel and Linda talked pleasantly with the children and thanked them for their invitation, but continued in the sanctuary. After what seemed like an interminably long time, the auctioneer's voice below faded into silence, and people began to leave the building. Rather sheepishly and wonderingly, the Schaeffers and Jensens, along with a few others had the courage to face their pastor, who, in turn, addressed them with a little talk explaining his position and the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject of buying and selling in the church and on tithing as being God's way of financing His work. They took it kindly, some expressing themselves as feeling as the pastor did about the matter.

Poor, misled sheep! Former pastors for years had encouraged a social program! How sad! How far could the people be blamed?

This was not the only problem that confronted Noel and Linda. In fact, there were many more, but the new pastors, with the enthusiasm of youth, believed that God would help them leave an impression on Mentor that would be felt in eternity.

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CHAPTER 5

It was well into November before the last flaming leaf fluttered from the maples, the finale to the symphony of golds put on by lavish autumn. As Linda looked ahead into a bleak Nebraska winter, she determined to put more thought into her homemaking and cooking efficiency. Noel was

patient with her housekeeping attempts, which, though not so clumsy as they had been at first, were never to come as natural to her as making pictures or playing a piano. Almost every task had been new to start with. Of course she knew how to iron, and clean the house. She had practiced making pie dough, too, under Mother's supervision, but now her main strength and stay in getting meals was the Bride's Cookbook which detailed every step. So irresponsible, indeed, had she always been in keeping house, that now when Noel was away for an afternoon, she forgot and let the fire in the heating stove go out. An experience or two, however, of sitting in the cold or of struggling to start the fire again, and Linda had learned her lesson!

Despite the extra time they spent in feeling their way into all the unaccustomed duties of a pastorate and a household, the two young sojourners in the parsonage spent an hour or so each morning after breakfast in prayer together. On occasions, Noel became so lost in the urgency of his petitions, that he concluded only in time for Linda to scan the Bride's Cookbook hurriedly and get her selected menu on the stove in time to cook for dinner. While it was cooking, she washed the breakfast dishes and made the bed. Wherever Noel went he prayed with his parishioners, so that he soon got the name of being the "prayingest" preacher the people had ever seen.

They went to Noel's home for Christmas. The change was good for them both. Without having the responsibility of cooking, Linda was learning some lessons from Mother Winters, who was unrivalled in culinary ability. It was a gay time. Noel, having laid aside temporarily his clerical cloak, was like a boy again.

The time passed all too swiftly, and when Saturday came, the little Ford, without benefit of heater, braved a sturdy northwester as it bumped its way over frozen ruts to Mentor. Linda was chilled through by the trip, and before Noel had the fire crackling in the living room stove, a sharp soreness stole into her throat. Hurriedly, she marshalled two bowls of steaming soup to their places on the table and pulled up the chairs. She would take the hot soup, toast her feet by the fire, and jump into her warm bed. By morning she would be all right.

And she was. Well enough to go to service, she thought. There were not many out at church because of the sudden cold wave, but Nels and his wife were there and all the Robert Schaeffers. Others, too, mostly of the prayer meeting constituency. It was a precious time, as God always compensates for the extra efforts His children put forth to attend His house of worship.

Monday, Linda attacked, with scrub brush and bucket of hot, sudsy water, the floor of her barn-like kitchen. It was almost as large as the sitting room and the bedroom put together. She had not scrubbed it since before their Christmas vacation, and there were still on it mud tracks from their late December thaw. It was a colossal task. Linda was still a tenderfoot in regard to such toil, and before she was through, an unutterable weariness overtook her. But her delight in the shiny, spotless floor superseded all her aching exhaustion. She would scrub the porches tomorrow if the weather moderated enough.

She fell asleep quickly that night, only to be awakened later by pain -- that same vicious pain in her throat! It tore at her through the restless hours and told her by its sharp torture that it would not let her go this time. It had her. She could see that. O well, the porches could go till she felt better -- till next week, perhaps.

Noel got up and fixed their breakfasts. Poor Noel. It hurt Linda to think he had to wait on her. He had so many other duties -- several church members were ill and he must visit them. There was the prayer meeting and next Sunday's services to prepare for. But Noel did the little duties gladly, his only care being for her comfort. When, on Wednesday, he received an invitation to speak at a watchnight service that evening at Magnolia, forty miles away, he consented only upon Linda's repeated assurances that she would be all right. It was strange that when she ordinarily shrank from being in the house alone at night, now that she was sick, it did not seem to matter. It was as though, having pain for her companion, she was exempt from other evils that might stalk the night.

She tried to read, but pain interrupted. She tried to pray, and pain interrupted. But pray she must, and did! Her medicine did not have the potency to relieve the constant anguish. But, though the torture throbbed on, the One she touched in prayer did have the power to help her bear it.

By the time the Ford lights flashed in the window and Noel swung the little car into the garage, Linda's pain had extended its clutching fingers to her left ear.

"Something has to be done," Noel resolved, after Linda spent another fitful night.

He called the doctor who drove the six miles from Shelby and lanced Linda's ear drum. But he had made only a gesture toward allaying her suffering. On and on it went, unremitting, incessant, endless.

By Sunday, Linda was beside herself. For the first time she permitted the tears to flow unchecked. Noel's alarm jumped into action again at the sight of her distress, flushed cheeks and quick breath. He was convinced that this was no ordinary earache. His fears were substantiated when the doctor came and ordered Linda to be taken immediately to the hospital in Lincoln where she could be watched over by one of the mid-West's famous specialists.

In the sinking of heart that came with this turn of events, the way ahead looked dark indeed. Then Linda remembered a verse in the eighteenth Psalm -- a beautiful verse, one that stood out now above all the other beautiful verses in the Bible as exceptionally special to her heart -- "For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

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CHAPTER 6

Dr. Cassidy smiled reassuringly at his patient after his examination. As he turned to leave, however, his face wore a look of deep concern.

"What do you think of her condition, Doctor?" Noel asked as he followed the specialist to the hallway beyond Linda's hearing.

A gong clanged at the end of the corridor and a night nurse slipped into the room the two had just left.

"Well, Rev. Winters, it's hard to tell. I'm ordering treatment started immediately, but it does look as though an operation for mastoiditis will be inevitable, in spite of all we can do."

Noel watched over Linda as a mother over her child. He stroked her hair, talked soothingly, encouragingly, prayed for her, comforted her. Thus did the days wear on. Three, four, five... But to Linda, tossing piteously on her white bed, there were no days or nights, only cycles of pain, unrelenting, ceaseless eternities of pain. She was conscious of little but the eery green light on the wall at the foot of her bed and the clang of the gong in the hallway. The light worried her with its tricks -- now shining so near it hurt her eyes, now moving back so far it was only a star in the sky, swaying, swelling, fading, tantalizing, irritating, making her dizzy. If there was any connection between the light and the gong, Linda could not ascertain it. Yet they were melted together in their peculiar sickening influence. The gong was always in a hurry, calling, calling someone. The light was always unpredictable, going, coming, going, coming. Thus the three monopolized her senses -- the little green light, the gong, and pain. The little green light, the gong, and pain. The little green light. . . the gong. . . and always. . . pain! Around and around they went, and pain was in the lead!

Finally, one morning, Linda noticed that the sun was actually shining in the window. Dr. Cassidy was there, the nurse, and Noel. It seemed strange that she was alive, that there was a real world for her.

"And how is our patient this morning?" The doctor was bending over Linda, already seeking out for himself the answer to his own question.

A wan smile hovered on Linda's countenance. "Why, Doctor, I believe I'm better. The pain.. . it's gone!" Noel's eyes lighted with hope. But the doctor did not smile. "No pain. . . hm-m. . . still no breaking of the infection, I'm afraid. That means. .

Suddenly the sun blinked low behind a winter cloud and the green light again swayed near.

It seemed like minutes before the doctor spoke again. "That means that we must operate. Today. Before it spreads further into the brain." The doctor had recovered his professional tone. "She should come through it nicely."

Some hours later, Noel seated himself in the hospital restaurant. He felt the need of a cup of coffee before taking up his vigil by Linda's bedside again. But the clatter of the table service as other guests dined reminded him too much of hammer and chisel against bone, the sound that had so nauseated him as he had stood by Linda during her operation. He rose and left the table before the waitress had a chance to take his order.

Linda smiled faintly, but peacefully, as consciousness stole slowly into her mind again. Noel was by her bedside, thankful to see her resting in the absence of pain.

The next three days were days of hope that Linda would soon be home again. Then as though to taunt them, fever and suffering again clutched the sick one. It was like an ocean wave which had receded only to intensify the strength of its next surge. Erysipelas infection was now attacking the newly-made mastoid wound.

They did not need to tell Linda what was the matter or try to hide it from her. She could figure it out for herself. They evaded her questions, but they could not hide from her their strange actions. Noel would not take her hand. He would not even come near her bed. She knew it was because they would not let him. One nurse stayed in her room now all the time, and when she went out she changed her outer clothing. Even Noel left his top coat and gloves in the hallway and came in donned in a hospital cloak. Dr. Cassidy tried to act as casual as usual, but each time he examined Linda a strange blush of embarrassment colored his face. It was as though he felt responsible for someone's negligence during the operation-the cause for this new infection. Could it be?

Yes, Linda knew what it was all about. Most clearly she knew by the chills that shook her in the mornings and the fever that burned her in the nighttimes. Ham Watkins had had a similar experience at college -- infection after his sinus operation, and he nearly died! Margaret Gray, a missionary in China, did die from erysipelas infection. With great sinking of spirit, Linda accepted the fact that she was back again, back in the dark with the sickly green light, the gong, and. . . pain!

"O precious Jesus. . . ." Linda's arm reached out to the only One who was not afraid to touch her, "'In my hand no price I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.' Light my candle, dear Lord. Please light my candle!"

Rain fell softly outside Linda's window. Cool, January windgusts moved the tops of elm trees on the far side of the hospital court. Linda could see them bending, swaying, silhouetted against the misty light of the street lamp. That's where she wanted to be -- out there where the rain could cool her body and where no gong was ringing. She threw off the scorching blanket that was setting her afire. This was something that was too much for human endurance. It looked like the. . . end. The little green light dimmed and went out.

"Dear Lord. . ." The gong hushed its clamour. "Please light my candle."

Suddenly there opened up before the girl a vista of sparkling sunshine dancing over a sheen of rippling water, clear as crystal. In the shadow of the luxuriant trees along its bank, the river's depths flowed cool and emerald green. People were welcoming her, people she loved. Her mother in a silken robe that reflected the blue-green of the effervescent stream, was coming down golden steps to greet her. Jesus led them all, holding out loving hands to draw her to Him. He was not afraid to touch her.

Linda smiled. "So this is. . . heaven! Why, it's wonderful to die when you're a Christian!"

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CHAPTER 7

When Linda awoke the next morning, the realization that struck her with the greatest force and surprise was that she was going to live! The nurse and Noel and even the doctor still wore grave looks of concern over her condition, but Linda was sure now. She would not die. The chills and fever were yet to rack her body for many weary days, but she would live. Each tortuous day would bring her nearer the end of her suffering. In that knowledge and by the help of God, she could and would endure.

It was on the fourth of February, a whole month to the day since she had entered the hospital that Noel put Linda on the train bound for Fair Plains. Father and Mother Winters would meet her there and take her home to care for her during her convalescence. Noel took the Ford and journeyed to Magnolia to hold a revival meeting. The offering he would receive would put them out of debt at the hospital, their bill having been cut considerably because of Noel's being a minister. Thus, it was not until the twenty-first of February, Noel's birthday, that the little Model T bounded once again toward the far-away rim of the prairie, taking Noel and Linda to their little gray home in Mentor.

There was a cessation of snowing around the last of the month, but the days remained cold and drear. Noel helped Linda with their few household tasks in the mornings. In the afternoons he put her gently to bed and bade her stay there obediently until he should return from his round of calls.

The next two months brought a few days that spoke of winter warming into spring. Then, on a beautiful, crisp morning in late April, Bert Cox knocked at the door. When Noel opened to him, there was big, husky Bert. . . with tears in his eyes.

"Can you come, Reverend? The wife, she wants you. We had a baby girl born this morning. She died. An hour ago."

"Come? Why surely, Bert."

Noel and Linda both went. How different it was now than when they first visited that home the day of the Church Festival. No effrontery manifested itself now. There was only helpless sorrow reaching out for comfort. They looked on the still little form of the babe. They prayed with the broken mother and father. Too short was their arm of sympathy to reach the depths of grief the bereaved ones suffered. Noel and Linda knew that. But there was One who had a healing balm. They committed the bereaved ones to Him.

"O Noel," Linda whispered, as they went down the porch steps, "to think they wanted us!"

Yes, it was certain God was working.

Early summertime caught up with the occupants of the parsonage almost before they knew what was happening. Linda was feeling so well by this time that she attacked her first round of housecleaning with untiring ferocity. First, she painted the breakfast set, the thing she had planned to do last fall as soon as the curtains were made. Then she washed woodwork and laundered and

ironed every curtain. By the time summer was well started, everything was spic and span. She was bone weary, but she could indulge in a good rest Sunday afternoon, she told herself.

Sunday came, but did not bring with it the rest Linda anticipated, for on that evening, their little son was born.

"What shall we call him, Linda dear? What name do you like?" Noel was anxious to attach a good strong name to the little one.

"Let's call him John. Do you like John?"

"Yes, and let's put Daniel with the John. There is no bad thing spoken of Daniel in the whole Bible. Daniel John. Isn't that nice?"

"Yes, I really like that."

And thus it was decided.

Summer was well established when Linda returned from the hospital to her little prairie home, this time with wee Danny John. New duties confronted her, engaged her time, her strength, her every faculty. If she could not get everything done, it was the housework that suffered. Nothing should rob her little one of her most excellent care. What was it going to mean in all of Baby's growing-up years for them to be parents, with the moulding of an immortal soul as their responsibility! "O God, give wisdom," she prayed. "Help us to live lives of devotion and holy union with Thee that we may lead our son in the way of life eternal!"

Mrs. Cox came frequently to the parsonage, as one will, who has found surcease from his sorrow through the ministry of those who live there. She helped Linda with the apple butter, told her how to cold pack the garden vegetables, and, always during her stay, she held the warm little body of Danny close to her lonely heart.

If Noel was to return to Virginia for seminary work in the fall as he had planned ever since their marriage, there were only six weeks left in which to complete all the details of church work for the conference year. It looked as though he could report all finances raised, if the men could collect the remaining one hundred dollars of the pastor's salary. It had been marvelous how God had helped Noel and Linda to pay back their furniture loan and settle up the hospital and doctor bills. This last one hundred dollars would give Noel a good start on tuition at school.

When the church board met for the last time before conference, the men were justly gratified to announce that the entire remainder of the fourteen hundred dollars promised their pastor had been collected. Noel looked at Mr. Miller, the treasurer, but Mr. Miller had no comment of praise or pleasure. He was thoughtfully turning the leaves of his voluminous account ledger.

"You understand, of course," he said as he cleared his throat, "that we have a small matter to attend to in the way of meeting our last winter's coal bill which has been hanging over us for

several months now. Obviously, that must be attended to first. Sorry, Reverend, but you understand our position and that the integrity of the church is at stake here. A mere one hundred dollars will cover the entire amount and bring us out in the clear with our fellowmen. The remainder is yours, of course."

Noel wondered how he could face Linda with the knowledge of this new turn of events. He wondered what he could do about it himself. Should he continue his plans to go to school, or would it be altogether presumptive?

He approached Linda with his only alternatives. "If I go to school," he said with hesitancy, "well, the only way I see is to sell our furniture -- all but the bare necessities, and use that money. .. ." He sought her face, but it betrayed no emotion, no answer to his question. "Or," he ventured farther, "continue our pastorate another year. By that time we should be ahead."

Still Linda did not speak.

"What shall we do?" Noel gently prodded her. "Do you have any word from the Lord?"

"I believe you ought to go, Noel, but you must not take my counsel, as it may be an opinion only, and a poor one at that. Let's pray some more about it. God will surely lead us definitely."

They found separate places of prayer for this problem which was to search both their hearts, for to Linda it meant the breaking up of their first little home and, among other things, parting with the rose velour chairs. Linda's heart was not set on things, but these chairs were extra pretty, and, as Byron said, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." To Noel it was a venture of faith such as he had never taken before. But they both were impressed with the same conviction -- it was God's time. Noel went to Harlan the same day to place an ad in the daily paper for the sale of their furniture.

As soon as the decision was made, Linda mentally began to pack and then followed up her plans with the actual doing of it. Many of their linens had never been taken out of Linda's trunk. Some of her best glassware, too, wedding gifts, were still in the boxes in which they had come to Nebraska, for the simple reason that she had had no cupboard room for them. The few shelves in the pantry barely held the everyday dishes, pots and pans. These things, then, were ready to go again. Other things could be put in any time -- winter blankets, comforts, winter clothes, and, near the end, pictures from the walls and the curtains. Linda meant to leave these things as they were as long as she possibly could, however, so that the house would not look bare until absolutely necessary. The night before their departure, they could box the few dishes and daily necessities they used up to the last.

There were still many matters in connection with closing up the conference year to take Noel's attention, but he promised Linda he would be on hand the last few days to help in the final wind-up.

The new teacher for the Mentor High School and his bride came and bought the furniture. Everything went but the bed, the oil stove, the bookcases Noel had made when he was in high

school, and the breakfast set. It was hard to imagine just how they would furnish a living room if they should be so fortunate as to have one, but they could get store boxes cheap no doubt. Linda took a snapshot of the rose velour chairs and furtively wiped away a tear on the corner of her apron.

The parsonage had never appeared to have so many things in it, but the more Linda packed, the more there seemed left to stuff into the ever-decreasing space. She was glad Noel was about to finish his conference reports and come to her aid. Only two days left now, and from the looks of things, most of the packing was still to be done. She applied herself with more diligence than ever.

Just as Linda emerged from the basement with a stack of cardboard boxes higher than her head, there was an impatient knock at the door, and she peered around her load to see a man who was a total stranger to her. Noel had heard the knock, too, and relieved the situation by answering the summons himself. The two men conversed outside. Linda could not take time to listen in. It was probably someone wanting to sell them something. She was packing their little store of canned vegetables and fruits when Noel came inside, and she did not look up until his worried voice attracted her.

"It's a funeral, Linda. No one we know. The man was killed in an auto accident Saturday night. They want the funeral tomorrow, the very day before we go. This will leave you with more than you ought to do, dear. I . . ."

"O well, it ought not to take much of your time. Together we can get a lot done in the morning and by afternoon we'll be almost finished, anyway."

"That's just the problem, Linda. I can't help you then either."

"Can't help?"

"No, dear, and that's what worries me. There's a discrepancy in the Sunday school treasurer's report which I will have to discuss with the superintendent, and the church treasurer's report isn't in yet. After these are ready, there will be all the totals for the year to balance. It's really a whole day's work in itself. Is there anyone I could hire to come in and help you?"

"I wouldn't know how to tell them to do it, Noel" Linda was not a born leader. "I'll get along somehow. Don't worry."

That was always to be Linda's way. She could and would do the most herculean tasks herself rather than to enlist the help of anyone who would have to be taught how. No, she was not a leader.

Linda's brain whirled with the multiplicity of duties before her, but she would not tell Noel. Fortunately, he had already crated the furniture that they were taking along. Everything else must be packed carefully in the store boxes and trunks. Everything!

It rained in the night, and it seemed to Linda that with every drop that fell, she mentally placed another article in its proper packing box and tied the box tightly with binder twine. At four o'clock she decided it would be easier to get up and actually do the work, so she dressed quietly and started. The day passed quickly. Linda was fairly pleased with her accomplishments. At least she had the boxes packed that were to be shipped. Noel had promised to be back from the funeral in time to get Bert Cox's truck and haul the crated things to the depot for the 4:20 P.M. freight. It was ten minutes till four when he came. Before he reached the door he was calling to her.

"Linda, my coveralls. There's no time to change my suit."

"Right here." Linda flew to the peg behind the pantry door, grateful now that she had had presence of mind not to pack them. They might be needed on the trip, she had predicted.

The next minute Noel cranked the Ford and headed for the depot, calling back as he went, "I'll get the freight tags and the truck. You'll have to address the tags while I load the truck."

Linda had forgotten there were tags to address. How could they ever make it? She got the fountain pen from her purse where she had already put it so that it would not be forgotten. She watched at the door and tried to steady herself. It seemed that Noel would never come. When he did, they had exactly seventeen minutes in which to address and tie all the tags and get the boxes to the station. Linda's fingers flew with all the dexterity of which she was capable. While Noel loaded one box on the truck, Linda addressed and tied a tag on the next one. To add to the confusion, little Danny reminded them in no uncertain tones that his schedule called for a four o'clock feeding, but Linda had to turn a deaf ear to his insistence and push ahead. At 4:15, the truck pulled out of the driveway, and Linda heard in the distance a far away whistle Noel would make it before the train did

Linda sat down on a suitcase to catch her breath. But this was no time to relax. She washed her hands and snuggled little Danny in her arms for his feeding. She was thankful that nature had so ordered it that babies could not cry while they were eating. She stroked the little one's moist curls and amused herself watching his greedy gulps. His tearful eyes were closed in an expression of feigned exhaustion and abuse.

"You're such a funny little boy," Linda laughed. "You like to order Mother around, and succeed pretty well, too, for such a wee fellow." She laid him over her shoulder and rubbed his fat, sturdy back. He was dear!

"What's all this love-making?"

Linda looked up to see Noel's pretended sternness. As a climax to his triumph in getting the goods off, he was taking on one of his foolish turns. He took Danny from Linda's arms, hoisted him high above his own six feet of stature, and, as though as to throw him away, remarked playfully, "That's what we'll do with him when we cross the Mississippi-just chuck him in." Again he swung him high while Danny squealed with irrepressible outbursts of glee.

"O Noel . .

Noel continued his play which to Danny was as thrilling as an airplane ride. But when he turned to place the little one again in his mother's arms, there were tears on Linda's face.

"Why, Linda!"

"It's nothing, dear." Linda was smiling while she hastily brushed the tears away. "I know it was just play, but to even think. . . ."

"It was too awful, wasn't it, dear? I didn't dream you would take it so seriously." Noel's big arms encircled the two he loved best, and all was well once more.

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CHAPTER 8

It was evening. Noel and Linda were sitting side by side on the doorstep of a little cottage in College Town, Virginia, recounting the many providences of God in their behalf. The incomparable Ford had taken them without incident from Mentor, Nebraska, through whispering cornfields ripe for the husking, to Homestead, resplendent in autumn dress, and thence to College Town, having paused on the way at the Winters and Kents where Danny had received all the fondling of indulgent grandparents that any little boy could soak up.

The little cabin Noel had secured for their winter's lodging was cozy. Danny's bed was by the front window to the north in the sitting room, by day. Against the west wall was the bookcase and a window. By the window was a big, old-fashioned rocker, loaned them by the Lathams across the street, and along the south wall they had placed an army cot Noel had found and which Linda had covered with a brown plaid Indian blanket. The stove, connected to the east wall by its long-necked pipe, and thus, more truthfully, standing just a little off the center of the room, completed the furnishings there. Linda did her best to drape the curtains tastefully and hang their few pictures and mottoes artistically to make the little room homey in spite of its plainness. The bedroom and kitchen were even smaller than the sitting room, but a more commodious storeroom stretching full length across the back of the cabin provided a miniature alternate for basement and attic combined. A leak in the roof above the bedroom betrayed itself one rainy night when Linda was awakened by water dripping on her face. By moving closer to the edge of the bed and carefully placing a sauce pan in position to catch the drips, the situation proved not too detrimental to her night's sleep. The place was worth the ten dollars a month rent they paid, but no more, Noel said.

Noel had registered in the seminary. The one hundred dollars they had saved from the sale of their furniture paid for his books, his semester's tuition, and one month's rent. Besides, they could pay for one week's supply of groceries and milk: Beyond that...

Two months had now passed since Noel and Linda had made their advent in College Town. Linda sat by Danny's little bed looking out the window. The night was moonlit, cloudless, and very still. Trees stood etched against the white of the moonlight, their shadows looking almost

as real as themselves. She had whispered into Danny's ear the age-old prayer of babies, of children, of grown-ups everywhere -- "Now I lay me down to sleep." He had smiled and closed his eyes.

Someway God was supplying every need of the little family circle, though for the life of her, Linda could not have told how. And everyone kept well. Alice Latham, the neighbor across the street had looked at little fat Danny that very day and had said in the true southern gentility which compliments both babe and mother in one graceful sweep, "He sure looks like he is having good care!"

Yes, God was seeing them through. Noel had received a call to hold a revival meeting at Lancaster and he had gone out this very night for his first service. The offering might not be large, but it would help them through the next month anyway. Clyde Wendell was back at Christian College for his senior year, working in the dining hall for his board, and bringing left-overs from the kitchen to their cottage to supplement their meager fare. O God had ways.

Deep night crept closer to the little house. Linda was not used to staying alone after dark. Noel would surely be home from his service soon, unless they had an altar service. Linda read parts of Catherine Booth's AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY, an English anthology of verse and prose, and all of Malachi. Again she turned to the window. It stared at her out of its little square black eyes. She was not looking out; rather, the night was looking in. She snapped off the light, and all that was changed. The cabin hid once more in the sheltering trees, becoming a part of them under the sleepy twinkling of the stars.

Linda studied Danny's plump, little face in the crib under the starlight and dreamed of all that the years could bring. Indeed, if the dreams of all the mothers the world over could come true, there would be no ordinary men anywhere. Linda switched on the light and with her pencil and paper made a sketch of the fat baby cheeks, and when Noel's welcome step finally woke her from her reverie, she took up the small sleeping form and dressed him for the night.

Through all that year while Noel gave himself to his studies God provided for their sustenance. They were only forty dollars in arrears on their rent when school closed, and Mr. Reed willingly offered to wait for his money until Noel could hold some meetings in the summer. Noel and Linda stored their breakfast set, oil stove and trunks in Professor and Mrs. Drayton's basement, tied Danny's bed on the back of the Model T, and made their way to Grandpa and Grandma Winters in Nebraska. Edwin Marsh went along. He, too, was a seminary student, preacher and song leader besides. He would lead the singing in the tent meeting Noel planned to hold in his home town.

June and the first two weeks in July passed quickly. From several preaching engagements Noel accumulated a few dollars with which to pay the back rent, but had nothing with which to get started in the new school year. Of course, Father Winters was apprehensive.

"I don't know how you expect to make it, son. Take an appointment in the conference this year and then finish up your school the next. You'll have to, boy. You can't live on water."

His words were all true enough, but the battle had been fought out and the decision made. "It's this year or never, Father, and we can't afford to make it 'never.' I believe it's God's will, and it's up to Him to see us through."

There was no disputing Noel. Linda, herself, was in full accord. Hard as it might be, it would be easier now than later. The fifteenth of July, Linda packed again -- all the clothes she had freshly washed and ironed, pressed and mended. The next day they loaded the car, suitcases and boxes on the back seat with Edwin, Danny's bed tied on behind. At the urgent request of Father and Mother Kent, they would spend the remainder of July and August in Homestead. Mother Winters kissed Noel, Linda and Danny, leaving a trace of her tears on each cheek. Edwin and Harriett (Noel's sister) lingered by the honeysuckle at the end of the porch for their own special farewells, as could be expected in view of the romance that had developed between them in the few weeks they had been together. Father Winters wished the little party God-speed, waving as the car chugged into the lane, but shaking his head as he turned to go to his work at the barn.

"It's hard for Father to let us go. He's always been used to depending on himself, making his own way. He's never had to live by faith. To him we seem presumptive, I suppose. But bless God. . . ." Noel leaned forward and gripped the steering wheel with a determination proportionate to his faith, "God saw us through last year and He will again. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' I believe that!"

From the cool village street to the hot, flat prairie they emerged as suddenly as though one had opened the door of a blazing furnace. For two days and a half the landscape offered nothing so delightful as the sight of a tree with branches overhanging the roadway, affording thus, by its shade, one moment of cool relief. Rarely, a tissue paper cloud spread its gauze curtain between the travellers and the sun to give its shallow respite from their misery. Somehow they made it through.

Edwin left the little party at Gary, Indiana, and took a bus south to his home in White Pine, Tennessee. The next week after their arrival in Homestead, Noel started a meeting in a schoolhouse one mile to the south and with some such small engagements kept himself busy in the Kingdom's work until time for school to open at Christian College.

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CHAPTER 9

September came softly to College Town that year, the green maples bursting into flame almost overnight. All the village was a symphony in bronzes, scarlets and deep greens. This time Noel and Linda took living quarters in an upstairs apartment in the Reep building on Walnut Avenue. Looking from their back porch they could see, across the meadow to the northeast, the cemetery and, slightly closer, last year's little cabin, small and empty among the big pines. Their present situation was costing them two dollars more a month, but Noel felt justified in stretching his faith to cover this extra amount, since the rooms were partly furnished. There were three rooms and a bath, a sink in the kitchen, and a warm floor for Danny to play on, since Mr. and Mrs. Reep lived below them.

Noel put up Danny's bed. They spread the brown Indian blanket on the bed already in the apartment and slept soundly until the sunlight of a perfect autumnal morning woke them, freshly strengthened and newly heartened for the day. The rooms were not hard to make cozy. There was a rug on the floor in the front room where the bed and dresser were. In the center room was the stove, a study table, two straight cane-bottom chairs, and Noel's bookcase. They would miss the rocker that had been loaned to them the year before. In the kitchen were the oil stove, breakfast set, built-in cupboard, and sink with running water. The latter was luxury almost unbelievable. Linda once more hung the curtains she had made at Mentor, and like old friends come to abide with them again, they added the very touch needed to make the rooms like home. With everything in order, the housework was an easy morning's task.

When Noel went to the registration office to talk over his financial problem, Dr. Laworth met him. "Noel, I have good news for you," he said. "We have decided to give you a scholarship. So go on with your studies. You won't need to worry about your tuition."

Other surprises awaited them. In due time Noel was given a little church at Camp Nelson to pastor. Then, Father Winters wrote that he would send them the proceeds from the sale of his Sunday cream each week. Mother Kent began sending an occasional five or ten dollar check.

Noel and Linda dropped to their knees in utter amazement and thanksgiving for the providences of God being heaped upon them. Why, the cream check would be at least two dollars a week, sometimes three. It was nothing short of a fortune. Since Noel had been given the scholarship, all of Father's gifts could be used for groceries and Mother's checks could be used for clothes and other small needs.

October came and went. Still the leaves clung to the trees. Linda liked the loitering Virginia autumns and mild southern winters. She sat by the open south window of the middle room and sewed by the golden light of the warm sun, while Danny prattled at his play.

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CHAPTER 10

It was very early Thanksgiving morning that Noel and Linda's second little boy was born right there in their humble apartment. Hospital care was out of the question in their limited financial situation. The first Linda saw of the wee one, he was reaching his little arm up as high as its muscles would stretch.

"Pure, tiny one, straight from heaven, pointing us to God above," Linda thought impulsively. "O God, this one, too, for Thee," she prayed. "Keep him from evil. Cause him to grow up to be Thine own and to serve Thee until he gains an eternal home in heaven with Thyself."

As one has said, Mother's love has a distinct quality all its own -- a quality Linda had not known until this day. The coming of each new child divides and then subdivides that love without diminishing any of its ardor. Linda called it the most perfect example of love at first sight. Now,

without loving Danny any the less, she experienced an almost aching love for this new mite that was theirs.

Mrs. Wyatt came to be with them. She was like a Grandma to Danny, and to Linda she was Mother as well as nurse. She talked to Linda in the afternoons when the little boys were asleep and told her of her own six babies who were now grown and gone. At night she hushed the baby's cries with soft endearing whispers as soothing as the rain splashes on the window by Linda's bed.

When the baby was three days old, Linda thought it was time he should have a name. Noel was busy at school in the daytime and had been gone every evening, too, to a class meeting, a prayer meeting, or to the library, but surely he could stay with her tonight and discuss the matter with her. Linda listened for his footsteps on the stairs, but he was late.

"What time is it, Mrs. Wyatt," Linda called as she rested her head on her elbow and peered in the direction of the kitchen.

"It's gettin' handy to dark, Honey, almost six o'clock, but don't worry, he'll be comin' now 'fore long."

In five minutes he did come, but he had no time for baby naming, nor even time to sit down a minute, except to eat.

"There's a pressing engagement at school tonight, dear. I'll try to be with you more tomorrow. Maybe we can talk names then."

The evening was long without Noel there and Linda talked to Mrs. Wyatt about the question. "The little fellow's changing so, he'll be grown up before we name him. It's sure enough we can't always call him 'Baby.' What do you think would be a nice name? I like 'Richard,' and then if he is nicknamed, 'Dick' is nice, too. Or 'John.' I would call him 'John' if that were not Danny's middle name. Or, I'll tell you. . ."

"Now if you ask me, Honey, I think you could stop right there," Mrs. Wyatt interrupted. "There just isn't any prettier name than 'John,' and what if it is Danny's middle name? He'll never go by it anyway."

But Linda did not answer. It would not seem right to take even Danny's middle name from him.

Noel was of the same mind when they told him of it the next day. "The name is Danny's. It can't belong to two. In fact, I think we ought to discipline ourselves to call Danny by both his names. 'Danny John' is better for him now, especially since he's no longer the baby."

And so it was, that from that time, little Danny became "Danny John."

But still the new baby had no name. "Mother Winters suggested last summer that if we should ever have another son, it would be nice to call him 'Kent,' my maiden name. She came

across it used as a first name in a magazine story she was reading." Linda introduced the idea casually. Certainly she did not want to impose this name upon Noel so that he would feel obligated to choose it contrary to his wishes.

But Noel was repeating the name with evident approval! It was different and dignified, he said.

"Do you really like it, Noel, or is it that you don't want to offend me? Tell me truly."

"No, honestly, dear, I think it's quite distinguished. I'm glad someone thought of that."

"All right, then, if 'Kent' is to be his first name, let's make it 'Kent Noel' in honor of your side of the house, too."

Everyone agreed heartily, and no longer was the newcomer a person without a name, but a very real somebody indeed -- Master Kent Noel Winters.

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CHAPTER 11

The leaves that had hung so golden on the trees when Linda last looked out of the window, were gone when she again was able to be out of bed. The winter swiftly sped by with the two little boys to take her attention. And, besides all her little household to do for, Linda, to help with finances, had taken on the tutorage of a student, who, because of illness had failed to keep abreast of his class in New Testament Greek. It had been hard, even with a few extra gifts of money at Christmas time, to meet all the expenses that had accumulated. The doctor and nurse had been paid, also January's rent, but there was coal to buy. Even with milk at six cents a quart, and ham at a nickel a slice, it took most of the cream check each week just for groceries. To increase the problem, little Danny John was found to be allergic to milk, so, in its place, they bought him bananas, bacon, and other delicacies too expensive to buy in view of their present financial status had it been anyone but little Danny John who needed them. Noel and Linda ate thin oatmeal for breakfast to make their supply of oatmeal last longer and they cut down in other areas, too, but with all their contriving, the expenses continued to threaten to exceed their income.

March came in that year with roaring vigor, the only encouraging feature about it being, that having done so, it was honor-bound to go out like a lamb. The coal bin was empty, the rent was due, and all they could do was to buy enough food to keep soul and body together.

There was a mutual understanding between Noel and Linda that they would tell no one of their needs, save God alone. But, as Linda said, "What more could we want? God alone. Yes, but He is everything! It reminds me of the account of the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. They rose from their stupefaction to find no man there save Jesus only. But, O how rich they were in having Jesus! Jesus only -- yes, but Jesus is everything!"

Noel agreed. "And what are our little needs to Him but a chance to manifest to us His power to keep His promises and to show unto us more perfectly His tender mercies?"

Thus, Noel and Linda acted on their faith. To the best of their powers they put first things first, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, disciplining themselves to sacrifice that Christ might be preeminent. Many a Saturday night came with money in the tithe box for the Sunday church offering, but with not so much as four cents in Noel's pocket to buy a loaf of bread. Linda was not daunted by necessity. Rather, she made it the mother of ingenuity. In her earthen Dutch oven she baked a tempting mound of golden brown bread from the whole wheat flour given them by a mountain farmer who had attended the chapel at Camp Nelson.

To anyone not knowing what prayers were going up from that little three-room apartment, the personnel of the visitors making their way to its door on various days the next week would have been puzzling. Why, even Dr. Frank, professor of theology in the seminary, trudged up the stairs, bringing with him a receipt for a ton of coal he had paid for and ordered to be sent to them. Evangelist Barnes made them a visit one evening and gave Linda the vast fortune of seventeen dollars in payment for some art work she had done for him so long before that she had almost forgotten about it. Little Miss Castleton, teacher in Christian Academy and a devout recruit in the Drayton prayer group recently organized by a few seminary students and the good professor, made her way to the same destination, carrying on her arm a basket of groceries filled so full as to give the impression its contents would last forever.

Onlookers might have asked, "Why all this?" But Noel and Linda gave thanks to God and were strengthened to believe for greater things in the future.

Spring comes early in Virginia, and by the end of March there was a spell of warm weather which brought fresh young shoots of grass springing greenly from their sun-warmed beds and opened all the timid young leaves on the trees to sturdy life. By May there were days when the sun beat down upon the apartment roof as scorching as mid-July temperatures in the North. Linda sat one evening at the kitchen table with Danny John on her lap, waiting for Noel to come with a loaf of bread. They still had some of the jelly Miss Castleton had brought in her basket the Saturday before. With that and milk and the bread they would make out their evening lunch. Instead of milk, Danny John had tapioca pudding made with water.

"Kee? Kee?" Danny John pointed out the window with his sturdy fist. "Daddy, Daddy."

"Yes, dear, Mother sees Daddy. Does Daddy have our bread?" But before she had finished the words she saw that Noel was carrying nothing but his books.

Danny John peered with big blue eyes. "B'ead? B'ead?"

"No, darling, no bread. Mother will find something else."

Linda stood in the middle of the kitchen and looked around her. What would that something else be? Even the brown wheat flour was gone. There was just a little white flour, but she ought to save that for the gravy she often made with the drippings from Danny John's bacon. He hadn't had

any bacon for two days, and there were no drippings left, but next week when the cream check came....

Noel ascended the stairs with a bound and in one big swoop caught Danny John up to his shoulder amid the little boy's full, hearty chuckles.

"You're waiting for the bread, aren't you? I'm sorry, dear, but my diploma fee was more than I expected and it took every cent I had. But say, that brown bread you make is awfully good."

"But Noel, it's gone. I'm just trying to think. We do have a little buckwheat flour left. Is it too warm for pancakes?"

"Sure not! Thank the Lord for buckwheat flour. Pancakes are always welcome to a hungry man."

Linda soon busied herself at the griddle. It was warm work. No air was stirring, though they had both windows and doors open. Mrs. Lucas' footsteps tap-tapped in the next apartment, and she was singing as she went. In a minute she stood in the Winter's doorway, a look of blank astonishment on her face. In fact, she showed plainly that she wondered if Linda had gone completely crazy.

"I thought I smelled pancakes! Baking pancakes! On a warm night like this!" She stopped short with her mouth wide open, and then went on in a tone calculated to contrast such stupidity with her own superior ability in menu planning. "Why, we're having cold sliced ham, macedoine salad and pineapple sherbert. . . ."

"Sounds delicious!" Linda agreed sweetly.

"But I ordered pancakes," Noel informed her goodnaturedly, thus relieving Linda of all embarrassment.

Mrs. Lucas returned to her delicacies with evident pity for people of such common-place tastes, while Noel and Linda and little Danny John bowed in thanks over their meager fare, more content with their modest morsel, made sweet by the blessing of God, than they could have been with all the dainties that the world requires to make it happy.

The next day was Saturday and again unostentatious little Miss Castleton came with her brimful basket on her arm. Today the basket was topped with fresh strawberries!

"O great, great is Thy faithfulness!" was the prayer of thankful praise that sang on Linda's lips and in her heart through all that happy day.

Commencement time was upon Christian Seminary before Noel and Linda knew it. The thesis Noel had worked on for weeks and which Linda had typed was already graded and accepted. Linda was even packing such things as were not in immediate use. And then the day came for which they had sacrificed and labored so much. Linda left the babies with Mrs. Reep and

went to the auditorium to see Noel honored with the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. Somehow Linda felt she should be graduating, too, for she had been taking training, not in Christian Seminary, but in a certain course that only Life offers. But she was not through with hers. She was to go right on studying, without vacation and without a diploma.

The Draytons extended their congratulations -- to Noel in the very practical form of a ten dollar bill. "To help you get out of town," the professor said. And indeed this, added to the three dollars Mrs. Wyatt gave them for their oil stove, was no more than enough to buy the gas the little Ford required to get Linda and the babies to Homestead and to take Noel on to a meeting in Tefft, Indiana -- the first of four meetings he had scheduled for the summer.

In one of Noel's seasons of a few days at home, Rev. Hathaway called for a short visit and, before he left, placed his hands of blessing on the heads of the little boys, Danny John and Kent, and prayed that they might grow up to be men after God's own heart. How precious it all was! And Noel and Linda responded with a deep "amen" from out their grateful hearts.

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CHAPTER 12

It was midsummer, while Noel was holding a meeting in Kentucky, that he received the call to take a pastorate in Morton, Nebraska, the first of September. Inquiries for evangelistic services were still coming in, however, and Noel felt free to accept the pastorate only on condition that he might be released at intervals for these special meetings. This arrangement was agreed upon by the church in writing, and Noel and Linda looked forward to a definite field of service with real satisfaction.

In August, Noel, Linda, and the babies found themselves again in Nebraska at the Winters farmstead, this time awaiting the arrival of their small store of goods which the Draytons were having shipped from College Town. The boxes still had not come when the Sunday dawned upon which Noel was to appear in Morton. Thus it was decided that he should make the trip alone and return the same day.

"Noel, dear, would you, could you, sometime during the day, maybe between services, try to look over the parsonage and tell me just how it is?" Linda ventured hesitatingly. "It will help me plan. . . and O," her voice fell to a confidential whisper, "tell me whether there is water in the house and trees in the yard."

"Now Linda dear, I fear my girl thinks more of her own comfort than of the people we go to serve," Noel teased her, meanwhile stealing a smacking kiss.

"I don't mean to, darling. Truly I don't. Please forgive me. But it is hard not to wonder."

Perhaps what Noel had said was more than halfway true, Linda admitted. She must look beyond such transitory affairs. But she felt timid going into a new city among strangers, so far

away from home. Trees, especially, would help wonderfully. She felt an affinity to them such as she felt toward old friends.

Linda stayed up that Sunday night until Noel returned. His observations were quickly itemized. The water supply was located in a well in the back yard. There were no trees save a scraggly plum, also in the back yard. But there were people -- eager, friendly, hungry people, souls to serve, souls needing to be saved.

When, on the next Thursday morning the little Winters family set out to Morton, Linda felt a new dauntlessness invigorating her. She went as a soldier of the Lord, steeled for the worst, yet eager for the fray.

About noon the Model T entered the city. The skies which had been leaden all morning, began now to release a steady down pour of dismal rain. Noel, having learned somewhat the lay of the land the Sunday before, maneuvered their way into town by a route calculated to attract the attention of the least number of townspeople. Their means of transportation, though remarkably efficient, was beginning to show some effects of its tremendous mileage and, embarrassing, though unavoidable, was the added spectacle of a small bookcase tied onto one running board and the folded baby bed tied on the back. Wherever they went now, there was always the baby bed on the back.

On the outside, the parsonage presented an appearance similar to the one at Mentor, except that this one was yellow instead of gray, and the front room bulged out into a bay window in the center. Mrs. Kinsey of Homestead, who had visited in Morton once, had reported the parsonage to be built on stilts. Linda was heartily gratified to see that a very substantial tile foundation supported the structure, not knowing then how narrowly she was to escape having such a stilt home in which to live only eight short years away.

Inside, Noel and Linda stood looking around them. Their little store of furniture had been deposited wherever it had been most handy to set it down, and there was not a stove in the place. If it had not been for little Danny John's squeals of glee as he toddled about exploring this hitherto undiscovered country, they might have been tempted to feel a touch of faintheartedness. It was evident that the first requisite to setting up housekeeping was some sort of a cooking stove. So, while Linda continued her scrutiny of the three rooms downstairs and the two rooms up, Noel went to inquire of Mr. and Mrs. Ralston, his most wealthy parishioners, concerning the possibility of obtaining this necessity.

Having come into town with only the twelve dollars paid him for his first Sunday's services in Morton and being already in debt twenty-four dollars for the freight bill, which amount Mr. Ralston had forwarded before the furniture could be released from the depot, Noel's prospects for acquiring equipment of high efficiency were next to nothing. Noel did not return from the Ralston home empty-handed, however. Mr. Ralston, being painter, carpenter and plumber, had loaned him the best that he could spare at the moment -- his powerful, roaring, blue-flamed blow torch, which he carefully instructed Noel how to operate. By some sort of hitherto unpatented device, Noel rigged up a contrivance for hanging a kettle over the flame, close enough to cook its contents, and far enough from it so that a hole would not be burned through the bottom.

While Linda watched over the potato soup cooking in the kettle, unpacked the dishes, and set the table, Noel put together the baby bed in which both little boys would sleep that night, and set up the big bed. The house was damp and the blow-torch gave off little heat except at its point of contact with the kettle, but the little family kept their sweaters on and began to experience a sense of coziness, sheltered as they were from the rain, and in their own home again -- this time with no rent to pay.

All that week was dark, chilly, shrouded in autumnal rain. Noel began to look about for a heating stove, though if they had one, the problem of coal was something more than they could reckon with until the freight bill was cancelled and the stove itself paid for. The decision to wait awhile for the stove was automatically arrived at, when, on the next Sunday, Mr. Ralston, the church treasurer, handed Noel seven dollars instead of the twelve he was expecting, explaining that he would withhold five dollars each week until the freight debt was repaid. In the same way was the heating stove paid for a month later. Now, after the tithe was deducted, there was only five dollars and eighty cents left to last them through the week. It was scarcely enough to buy gasoline for the blow-torch and pay the deposit on their electricity, to say nothing of buying groceries, but it certainly was one sure way to get the freight bill paid quickly. It was evident that even a salary did not insure one against having to scrimp. But this they were glad to do to have a place to serve their Master.

On Monday the weather suddenly relented, and the good sun stooped low once again to kiss the earth with warmth. Linda opened the doors, little Danny John played on the porch, and life became radiant with faith and hope. Everything the family possessed in the way of furniture had been placed so as to hide as well as possible the bareness that yawned everywhere. Linda hung the curtains she had, but the front bay window presented a problem, the answer to which was not to be found in the back of any arithmetic book. There was just no way to stretch two pairs of curtains over a north window and the four-lighted east bay window without leaving too much gaping between. Someone had laid a worn gray linoleum on the floor in the kitchen, and a large flowered blue and yellow one in the front room, its shiny hard surface reflecting tawdriness. The best one could say was that the house was clean. But after Linda had done her utmost, there was still a pinched look about everything. Nothing was plentiful. Furniture was scarce, curtains were skimpy, the rug was too small.

At this point the Winters first heard of Nellie Kendall. She had sent word for the Ralstons to ask if the new minister would like the use of her furniture which was stored away and being of no use to anyone. The proffer was gladly accepted, and Noel, learning that Miss Kendall was one of his parishioners, made ready one golden afternoon to take his family and drive the twelve miles into the country to visit her.

It was not a total surprise to find Nellie and her Uncle Paul in a low two-room shack back in an apple orchard, for Noel had been told that Uncle had lost his farm and all that went with it. What was amazing about it all was the evident joy and content that pervaded the humble lodging. It was Nellie herself who met them at the door. Tall, angular, with a countenance which years before must have been freckled and plain and with faded hair which once must have been more nearly red than golden, she nevertheless presented now a picture of character. At first glance, her appearance

was the summary of a life of self-abnegation that God might be exalted, a life of warring against the world and coming out the victor. Her conversation confirmed this judgment.

"No, Uncle and I have never harbored resentments toward them nor felt any inclination to fight our cause. What God allows can't hurt us, unless we take the wrong attitude, and that we have purposed not to do."

"It was not your uncle's fault that this misfortune came to you?" Noel asked.

"No, it was Uncle's kindness. He saw his kinfolk in need and mortgaged all he had to help them in their extremity. They shrugged off all responsibility then and left him to the mercy of their creditors. Uncle was too old and ill to make the farm pay, so they came one day and moved us out. They gave us this, thank God!" She smiled as her eyes indicated their surroundings. "You wouldn't believe it was once our chicken house. With the weather-stripping on the outside, and the earth banked up around the foundation, we didn't notice the cold much last winter. One advantage it affords is that there isn't much space to heat."

Linda looked about her. The place was homey, with plants in the windows, a heating stove in the room which served as both sitting room and bedroom, and a cookstove in the kitchen. Nellie had gay flowered curtains at the windows and matching covers on the couch and chairs. It was a tiny place, it is true, but quite livable indeed.

"I hope you people don't feel sorry for us," Nellie searched Linda's face with a smile so sweet and content that Linda hastened to collect herself.

"I was just thinking how snug you are, what a cozy place you've been able to make out of a...

Nettie laughed again. "So many people came when they first heard, and thought they must console us. But why should we think it strange if we are sometimes inconvenienced for Christ's sake? The enemy is always trying to distress us in one way or another. If it had not been this particular trial, it would have been something else. I think God has been most merciful to us. And why sing, 'A tent or a cottage... 'if we're not willing to prove it?'"

There was something astounding about this philosophy when you saw it acted out in reality before your very eyes. It's all very well to sing and talk complete deliverance from the love of this world's goods, thought Linda, but quite a different thing to experience it, and rejoice! It made their own few inconveniences in getting started at the parsonage look small and transitory. Moreover, when they left Nellie and her humble dwelling, Noel and Linda felt that they were going, blessed with spiritual riches and eternal verities, the like of which many larger homes had none to offer.

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CHAPTER 13

With such pieces of Nellie's furniture as were available, the parsonage took on a more comfortable appearance. Rockers and library table for the front room; sideboard, table and chairs for the dining room; and a bed and bureau for the upstairs, made an amazing improvement in convenience. Furthermore, one of the young men of the congregation had coaxed a three-burner oil stove from its owner at half price, thus solving the cooking problem.

Noel and Linda felt now that they could turn their attention more exclusively to the work of the church. Noel knew that his youth was not particularly an asset to him, but the knowledge of his inexperience and inadequacy only drove him more desperately to the Lord for help. Like an old saint whose prayers in secret devotions could be heard two miles away, Noel soon became known by his neighbors on all sides as an ardent pray-er. He gathered his young people to the parsonage for prayer and then took them out to sing for him on the street while he heralded forth messages as fiery as his prayers. Indeed, the hope of the church lay in the aggressiveness of the young people. Too truly was the feeling of the older people expressed by Mrs. Dayton's statement, "The people know the church is here; they can come if they want to." It was heartening to see the congregation fast taking on new life. Sinners came to hear the enthusiastic new preacher, and prospects for a new spiritual day in Morton rose encouragingly.

Then calls came for Noel to hold two revivals -- one in his home town in December and one in Virginia in January. These he joyfully accepted in accordance with the agreement made with the church that he would be free to do so. Already the trees had lost most of their leaves. Winter was on its way. The grasses were a dull color under a dull sky. At night the winds wailed as though they were looking for something they could not find. Linda was glad for the shelter over their heads, for the cheer of the fire in the big old heating stove for which they had just finished paying, for the snugness of having each other, and of being all together in their own little home. Strange how she had not thought so much about this until the time drew near for Noel to go away for his first meeting.

Then the day came. The ground was frozen and the air chilly when Noel drove off, taking little Danny John with him for Grandma Winters to keep, thus relieving Linda while she took care of the young peoples' prayer meetings, made sick calls, and stayed in the parsonage in case any of their flock needed help. Linda waved good-by to them both, then went back into the house and swept little Kent up into her arms. What would she do without her baby? He was such a little person to be so much company! With a final squeeze, Linda put him again on the floor. It was really too cold for him, but he did like to get down and exercise his legs. She must make him some warm rompers. Perhaps with part of the offering they would get from the meeting, he could have a baby walker. That would keep him off the cold linoleum. Linda hastily straightened up the house, refueled the stove and carried in enough coal and water for the night so that she would not have to go out after dark.

Sunday was ushered in by the most severe cold snap of the winter thus far. Linda rose early. There were so many extra chores now that Noel was not there. She had the fire to watch, and water and coal to bring in. Then, too, though a lay member would be taking the services, Linda felt the responsibility deeply.

"Dear Lord," she was praying as she went about her duties, "please crown the services with Thy presence. Help us to give Thee room and let Thee talk to our need."

Linda carried the baby to church and, while she played the piano, she gave him to friendly Grandpa Reavis, the man with the smiling mustache who always asked to hold him. Today he had a celluloid fish to dangle in front of Kent's astonished eyes, which did very well to entertain the little one.

The service started, but there was an unaccountable stiffness upon the people. Something was wrong. What could it be? Linda glanced around her. Mr. Ralston sat a little to the side of her. His eyes which were usually so kind and earnest, were looking at the speaker with wintry blue coldness. Mrs. Ralston, beside him, did not look up at all. Mrs. Dayton, over to the left of the aisle, who prided herself in attending every service, looked as though she were there this morning merely because she did not want to break her record. Only the young people, including Don and Anna Mae, Paul and Jeanne, along with Nellie Kendall, Mrs. Renfrow, sole representative of the colored race, and Mrs. Harvey, mother of ten children, listened with interest and gave their encouragement. The tightness on the part of the leading members could not be ignored, however. What was the matter?

When Linda got home, she stood leaning against the warm chimney behind the heater. "I feel as though I've been in an ice box," she said aloud to the stove.

All that afternoon while Kent slept Linda prayed. And then she knew what was wrong. Even though the church had signed the agreement to release Noel for an occasional evangelistic campaign, the facts of the case were that they were not agreeable to it and were showing their disapproval by not cooperating. She would not write about it to Noel and spoil his revival. She would keep on praying, and surely God would light her candle.

On Monday, Linda tried to relax from the strain of Sunday by bundling up little Kent and taking a walk downtown. There she bought lovely warm outing flannel out of which to make him some rompers. Fifteen cents a yard was most too much to pay, but one could not call it extravagance when Kent needed them to keep him warm.

The West yet glimmered with some streaks of day when Linda went to carry in the coal and water. There was more water than usual to carry tonight, enough to fill three big tubs, for tomorrow she must do the washing, and this time all alone. Two days of Noel's absence were gone. Somehow the time would pass.

"Isn't it too bad," Linda addressed the coal shed, "to wish for time to pass? It's like wishing part of your life away." But there were times when you did that very thing.

It took Linda all day Tuesday to rub, rinse, hang out the clothes, mop the floors, empty the water, feed and care for Kent, then in the evening, to take in the clothes, fold and dampen them for ironing, get the coal and water. . . . What a round it was!

As yet the cold was not so severe that she minded the outside work. There were to be times that winter, however, when she waded a foot of snow and braved a stiff northwester to get the weekly washing on the line, only to find that her task was doubled in trying to get it off again. Many a time she wrestled many moments in the frigid wind with a union suit frozen hard, the cloth stuck tight to the line under the clothespins. It never occurred to her to do anything but hang the clothes outside. The luxury of having drying space inside was not so much as imagined. "One hundred and eighty pieces," Linda reported to her mother, and still it was all done by hand.

At length the ordeal of staying by the stuff for Noel was ended, and not altogether lost, Linda hoped. At least it had added to her own spiritual stamina.

Christmas came and went. The little ones were showered with gifts -- clothes from their parents, a walker for Kent and a tricycle for Danny John from the more indulgent grandpas and grandmas. The days were slipping by swiftly. January would soon be here again when it would be time for Noel to go to his meeting in Virginia. Linda wanted to turn the clock back until she could collect herself again. But, though you can do anything you want to with the clock hands, you can't slow down time. Early one morning with the ground frozen under their feet and tiny shivering snowflakes coming from the leaden sky, Noel and Linda and the babies walked to the bus station where Noel set off for Virginia. Part of Linda's heart was already in Virginia. If she could have gone with Noel, she thought that her joy would have been complete, but the weather was bitterly cold, icy and snowy at unexpected intervals, so that even Noel alone would not risk the hazards of the winter highways with the old Ford. For all of them to have gone on the bus was financially unthinkable. There was no other way but for Linda and the babies to stay behind. But God would light their candle as He had done before. And He did, in spite of a repetition of obvious disfavor on the part of some church members.

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CHAPTER 14

That next summer Noel made preparations for a tent meeting in Morton. There was so much work to be done and so many problems to be solved before a lot was procured, the tent set up, seats located and a piano obtained, that Linda wondered if it would not have been just as well to carry on the meeting in the church. The increase in attendance, however, was to bear out Noel's contention that there are people who will come to a tent who would not be seen setting foot inside a church. Dr. and Mrs. Drayton and a Mrs. Coates, the doctor's sister, were engaged to do the preaching, help in the visitation work, and in conducting the prayer meetings.

For two scorching weeks, Linda stood over the oil stove and requisitioned all the ability she could muster to concoct tempting meals with as little expenditure as possible. There were string beans, peas and lettuce in the garden, but the beets and tomatoes, which would have lent substantially to variety, were not ready for use.

On wash day, Linda and Noel rose at four, drew and heated the water and had the washing on the line by the time the little boys woke for breakfast. The rest of the morning was spent in straightening up the house, caring for the children and getting the dinner for the evangelistic party.

Noel's cooperation in helping to rub the clothes on the washboard was perfect, even though one could detect a hint of reluctance in the words of a little ditty which seemed to be his favorite on such days. It never failed to amuse Linda when she heard his hearty voice in song affirming

"O tra la, la, la, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the highlands chasing the deer."

Just as the days of the meeting were consistently hot, so the nights were consistently stormy. The tent, frail at any time, gave with the wind. And the wind that ruled this land, sparred it as capriciously as a cat spars a mouse. At the first low growl of thunder, Noel jumped out of bed into his clothes and sprinted through the first huge drops of driving rain to collapse the tent before it was blown to the four winds. Linda lowered the windows against the hammering downpour and cracking thunder and looked for Noel until he was safe at home once more.

The meeting closed with several new faces in the congregation. All that fall the work of God prospered. There was a spirit of optimism and faith that gave the entire group the kind of forward look that expects great things from God and gets them.

Noel's appointment to the Morton church was renewed for the coming year. Substantially his salary was the same as before. But since Noel's custom was to return his tithe to the church each week, the treasurer took it upon herself to relieve him of that trouble and simply deducted the one dollar and twenty cents beforehand, so that actually only ten dollars and eighty cents came into the minister's hands. But this was a small matter, indeed, in comparison to the joy of having such loyal cooperation and the hearty prayers of most of the congregation.

In early March Noel did so reckless a thing as to buy a washing machine. The payments took \$4.20 out of their weekly allowance of \$10.80, but it was wonderful how much easier it made their wash day. Noel and Linda hoped their consciences would not chide them for having made this purchase, since it gave them more time for the work of the Kingdom. Then, before winter had made any pretense of relinquishing its cold fingers, Noel and Linda made a thorough renovation of the parsonage. It was racking toil that would have to be repeated to a certain extent when it was warm enough that they would not need a fire in the stove, but Eleanor Craven was coming for a visit. The old heater had poured forth too much smoke on wallpaper, curtains and windows for Mrs. Craven to see.

Eleanor Craven had been in China again since Linda had seen her last and had started a new mission in Yunnan Province. She was hunting new recruits for her work. Would this be the time when Noel would decide to go to the mission field? Mrs. Craven would not return to her work until next fall -- the end of the pastoral year. But Mrs. Craven came and went without Noel volunteering to ally himself with the work. Even Mrs. Craven did not push the matter when she saw how Noel's heart was wrapped up in the work in Morton.

The month of May was a scorching one. One afternoon Noel started out to visit one of their elderly parishioners who was quite ill. He would be back soon, he said. Linda took another little romper suit from the clothesbasket and adjusted it on the ironing board. Then she went to the west lean-to door and watched Noel swing down the garden path to the garage. The dry, hot wind struck

her face before she reached the threshold, but just for a breath of air she stood there, even though it was stifling. Noel disappeared into the garage to get the Ford.

"Good, stalwart Noel," Linda thought, ". . . noble and true. With all the hardships, life with such an one is rich indeed."

Suddenly from nowhere, seemingly, little Kent appeared and took his stand behind the car, his chubby body looking now so small, so unprotected. The engine sputtered. In another moment...

"Kent! O Kent!"

Linda was hysterical. Her voice was snatched away so quickly into the hot wind that it had a staccato quality. In one more second the car would back out....! Down the endless path she ran like one crazed. Just as she clutched the little body, she heard Noel's voice calling, "Come on Sonny. Daddy will take you, too."

Noel had seen him then. Thank God! Linda breathed once more in grateful relief. She went back to her ironing. Another hour she worked and yet another.

At six o'clock that evening the Winters had a little daughter. Smoothing back the tiny, brown ringlets from the moist baby temples, Linda relaxed in her hospital room in exquisite satisfaction and thankfulness. A little girl!

"What shall we call her, Noel?" Linda broached the subject.

"What do you like, dear?" Noel bent over and kissed the mother and babe.

"Tell me which of these," Linda suggested, "'Virginia Elaine,' or 'Catherine Beth'?"

"Catherine Beth is a good, strong name. We can tell her the stories of many Christian Catherines, including your greatgrandmother, Catherine, the lady preacher who was so fearless for the Lord. She will have a name worth living up to."

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CHAPTER 15

The few days Linda rested in the quietness and peace of her cheery hospital room, she continued to marvel that at last she had a baby girl. She had come to consider baby girls so rare that it even astonished her to know that there were two more baby girls in rooms adjoining hers. Who knows what heights of anticipation Linda had already reached for the possibilities in the life of wee Catherine Beth!

The day came when Noel took Linda the block or so from the hospital to their parsonage home in a wheel chair. He wanted her to assimilate all the beauty of the May morning at leisure. It had been necessary for Linda to leave the hospital before a certain time to avoid paying for another

day. But Baby was in the midst of having her bath, so Noel would go back after her. This he did, having packed the folded wheel chair into the Ford, along with the clothesbasket newly painted in pink and softly lined for a baby bed, Catherine's baby clothes and light blanket.

In the meantime, Mrs. Bates tiptoed about, making Linda comfortable and quieting the little boys who scurried in and out as excitedly as a pair of chipmunks. It was not long before Noel returned, but as their new little sister was fast asleep, he allowed the curious little brothers but one hasty peek at her little round face under the blanket and then carefully placed the basket on two chairs by a window in Mother's room.

Mrs. Bates corralled the boys and went downstairs to prepare lunch. Noel, with his Bible and sermon outline, betook himself to an adjoining room for study and prayer, while Linda relaxed in her own bed once more, thankful to be at home again with her little family.

Linda lay dreamily, her eyes on the baby basket across the room, when she saw it move ever so slightly. Then a chubby little clenched fist reached above the basket rim, and a small wail ascended from the basket depths. More insistent and more piteously it rose, as though trying to persuade Mother that here was a little girl who was being treated with unheard-of abuse. Noel had heard the first little cry and quickly came to place Baby in Mother's arms for her noon-hour feeding. Linda reached for the soft, tiny bundle and then, with one terrified look and a startled cry, she dropped limply back on her bed.

"Noel!" Linda managed to tell him, as she sat bolt upright again, "Don't you see? This isn't our baby!"

"Not. . . our baby? Why, certainly it's our..."

"No, Noel, never! Those strange eyes, the thin face... No! She's not ours!"

"But the blue eyes, the hair, our baby clothes... ." Noel was still reluctant to believe the awful words.

"No, Noel. O do hurry! Take her back and get our baby!" The last cry ended in an inarticulate wail.

Noel knew now that it was true. In a moment the Ford was sputtering and he and the baby were gone. But, O could she wait? How long. . . how long. .

"Now don't you worry, Miz' Winters (Mrs. Bates was from the deep South). They'll get it straightened out in no time." Mrs. Bates, her own voice trembling, drew frantically and heavily upon her every resource of ingenuity and psychological wisdom in the treatment of this emotional case, the likes of which she had never before had on her hands.

"But don't you see," Linda was working it all out now, putting fragments of information together to get to the source of such a tragedy, "Colleen Joyce's mother went home today, too. We had Colleen Joyce. Her mother has Cath. . .

"Noel will find her, honey. Now just be calm. A little while, and everything will be all right."

"But that mother may live miles from here in the country, and what if she is sure Catherine Beth is her baby? You know I've heard of lawsuits over cases like that, and sometimes they never do get their own babies." Linda was on the edge of her bed now looking out the window, searching, searching.

"O," she prayed convulsively, "O Lord, reach down, please, and light my candle. . . ." Linda sat, head bowed, eyes closed, the tears running freely down her flushed cheeks.

Mrs. Bates, though usually talkative, was strangely wanting in anything to say, just when words were needed most. She took Linda's hand in hers and patted it gently. "The nurses know, honey. They know which is your baby and which one isn't. They don't dare make such mistakes. . . ."

"But they did. O, Mrs. Bates, they did! I mean she did." Now Linda was seeing it all as clear as day. The new nurse! She was the one. She dressed up that strange baby in Linda's baby clothes. But the head nurse would know.

It seemed they spent an eternity of reasoning, Linda and Mrs. Bates, before the Ford sped toward them between rows of neighboring elms and stopped on the shadeless driveway beneath Linda's window. Noel had triumphed! They could see that. In a moment he was up the stairs and placed in Linda's arms the tiny bundle, wrapped in strange blankets and bonnet, to be sure, but out of them peered, not strange eyes this time, but the very eyes that belonged to the sweetest of all baby faces in the whole, wide world!

"Catherine Beth!" In one exquisite moment Linda expressed the first exuberance of her thankfulness, but it took hours and days of fondling the little one, hours and days and indeed a lifetime of praising the God who lighted her candle, to express the long, sweet gratitude that filled her heart.

At last, Noel told his story -- how the head nurse, upon seeing the baby he had returned, recognized the blunder that had been made.

"She was so embarrassed, I felt sorry for her," Noel related. "She went with me and we hurried to a house on the corner northeast of the hospital where Colleen Joyce's parents live. As soon as we got to the screen door, I heard little Catherine Beth hiccupping. You know, Linda, how she does just after a good feed. Well, I knew then she had had her dinner.. ."

"O-oh," Linda laughed, chagrined, "and I sent that poor little thing home hungry!"

"Never mind," Noel soothed her. "But say, I do feel rather sorry for the mite, at that. Her mother, though she had fed Catherine, hadn't even noticed that she had the wrong baby. And the grandmother said it wouldn't have made much difference anyway!" -

"Of all things!" Mrs. Bates held up her hands in consternation, and Linda's eyes were wide with unbelief. How could anyone say it would make no difference to have the wrong baby?"

"Did she agree that there really had been a mix-up?" Linda wanted to know.

"Yes, when she saw the two babies together, there wasn't a question in her mind which was hers." Noel assured her.

"Thank God!" Linda breathed.

"You should have seen how relieved that nurse was when the thing was so easily settled satisfactorily to both parties. She did earnestly ask me to promise that none of us would tell the incident to anyone. Of course, they will mark the babies after this, even though there are only one or two babies there at a time, but the reputation of the hospital could easily be ruined if such a story got loose around town."

"Of all things!" reiterated Mrs. Bates with more feeling than before and with evident disappointment. "Not tell! . . . and such a juicy piece of news!"

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CHAPTER 16

In June, the two little boys went to Grandpa and Grandma Winters' for a few days while Noel and Linda took little Catherine and went to the Boone, Iowa camp meeting, where Joseph H. Smith was the principal evangelist. Linda had lifted little Catherine many times in prayer to God, as she had done her baby sons. Here, the wee one received a further commitment to the heavenly Father when Rev. Smith, this holy man of God, laid his hand on her head and prayed a special blessing on her life. What a rare favor! One the parents treasured in their memories ever after.

The summer sped by on the sinewy current of Time's fast river. Much of it was cool and rainy. Noel and Linda looked happily upon the extent of their family -- two sturdy sons and a sweet little daughter! "And to think!" Noel reminded her, "soon we will have been married five whole years!" It didn't seem possible. There were so many things Linda had planned to do in the realms of art and study, and not one of them begun. But, there had been other things she had accomplished that she had not planned. After all, three little children in their home. . . . At least no one could say she had been, or was now, idle. Some days she told Noel she just went around in circles and back again.

Noel put up a new clothesline with four long wires suspended on two cross-armed posts and braced in the middle by a third. There was no time now to count the garments. At first, in spite of himself, Noel had been conscience-stricken for having bought the speedy electric washer, but since they finished paying for it in May, he felt easier about it. It was wonderful of how much drudgery it relieved them. The ease of the operation had increased proportionately with the

magnitude of the task to be done. Still, Linda had to droop the clothes in order to get them all on the line. She wondered where her washing would reach if it were all hung out straight.

Fall winds blustered around the lowly parsonage, and Linda's duties were still as endless as the washing on the line. One never could satisfy the demands of work, it seemed. Noel found a Davis sewing machine in a second-hand store for five dollars, which, though it had seen its best days in the preceding century, still stitched an even seam, and Linda contrived into existence a snowsuit for each of the boys, one from an old coat of her own, and one from a coat of her mother's. By the second week in December, she had hemmed and embroidered a week's supply of dish towels for both grandmothers and had manufactured gifts to satisfy the demands of the whole Christmas list. It was quite a feat considering the fact that there had been little money spent except for thread and tape.

A soft snow fell the day before Christmas. The little boys tumbled about in the feathery stuff, releasing stores of preChristmas intoxication in rollicking sport. The sky cleared by supper time without lowering the temperature perceptibly. It was a perfect Christmas eve. Coziness blessed their little home. The children were snuggled in their beds, sleeping the sleep of contentment and innocence. God was good to them.

It was not long, however, that an untroubled sky looked down upon the quiet household. At midnight the light of the stars went out. A terrific blast roared in from the northwest and shook the house till its whole framework trembled. Linda was awakened by the rattling of windows and by Noel bouncing out of bed.

"Sounds as though it blew every door open," he called to her above the din.

Linda followed him downstairs, and before they could reach the outside kitchen door, they had waded halfway across the floor in almost an inch of snow. The wind had forced open the outer lean-to door, then the kitchen door, and snow had blown in completely across the room to the front door sill. The storm whipped their night clothes about them. It took all their strength combined to shut the lean-to door and lock it against the fury.

Linda returned to the bedrooms to tuck more covers on the little boys and the baby. None of them had awakened. A two-inch drift of sifted snow lay on the west and north window sills, but no beds were close enough to catch the icy powder. Linda curled up in bed, but she could not sleep. All night the thundering, whistling tempest lashed at the foundations beneath them.

In some places drifts were still piling up the next morning, but the wind was not quite so high. In front of the house it was contenting itself by tracing little scrolls and frills on the larger drift that reached to the porch eaves. The temperature had swooped to fifteen degrees below zero and forecasts were discouraging. The giant elms across the street were iced-a blue, blinding tangle of silver network gleaming. Even the scraggly plum in their own back yard took on an air of enchantment, so that the little boys had only to look at it and see a glistening Christmas tree of their own

Noel spent most of the morning shoveling paths and carrying coal. It was all they could do to keep enough heat in the drafty old house to make them comfortable. By evening the wind had risen again. It had a knife edge, and the sun was a pale red, as though the chill had drawn the color out of it.

Just as darkness was stealing the last bit of warmth out of daylight, Noel locked the lean-to door for the night. He had carried in three bushels of coal. "I'll have to fire through the night," he said, "to keep us all from freezing to death. It's twenty below now and still going down." Linda left underwear and stockings on the children when she dressed them that night for bed. Over these she put their outing flannel pajamas, sweaters, snowsuits, mittens and wool helmets. Then she piled on them every extra blanket and comfort she had. Instead of a snowsuit, little Catherine wore her fleecy "baby bunting" snapped to her chin and the attached bonnet tied tightly around her chubby cheeks. Linda put over her all her little warm blankets, then topped these with the beautiful blue and yellow silk, wool-filled comfort she had kept carefully wrapped in tissue paper in her trunk ever since her wedding day. All of these she pulled up over Baby's head, then humped them in the middle over her face, so she would not smother. She and Noel went to bed with their bathrobes and stockings on and spread their coats on top to make an extra blanket.

Linda slept fitfully in the icy room. Every time she roused, she counted the covers on the children's beds, comparing their number, weight, and warmth with those on her own bed. In that way she estimated the extent of their comfort.

The next day Noel hung heavy curtains at the archway between the dining room and the front room and two days later, when the mercury registered twenty-five degrees below zero at noon with the sun shining, he curtained off the kitchen, too. Linda cooked their meals on the flat top of the big heating stove in the dining room and washed dishes on the dining room table. By heating only the one little room, they kept cozy and snug. Noel waded to town once a day through the snowdrifts, the cold, and the wind, bringing back provisions and various news items from the outside world. Some stories had to be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt, such as the one about the man who took a hot water bottle to bed with him and found the water frozen to ice at his feet the next morning. But Linda shivered with something more than cold when Noel told of the month-old Branson baby that was found frozen to death in his little crib.

After that, Linda brought the children's mattresses downstairs every day to get them heated through and warm for the night. Too, one night when Catherine Beth whimpered in a pitiful faraway voice, Linda picked up the little one, blankets and all, and snuggled her into her own bed.

Six weeks was the bitter cold to linger. People began to wonder if they were to be locked in an eternal ice era. Snowdrifts continued ten and fifteen feet deep. Days were bright, sunshiny, and stingy cold; nights were clear, white-lighted and as cutting as a knife. Time took on the monotony and the boredom which comes from long endurance. Noel visited the college library and brought home an armload of books. After that, the afternoons were pleasant with the companionable drone of Noel's voice as he read aloud from "Saints, Sinners and Beechers," by Beecher, and the lives of William and Catherine Booth while Linda ironed and sewed.

One afternoon, Linda amused herself by drawing sketches of little Kent and Catherine Beth in their sleep. She would put these away with the ones she had made of Danny John. It was an easy matter to reproduce the round baby faces of Danny John and Catherine, but Kent was different. None of her attempts satisfied her. Kent could not help it if his features were of the kind that were hard to "get." She would do her best with a side view, not showing his face so plainly. He would know she had tried. Poor little fellow. It was not because he was not good looking. No artist could put on mere paper that tender, innocent baby look that made one love him almost inordinately.

Linda washed in the kitchen by the warmth of the steaming boiler, and hung the clothes on lines Noel crisscrossed in the front room. There they froze the first night, but were nearly dry by the end of the third day.

So long did the cold continue that it seemed to become a part of the very walls. Nail heads on all the door jambs and window frames were coated with perpetual frost fuzz. It seemed that the cold was only strained before it reached them, but not subdued. At sunset time the cold became a solid presence. When dear Mrs. Lain across the back alley gave them a big comfort, and mittens for all the children, Noel and Linda were so grateful they could not think of being embarrassed because they were objects of charity.

The break in the weather came at the very time a neighbor said it would -- at the change of the moon. Noel, Linda and the babies had been penned up for so long, they took advantage of the first moderate day and went to Grandpa and Grandma Winters'. The drift in the back alley was still as high as the garage. There was no way to get the Ford to the road except by cross-lots, so Noel backed it out over the frozen hillocks of last summer's stripped garden rows, and away they went.

When winter really did break, spring came in a hurry. It was livening to see new green leaves pop out on the elm branches overnight. And in the first fresh moments of early dawn, Linda thought she could hear all the little songs buds sing when they are swelling and all the little secrets that grasses whisper when they are stretching.

June arrived under perfect skies. It was early in the month that Noel received the letter informing him of his new appointment for the coming year -- Van Strauss, Pennsylvania. It was a Dutch name, but actually, all that was left of tradition to remind one of the sturdy Hollanders who had planted the town were mammoth and multitudinous tulip beds that made the place famous

Now this new excitement filled the horizon for Noel and Linda. Conjectures concerning the new places ran through Linda's mind, all the questions that had concerned her before they went to Mentor and again to Morton. This time they were to receive eighteen dollars a week. What a fortune! There would be new people, new opportunities for the Gospel, and new experiences to make up for their separation from the dear ones they had grown to love here. O, who can tell what magnitudes are bound up in the transfers of life!

Then, as though to give back to the earth some of the warmth extracted from it the winter before, the weather reached record heights of torridness in July. Day after day was hotter than the day before. The wind blazed out of the southwest and withered everything with its feverish breath. Even the grasshoppers looked dry and parched. The grass, and the leaves on the trees were turning

brown before the summer was half over. Linda panted for a breath of air. Then when a breeze stirred the crackling garden plants, it was so hot and arid that at once the perspiration on her face dried and made her skin feel brittle, as though it would crack if she smiled or spoke. To lie down on the beds upstairs at night was like lying down on the tops of ovens. The temperature in the coolest part of the night was eighty-seven degrees with not a breath of air stirring. Linda could stand it no longer. Noel helped her carry a mattress downstairs, and there, on the floor between two doorways, Linda and the babies slept. For seventeen days the mercury hung quivering between one hundred and one hundred ten degrees. When the break came it was by way of a tempest bordering on cyclonic fury. The earth soaked up the deluge as soon as it fell.

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CHAPTER 17

It was the first week of September that Noel and Linda went to Van Strauss. Danny John was a big boy of five now. Kent was three and a half and Catherine Beth was toddling around, not quite sixteen months old. It was miraculous how children grew out of one's arms.

Noel had left a prosperous work at Morton and his faith for seeing God do great things in Van Strauss was unbounded. There were hindrances to the work, as there always are, one of the greatest of these being that there were wrong feelings among the members, and as long as this condition obtained, Noel, with all his prayers and heartbreak and faithful preaching could not muster his army on a united front against the sin without the church walls. God must first do a work inside, and for this the church was not willing. What did it mean? Failure in his third pastorate? But surely God was able.

Linda's heart, too, was heavy. The people had been good to them, had brought in some of their used furniture for the front room, had paid the freight bill for what pieces had been shipped, had even placed things in order, and had decorated the dining room table with a bouquet of flowers. There was running water in the house and shade trees in the yard. But Linda knew now that it takes more than things to make one happy. If there is not love and harmony and cooperation, the wheels of any church can do no more than drag heavily in the mire.

In spite of all the dissension, Noel was retained at Van Strauss for his second year. The prospect was disheartening, but in the vigor and strength of his youth, Noel looked forward into the fall work with unmitigated courage, believing that together, he and God would win.

Added to all the disappointments connected with the church work, there arose a new perplexity, which slowly but surely made itself felt in the minds of both Noel and Linda. From different angles their eyes were being opened to the startling conditions in the public schools, indeed in their own little city. Evolution was being taught even in the beginning grades, not as a theory, but as plain matter-of-fact. A class of dancing was part of the curriculum.

"What we are going to do is a quandary to me," Noel said one day, after talking over the corruption in the school system with Linda. "The question of schooling for our little ones is becoming a very serious and major issue in our lives. I see that."

Linda, too, was grieved deeply over the situation. And to think, their own Danny John would be thrown into that whirl of wickedness in only one more month! Or would he? Was not there some way to protect the innocence of their child? Some way to guard the teachings and ideals they were continually impressing on his young heart and mind? Just as the Bible teaches that at last there shall be a great gulf separating the righteous from the impenitent, should there not be, even here, a deep and wide gulf between the righteous and the ungodly?

Suddenly Noel answered her question as though she had spoken it aloud. "Linda, there must be a way. God never intended for parents to hand their little ones over to be instructed by the ungodly. The school is a wonderful institution, mothered by the church in the beginning, but when it falls to such a plane that infidelity and immorality are upheld within its walls, it were better for children to go through life ignorant, than to acquire all the wisdom the world has to offer to the detriment of their faith and the damnation of their souls."

Noel knew he had spoken boldly. "That's so, Linda," he emphasized, "and I don't believe God requires us to imperil our little ones by sending them into this cradle of sin. There's some other way, and if there isn't, God will make one. Why, I'd rather Danny John would go to some little country school to a capable, sensible teacher who still believes the Bible and where they never heard of all the so-called advantages of the city, than to be surrounded with all their new-fangled equipment and modern teaching ideas, and have the tender seeds of faith and purity we have tried to instill into his heart trampled underfoot and destroyed."

"O say, Linda," Noel looked up with new light in his eyes, "what was that which Stella was explaining to you the other day about teaching Jimmy herself while they travelled on their winter's evangelistic tour? What was it? A correspondence course, or something?"

"Well, similar. This school in the East sends out books, lessons, and all materials for the child to work with under the supervision of his mother or whoever is to oversee his study. They also send detailed instructions for the mother's use in connection with every lesson the child studies. Every month the child's work is sent in to the school for examination and grading, and at the end of the year the student is given a certificate of approval and promotion."

"Sounds splendid! Is the school a trustworthy one, an accredited institution?"

"Stella says it is one of the best in the country, ranking among the highest in scholastic standing, and approved by national educational leaders."

"It's just the thing," Noel decided. "I believe with all my heart the Lord has opened this up to us for the protection of our children at this time. Perhaps we can get Ruth to come in and help a few hours on your busiest days and you can take charge of Danny John's lessons, Linda. Now, how is the best way to go about this? The superintendent of schools will not be in his office for business until school starts. But no doubt we can reach him by letter. He will have to be informed of our decision, of course, and will have to give us a written statement of his approval. But that is only a matter of routine. There will be no trouble about it, I'm sure."

Linda felt that there had been a great load lifted from her heart. Besides, she looked forward with real joy to the prospect of overseeing little Danny John's instruction. They sent to the eastern school for a catalogue, and when it came, the prospectus surpassed their brightest expectations. Though no word from the superintendent had reached them yet, they felt sure that everything was working out perfectly.

Days passed quickly, and the first day of school was soon upon them. Noel and Linda rose early to get the washing out of the way so that Ruth would have nothing to do but to mop the floor and set things in order, while Linda worked with Danny John.

It was a perfect September morning. Linda was hanging up the last of the clothes when children, shouting and running from everywhere passed by on their way to school. In a way it was too bad Danny John could not go. He would so enjoy romping and playing with the others, but he would have it sometime, she assured herself. Not this year, but sometime when they should move into a more solid community.

The children's voices died away in the distance. Linda heard the school bell ring. She had picked up the clothesbasket to go into the house, when she heard Noel talking to someone on the front porch.

"It's some man talking to Daddy," Danny John blustered excitedly as he ran around the house to his mother. "Come and see."

"Who, darling, do you know?" Linda was beginning to have apprehensions.

"A big man. And he's angry. What's he going to do with Daddy?"

"Mother doesn't know who he is or what he wants, dear. He won't do anything with Daddy. What makes you think so? See, now he's going. Come on with Mother."

Noel met Linda in the kitchen, an unaccustomed nervous expression overshadowing his forced smile.

"Looks as though they are going to make trouble for us, Linda. But never mind. It may not be so bad. We'll go and talk to the superintendent personally. Surely he has forgotten our letter, or, in the rush of school commencing again, he has overlooked the matter of informing the truant officer of our plans. Just leave the children with Ruth and we'll get ready and go right away. Take the prospectus with you, also Danny John's first lesson books and your teaching instructions, so that if the superintendent is not familiar with the type of school we are dealing with, we can explain it all to him."

It ran through Linda's mind that the superintendent must have tipped off the truant officer, or he would not have been at the house almost before the school bell quit ringing, but she said nothing.

Noel and Linda found the superintendent in the office and lost no time in introducing themselves to him. As they spoke their names, however, the stern aspect that suddenly hardened Professor Deiner's face was by no means reassuring. "I think I know the purpose of your coming," he began coldly. "Surely you are aware that the laws of the State of Pennsylvania require that every child upon attaining the age of six years shall attend a public, parochial or private school unless he or she is excused in a statement signed by two or more competent physicians declaring him to be physically or mentally deficient. Do you have reason to suspect your child of being subnormal and unfit to take his place with other children in the schoolroom?"

"Professor Deiner," Noel answered kindly but boldly, "I'm sure you understand our reasons for wanting to instruct our child at home, until he is a little older, at least, for we explained all that in our letter. Furthermore, I have no reason to doubt your knowledge of the fact, that though the laws of the State of Pennsylvania do include what you have just stated, they also give to the superintendent of schools the right of arbitration in the matter. In other words, the laws of the State invest in you authority and right to excuse a child from attending school, upon presentation of sufficient evidence that he is receiving instruction elsewhere that meets or surpasses the requirements of the State Educational Committee..."

The professor waved the words aside and leaned back in his swivel chair. "I do have the right of arbitration in the matter, he emphasized, "and I do not propose to excuse your child from attending public school. If that is not clear, it will be made clear tomorrow morning if your child does not appear in school."

Noel and Linda looked at one another in mute dismay. There was no use waiting there for a retraction of the sentence. Their only hope was in God, and to Him they fled.

The little ones must not know of the cloud that hung over their lives, Linda decided, so upon returning home, she took Danny John adventurously through his first day's lessons, interested four-year-old Kent in a kindergarten project so that he could "go to school" too, and played with them both in a rollicking game at recess. Only once did Danny John guess that something was wrong. Mother could not tell them when they were "cold" or "hot" or only "warm." She had forgotten indeed where on the porch she had hidden the thimble! With a mental jerk Linda snapped herself back into the awful game she was playing -- the game of pretending nothing was wrong. How could one play that without a single mistake?

All that night, Noel and Linda did not go to bed. With their Bibles on chairs in front of them, they stayed on their knees, weeping out their hearts to God, searching His will, claiming His promises. They could send Danny John to school the next morning. But no, there was no way out in that direction. Only a blank stone wall. God would not let them do it. What was there for them then? Evidently suffering enough, but not without deliverance. Had not God said, "I will light your candle"? Had He not in a thousand other golden promises declared His faithfulness? Martyrs they might be, but they would not disobey.

The next morning while Linda collected together Danny John's lesson materials, Noel packed his briefcase.

"What. . . ." Linda's white face showed the fear that clutched her being.

"Never mind, dear. If they do take me, I want something to read. I'm getting my Bible and hymn book, some paper and my pen. . . ."

"Take you where?"

"If they're bold enough to go through with it, they may take me to court, and then if the judge's decision is against me, why. . . ."

"Do you mean they would take you to. . . jail?"

"They may, but. . ." Noel smiled with drawn lips. "It would be no more than they did with Paul."

"O, Noel!" Linda was at the point of tears. "Don't let them do that." There was exquisite pleading in her voice. "Tell them we'll resign and move away before you let them do that. Think of the disgrace before our people and friends who wouldn't understand. Think of your future, your influence, your. . . ."

"That's just what I am thinking about, dear. Now be calm and let me reason with you. I'm fighting, not only for Danny John, but for all the boys and girls of the town. People ought to be aroused about the corruption in their schools. If some of us have the backbone to suffer in opposing this wickedness, maybe we can put a stop to it."

"But your career! And, O, Noel, for your children to know you went to. . . ."

"I'm thinking beyond that, dear. God can take care of the career. What He needs now is someone that will fight this to the finish. After knowing what I do. . . ."

"But going to jail, how could that help?" Linda was desperate in her horror of it.

"It may take just that to awaken people. If it does, that's where I'm going."

There was no use. Noel was determined. Linda's heart sickened, and for one moment life itself almost died within her. But she must not collapse, could not, at the most crucial moment. This was just when Noel needed her. Strange how one week life could look so hopeful and the next...

"O Lord, please don't let them take him.

Linda went to the doorway. "Come, Danny John. Come, Kent." She called the little boys from their back yard play. "Mother has new lessons for you today -- pretty things to color." She made her voice so cheery that they ran to her, breathless, with eyes like stars.

Linda caught the two little forms in her arms as they plunged toward her, while her whole heart wordlessly pleaded again, Please tell me Thou wilt not let them take him, Lord....

"What new lessons, Mother? Where? Let us see!" Danny John was ecstatic.

"Here is Danny John's book. Here is Kent's book. Have your pencils, do you? Now Danny John can print his numbers just like they have them in his book. Kent can color the bird just like the bird in this book. Won't that be fun?"

O, Lord, please don't let.

There was a knock at the door that sent the blood from Linda's face. She dropped her pencil from hands that were cold and shaky. Noel was talking in short and decisive sentences to a man. The man, too, was short and decisive. Commanding!

"O, my little boy does his numbers so nicely," Linda encouraged. She hoped the man had heard her. The school officials should know that it was not education they were fighting. Please don't let. ..

"Now we'll start on letters, Danny. . .

The screen door shut. A car door banged. And. . . the brief case was gone!

* * * * *

CHAPTER 18

The long minutes that followed Noel's departure held Linda in a sickening daze. Throughout the anxious morning, she worked and laughed with Danny John, Kent, and Catherine, playing that awful game. Before noon two men of the church called, having heard that their pastor was in court that day for not allowing Danny John to enter school. Linda carefully explained their stand and the events leading up to their decision. Twice she refused their kind offer to pay Noel's fine and relieve him of the possibility of receiving a jail sentence. But she knew Noel would have none of that. He was fighting for a cause. Paying a fine would not settle anything. If enough good people, however, could, by his suffering, be stimulated against the evil which had already crept inside the school doors, it could be stamped out! Of this he was sure!

Hour followed upon hour, each linked to the other with the same cruel, grinding torment. In the afternoon more people came. Over and over again Linda said the same things, explained in the same words. It was like a hopeless, disastrous dream. Her heart tossed between belief and unbelief. Surely they must have sentenced Noel. He was so long in coming. But they would not take him to jail. There was some other way. O what confusion gripped her! Linda began envying her own future-the time when all this would be over, and they could live normal lives again.

Toward evening the telephone rang. It was Noel -- in jail! His voice had a cheery note. "We're suffering for a cause, Linda. Keep encouraged. I'm already witnessing to my jail mates. God has a purpose and He will see us through."

"Of course, Noel. Don't worry about us, either. We'll be all right and we'll keep on praying. Surely they won't keep you long... ."

"Was that Daddy, Mommy? Where is he?" Danny John's eyes were big with perplexity.

"He's down at the jail, darling, talking to the bad men about Jesus, trying to help them get saved."

A smile of relief and satisfaction spread over the little boy's face and he turned once more to his play.

The next day, a fellow pastor and his wife, ignorant of the trouble that had befallen those in the parsonage, stopped to call. Noel was downtown, Linda told them, and she could not say just when he would return. Here was a new game to play. She continued the conversation pleasantly because she must, speaking trivial things to hide those which were immeasurably important, but in spite of herself, never for one moment was she free from the mental pain that haunted her or from the numbness that gripped her.

Near the end of the week, the denomination's superintendent appeared. Someone had telephoned him to come. So, yet another time the story had to be repeated, and soon did Linda discover that this time it was not to sympathetic ears. The superintendent was nervous and vexed over the humiliation to himself and to the church that Noel's "blundering" had caused. He never heard of a preacher doing so irrational a thing as to allow himself to be taken to jail. He should have resigned first. Now the superintendent would order the church to demand his resignation. He was sorry, but there was nothing else he could do. No way at all could Linda make him see that there had been a cause serious enough to warrant such behaviour.

And thus he left.

O, where would it all end? Were they not to have even the church's backing? Without that, it was a lost cause. Noel could not fight it all alone. Queer how unreal the day looked to her. The sun shone and there was no warmth. Zinnias and goldenrod and little ragged asters were blooming in the garden and there was no beauty.

And then Linda knew with assurance that they were not fighting it alone. The Lord was leading on softly and their only responsibility was to follow. Had not God blessed to her heart that very morning the words Moses long ago spoke to Joshua? "Be strong and of good courage," he had said, "fear not nor be afraid of them; for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." What a spark to light one's candle!

To Linda's unutterable joy, Noel came home, unannounced, the next Monday. He had been gone eight days! There was much to be said, but no time to lose. If Danny John did not appear in school when it opened the next morning, Noel would be apprehended again, so he wrote his letter of resignation, mailed it to the church officials, locked the parsonage doors, and took his family to a friendly home outside the jurisdiction of Van Strauss's school authorities. Here they found refuge and sympathetic prayers.

It was late in the fall to find a church without a pastor. With Noel's own church superintendent so unsympathetic with their protest against the school regime, there was no hope of work within his jurisdiction, and when several telegrams to friends elsewhere brought no opening, Noel decided to accept his father's invitation to visit them in Nebraska until he could get his bearings. Danny John would not have to enter school there until he was seven, Father said.

"Father always has been so fair-minded and true," Noel recollected tenderly. "Being on the school board at home he has put up a valiant fight against the wickedness which is creeping into so many schools everywhere. Father knows. . .

So they were actually leaving Van Strauss. Well, it was not in ignominy and defeat. O some would think so and laugh and point the finger, so to speak. But the years would tell. The years would even vindicate them in the Cause for which they had fought, and which they had seemingly lost. God never loses! The words staunchly declared themselves to their hearts, and Noel and Linda knew it was so! After all, the worst they could say was that Noel had been very "unwise." Strange what cruel penalties can be inflicted on the unwise, when wisdom is meted out so very meagerly to the best of mankind.

Permission was given for them to store their goods in one room of the parsonage, and on September 15th, the Winters went west.

Noel wrote and telegraphed to other friends who might be in a position to point him to a field of labor. When no encouraging news came, he interviewed district superintendents in Nebraska. One after another reported their pastoral positions all filled. The days dragged by. Two weeks, three weeks, four! Noel's funds were gone. Father's resources were low. The added burden of five extra mouths to feed was no little item. When hunting season opened, Noel shot rabbits early in the mornings before he started out to interview district superintendents. But it took more than rabbits to keep them all going. Besides, the little ones were needing winter clothes -- shoes, mittens, pajamas. .

Linda worked doggedly with little Danny John. He was learning to read and add his numbers now. He was a good little student, but Linda wondered how soon she must crumple under the gruelling of that awful game she still was playing -- that of pretending there was nothing wrong!

Every morning dishes were washed, beds were made, rooms were swept and dusted. Life is made up of such infinitesimal things. How could they so shamelessly demand your attention when your mind grappled with the excruciatingly momentous? Every morning Linda woke with the prayer for deliverance tearing at her heart. All through the long day and till her last waking moment, it was still on her lips. Surely it could not last forever, could it? Not if God's promises were true. And Linda never could doubt her Saviour's gracious words of hope given to her at the very beginning of this ordeal. But the mailbox continued bare, the telephone never rang, no one knocked at the door to tell them the long, long night was past.

Five weeks -- six weeks -- the last week in November came. For two days now the wind had been howling around the homestead, whistling by the corners, moaning at the eaves, bringing

rain and coldness, making the heat of flame the only beautiful thing on earth. On the third day a bleak northwester tore in across the prairie. Snow covered the bare, hard earth and banked up against fallen trees, fences and buildings in drifts, three, four, six feet high. Were they stranded, then, for the winter? Must they wait until conference convened in the spring? Had they made a blunder, after all? An irreparable blunder? They had done what they felt was right at the time. God would not forsake them forever, would He, even though they might have misunderstood His leading?

Linda hugged the warm chimney in her bedroom before jumping into bed that night. Strange how this inanimate thing of brick covered with wallpaper could soothe her tired spirit. It had come to take on the qualities of some old friend in the endless nights since she had been there. Just as the warmth of it had warmed her body, so also it imparted something that stole into the very fiber of her with comfort and reassurance. Noel kissed her and rolled wearily into bed. Linda turned to switch off the light and raise the window shades.

Just then, the abrupt, sharp shudder of the telephone bell so startled the nerves of the distracted two, that Linda involuntarily jerked the light off and then on again, simultaneously with Noel's bouncing out of bed like a rubber ball.

"Hello!" she heard him say. "Yes, this is Noel Winters. Where did you say? Near Popejoy? I'll find it. Yes, sir! I'll be glad to, sir! Thank you. Good-bye."

Linda was clasping and unclasping her hands with joy. It was an engagement, at least. Even one preaching service would help.

"We go to Lindlow Sunday for a try-out." Noel was so ecstatic his voice quavered. "It's a German community. They've rejected every preacher assigned to them this fall, holding out for a 'real Gospel preacher,' the superintendent reports."

As excited as a schoolboy, he jumped into his robe and looked about the house for a map of Nebraska.

"Here it is," he exclaimed, and pointed to a dot marked "Lindlow," four miles east of Hayes and about the same distance north of Popejoy. Even Grandpa and Grandma Winters left their beds and joined in the eagerness of the young folk.

Noel insisted that Linda and the little ones take the one hundred mile journey with him on Sunday. "I want the congregation to know I have a family, and one I'm not ashamed of," he persisted.

And so it was decided.

On Saturday everybody went to town. Grandpa Winters took the little boys to the barber shop for a professional haircut and forwarded Noel some money to get them the mittens and boots they needed. It was the start of a new day. No one even suggested the possibility that the try-out

might end in their being rejected. All this could mean only one thing -- God had said, "I will set before you an open door, which no man can shut," and this was it.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 19

Sunday came and went. The Lindlow congregation was as delighted over the prospect of Noel becoming their pastor as Noel was to serve them.

"They gave us their unanimous invitation to work with them," Noel related to Father and Mother Winters that evening. "Father, you ought to see those folk! Stalwart German farmers, as individualistic as they make them. Fine buildings, no grander farms anywhere, and best of all they're pious folk for the most part. They just got tired of young preachers coming in with all this modern stuff they pick up in the seminaries, and refused to have anything to do with them. Said they would close the church till the superintendent could find somebody that would preach them the old-time Gospel they love."

Father slapped his knee and laughed. "Just what you want, son. I'll be up to see you when you get settled. They sound like people I'd like to meet."

"Weezie. . . Weezie, "little Catherine Beth kept lisping under her breath.

"What's that child saying?" Grandmother wondered. "I never heard her say that before."

Linda smiled. "O, the names, Grandma. We stayed for dinner at Wesenbergs. I guess that's what she's trying to say. All the names are German. Hackbarth, Schweiger, Lemke, Capellan. and how they can cook! Everything is swimming in butter and cream. I asked Mrs. Wesenberg what she used to make the ice cream so delicious. She looked at me rather astonished. 'Why, nothing,' she said, 'just cream and sugar and egg and... .' 'All cream!' I exclaimed. 'Sure,' she smiled, 'How else would you make it yet?' 'It's wonderful,' I said, and let it go at that. I didn't want them ever to learn to make it with whole milk and junket."

"And O, Grandpa," Danny John piped up. (Everyone had so much to say, it was hard for the children to get any recognition at all.) "What do you suppose they have for collection plates? Velvet bags fastened on the ends of long poles! The ushers can reach them clear to the other end of the seat and nobody has to pass them at all!"

"Well, I do say." Grandma ejaculated.

"Yes," Noel agreed. "I could see that was taking Danny John's eye. One advantage in velvet bags I see is that he who has little can give as unashamedly as he who has much, for a dime will slip in as silently as a greenback."

Grandma laughed. "Wouldn't be a temptation for someone to slip by with a dime when he could give a greenback, would it?"

It was the fourth of December when Noel and Linda and the little ones moved into their spacious farm home beside the Lindlow church. Someone had filled a whole bin in the basement with corncobs for kindling fires, and another with coal, so that Noel quickly had the furnace fire roaring and heat coming up the registers. Linda and the children made quick inspection of the house, planning where to put their beds and the little additional furniture that was to come from Van Strauss by truck any minute now. When Noel had started the fire in the big, kitchen range, Linda put a beef roast in the oven in a roaster which Grandma had sent along for the purpose. The warm appetizing aroma gave them all a sense of coziness and content at once.

In one hour the truck load of furniture did come. Linda hunted out the kitchen utensils, and by the time the men had tentatively placed the chairs and table, she had a most tempting dinner ready. What a happy time it was! From the very start this wonderful home in Lindlow was as a sweet refuge from all the suffering of the long, long months just past. Now it was as though the clock was beginning to shake the sand out of its bearings and move around more naturally. They felt it was truly a modern day re-enactment of the experience of the Israelites which led Moses to exclaim, ". . . and He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in."

Lindlow's welcome was not the momentary kind, either. Gifts of provisions poured into the parsonage. Furthermore, the congregation's expressions of love were not all to be found in material benefactions. They drank in the Word of Life which Noel so earnestly gave them, as hungrily and thirstily as camels of the desert partake of the bounties of an oasis.

Christmas came, one of the happiest Christmases the Winters had ever enjoyed. First, there was the Christmas Eve program at the church. It seemed to Linda that everything these folk did was done on a larger scale than she had seen it done anywhere else. The candy treat, instead of being in little decorated boxes, was in bulging store sacks as big as footballs. "Packages," the farm folk called them, and packages they were, each holding half a dozen oranges, a pound of nuts and a like amount of chocolates. No one in Lindlow seemed to know there was such a thing as cheap hard candy to put in Christmas treats. Then, too, there was the sumptuous Christmas dinner at the Rankins. Since the relatives included half the neighborhood, half the neighborhood was there, and the Winters besides. Linda never had known that the arms of a community could be so big or could open so wide to welcome a wayfaring family such as she felt themselves to be.

"How characteristic," Linda thought. "Big people, big voices, big hearts!" And how could they help being big? They lived on broad acres of land that stretched away as far as the eye could see, as though there were no boundaries anywhere. They lived under the vast sky that cupped those acres, only touching them on that distant horizon so remote that one had to imagine they touched at all.

Moreover, the Winters were to learn that through those skies in summer and in winter rode storms, commensurate in their strength to the greatness of the prairie itself. But though the wind tore through the telephone wires and whipped through the line of poplars behind the church before pitting its mammoth force against the house, they soon knew, too, that this was a house like all the others, built to withstand just such a wind. The tempests whined around the corners as though crying because their path was blocked, but the little family inside was safe in its little haven, a

refuge indeed from these storms and others which had been even greater than any storms of the elements.

Little Danny John went to the tiny schoolhouse a mile and a quarter beyond the crossroads, but Linda could see it so plainly across the level prairie that it seemed scarcely half that far away. There were fifteen pupils in it -- all children of the stalwart country folk close about. The parents took turn-about driving the children to and from school in winter. On nice days they walked. Linda soon came to appreciate and depend upon the wisdom of these veterans of the prairie, who could sense the approach of a blizzard before any signs of it were visible. At such times a long ring on the telephone would summon everybody on the line, which included most of the neighborhood, and the announcement of "no school" was heralded in multiple quick time.

On one such day Noel insisted he would go to Hayes and lay in a week's supply of groceries. "May be five or six days before the roads will be open again," he reasoned. "Don't worry, though," he added, when he saw Linda anxiously scanning the northwestern sky. "I'll make it before the storm breaks. No sign of snow yet. Just a little dark off there."

Linda watched him until he was lost to view beyond the church building, then she went back to her morning's work. She bundled up the children to go out and play, but had hardly seen them out the door before she hustled them back in again. Just that quickly the wind had risen, furiously, and was hurling its icy bullets of snow against the windowpanes. O, why had Noel started? He hadn't even reached town yet. No telling what the storm would be like before he could get home. There was no use to look for him yet, but Linda found herself momentarily going to the window to observe the progress of the storm. By this time she could not see beyond the church building at all. When the snow thickened in a sudden, more violent blast of wind, she could not see the church building nor even the well pump six feet from the window. O, Noel couldn't make it. No one could in such a raging tempest. Why had she let him go?

Suddenly the telephone rang and Linda answered to hear Mrs. Rankin's voice. "Don't worry, Mrs. Winters." The voice was cheery, so Linda relaxed a moment. "Your husband's car floundered out in front of our place in a snow drift. He's in here now warming up before he starts home on foot. The car will have to wait until we can pull it out with a tractor."

Linda never knew how she answered Mrs. Rankin. Now Noel was coming on foot! Renewed anxiety clutched her. Three miles through this blizzard! She walked to the windows time and again and peered out into the white blankness. There was no use to try to go on with her work. She pulled the rocker to the window and with the children piled on her lap, she watched and waited.

Then quite suddenly a grey shapeless bulk took form outside the window, and Noel stumbled in from the snows. The children ran squealing, to meet him, and Linda, taking from him the bundle he had slung over his shoulders, lifted her heart heavenward. O, thank Thee, kindly Father, for lighting the paths of men who go away and the candles of women who stay and watch for them.

Spring swept early across the wide open spaces, and before Linda knew it, housecleaning time had come, the garden and outdoor work beckoned, and summer was upon them. It was one sweet evening in June that Linda sat on the porch steps talking to her three little ones of the fiery sun that went down in a splash of gold, the wonders of the twinkling stars, the nectar of the honeysuckle and roses, the faint nestling sounds of tiny insects and the loving Father who crowned all these beauties of nature with tender love to all His children. She paused, breathing deeply and exultantly of the first fresh evening breezes wafting the perfume of new-mown hay from nearby spacious fields. From somewhere, too, came the sound of singing -- lusty, joyous, carefree singing. They listened, the mother and her little ones, when down a neighbor's lane stole the faint rumble of wheels. Then in the falling shadows, there came slowly into view a team of horses pulling a hay wagon with its group of happy toilers wending their way homeward. They were singing, "Bringing in the Sheaves," that old favorite of all. What matter that it was hay instead of golden sheaves of grain? Soon it would be sheaves. And Linda knew, too, that the men who sang were thinking not only of hay and grain, but of precious souls their faith was already harvesting.

In the singing there was faintly distinguishable a strangely familiar rolling of the r's. Yes, Emanuel Capellan was in the company. It was his favorite song. Linda had heard him sing it identically the same way many times as he led the opening exercises in their Sunday School. A sacred hush settled down upon the ones on the parsonage steps with the passing of the wagon. The little scene with its music had been a benediction to the day.

Linda thought of the first glimpses she had had of the treeless plains surrounding Mentor. She had been awed without being captivated. But now, with even vaster spaces of emptiness around her, she was actually becoming charmed with its very magnificence. The prairie was now a part of her, and she of the prairie. How had it come about? The Lindlow people themselves had done it. These men and women who lived near the soil and near the Creator. Nowhere could God have found for them and their little family a more peaceful retreat nor more wholesome surroundings. How wonderful if the children could grow up here. Did preachers ever stay in one place that long? Linda wondered.

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CHAPTER 20

It had been two years since Noel had officiated at the wedding of Edwin and Harriett, and just as long since they had been heard from, except for the announcement of little Kenneth Daniel's arrival and for some bits of news of them relayed by Grandma Winters. When, therefore, one day in July, Noel found a letter from Edwin in the mailbox, he was almost apprehensive as to the strange news it might contain. However, as he read, Linda observed a relaxed expression resting on his face, which in turn shifted to an aspect of amusement.

"What do you think, Linda, he wants me to come to Tennessee!" Noel announced. "Down in the Smokies! Good schools, wonderful field, scarcity of preachers, he says. Every preacher has three to eight churches. He's having the time of his life preaching three times a Sunday and holding a revival in each church every year. Says he's in a revival somewhere practically all the time. The

conference would honor my B. D. degree from Christian Seminary and I'd have no trouble getting in. . . ."

Now Noel was weighing the question aloud. "I appreciate his invitation, but he doesn't know what wonderful folk I'm working with here. It looks like it's out of the question now. I'd like to have a few more chances to warn these people not to let their affections rest on these worldly riches all about them. It's easy for farmers to become absorbed in the earthy, to depend on their broad acres and the fruit of the land instead of seeking the mansions in the skies. . . ."

The letter was laid aside and all but forgotten in the concerted preparations for a tent meeting that was soon to begin in Emanuel Capellan's grove.

How swiftly the days of harvest passed! Great barns were filled. Silos bulged with winter feed. Will Schweiger even tore down his corn cribs and built a greater. He made the new one of cement block and made it as big as an ordinary barn. ". . . and it's rat proof," he pointed out to Noel. "This will be here when I'm gone. My boys and my neighbors will remember me by this rat proof corn crib." The words were spoken with evident selfsatisfaction.

Yes, Will, but what a poor monument, after all!

Noel was afraid for this one of his sheep. He was prominent in the church, had been the first to show them through the parsonage, yet so earth bound!

Noel's going to conference that year was more of a gesture than a necessity as far as his appointment for the next year was concerned, so he thought. An almost unanimous petition for his return to Lindlow already had been presented to the superintendent. It was just as good as being a foregone conclusion that no change would be made.

It was planned that Linda and the children would go to Lincoln with the Lemkes and Rankins early Sunday morning, attend the closing conference sessions that day with Noel and come home with him after it was all over. Saturday evening, Linda made a huge bowl of potato salad as her contribution to the noon meal, pressed her own dress and the little boys' suits and lengthened the hem in Catherine's best dress. She had tucked the two younger children in bed and was scrubbing Danny John's ticklish, wriggling feet when a car drove in the driveway and stopped at the kitchen door. Linda draped a towel around Danny John and stepped to the door. Why, it looked like their own car! It was! Noel banged the car door shut and was in the doorway beside her.

"Well, Linda, it's Tennessee for us. At least I think it is. God seemed to tell me so on the way home, anyway. The superintendent informed me today he was sending me to Popejoy. More of a 'killjoy' I think it would be. No field at all over there. Well, when I first got to conference I found out something that I don't think even a lot of our church people knew. Two weeks ago, Will Schweiger gathered a few of the others around him and sent a request to the bishop for a conference man. You know, Linda, this has been only a supply charge. I came in here as a supply, not being a member of the conference. Of course the superintendent is always anxious to raise his churches to full conference level. To get a preacher other than a supply, the church will have to pay him two hundred dollars a year more -- twelve hundred dollars, in other words, but Will and

his men promised to pay the extra. I think it's been my preaching against worldly gain being a soulsaver that's done it. But that's all right. I've always said I would keep my suitcase packed ready to leave any time, rather than compromise the truth. I have to be true to men to save my own soul and theirs. Well, I'll go, free from the blood of all men, anyway."

Many thoughts had been spinning around simultaneously in Linda's brain. It had been nice to live there in Lindlow. It had been wonderful! But they were young, and there was something of adventure in the thought of going to Tennessee, to the Great Smoky Mountain country.

Then another thought struck her. "But why," she asked Noel, "why can't you be a conference man -- in full connection, I mean? You have your B. D. from Christian."

"That's just it," Noel told her, "from Christian. Some conferences feel they're too far advanced to honor a B. D. from Christian. That school's too spiritual for them. To become a member of most conferences I'd have to go to seminary again -- to one of their modern schools. I just can't cater to them. None of their schools measure up to Christian in the spiritual essentials and I can't waste time and money studying the modernism they teach."

"Of course not, dear. But what if - . . . what if something interferes with you getting an appointment in Tennessee? You know Edwin may not know anything definite from headquarters."

"I know. We'll just have to contact the superintendent, of course, but I believe God is pointing us that way. As I said, I felt reassured about it on the way home. Fortunately, or rather, providentially, Smoky Conference meets in Knoxville next week. That conference includes churches in both Virginia and Tennessee. I'll get a telegram off to Edwin early tomorrow morning. By Wednesday or Thursday we ought to know something.

All the next day, Linda found herself wavering between the prospects at Popejoy and work in the Smoky Mountains. Unmistakably her heart responded more readily to the latter. She had to admit it was partly because of the adventure it promised, but it was also because of the neediness of the field as described by Edwin.

Monday morning, Noel telephoned his telegram in to the office, then he went to town to find a man to make a trailer in which they could haul their few pieces of furniture behind their car. Linda marvelled at his faith. It would be quite a loss of money to have the trailer made and then discover they would be moving only four miles to Popejoy. O, well, in that event, maybe they could sell it to a farmer.

Linda started at once to take down pictures, to pack books, canned fruits and vegetables -- the same routine she had followed five times previously. After the curtains were washed she packed them. There would be no use to iron them until they got in their new home. She felt as though she was becoming a real specialist in the art of moving. By Wednesday, a sturdy, roomy, two-wheeled trailer stood at the end of the front porch. It was an easy matter to carry boxes from the house and place them compactly in its broad bed. By Thursday evening everything was loaded but the clothes they would need on the trip and the blankets Linda had reserved for makeshift beds on the floor that night.

Periodically during her tasks, Linda envisioned her labors as being a modern example of the title of Shakespeare's play, "Much Ado About Nothing." She was packing things with unusual care to go only four miles, she joked with Noel. But Noel silenced her playful teasing with his sure faith that they would go to Tennessee. When, at ten o'clock that night, a telegram from a superintendent in the Smoky Conference confirmed that faith, not only did Linda's heart bound with joy, but Noel at once took on a lightheartedness and an anticipation for the future that was good to see.

On Saturday the little family left their spacious farm home of refuge, all swept and empty. And, as they left, somewhat of that emptiness stole into their hearts, as it does with those who are leaving dear places and befriending people. Noel eased the car and trailer out of the driveway that wound around behind the church and onto the "street" as the farm people called their road. Over to the right was the Schweiger farm, and there was Oliver waving good-by with his pitchfork. No sign of Will and Ada. They were in the barn milking, no doubt. Farther on to the left was one of the Hackbarth places. Rachel and Shirley had waited long at their mailbox to say good-by to Danny John, Kent and Catherine as they went by. At another Hackbarth home farther down the road on the right, Frebert and Emma were both standing out by the milkhouse to wave good-by. The Rankins were next. Their house stood a quarter of a mile back from the road, but they could see Sarah waving her apron, and Henry his straw hat. Farther west on the opposite side the Capellan farm came into view. Linda remembered the first time she had seen their "Happy Home Farm" sign among the maples in the front yard. Now, there by the windmill, stood Emanuel, his wife, and Gerald, all with their arms and faces lifted in more of a benediction than a farewell. Wesenbergs came at the end of the line and they were standing out by the mailbox. Mrs. Wesenberg flagged the car to a stop and handed Linda a box. "Just to remember us by," she smiled as they grasped hands in a warm farewell.

It was not easy to leave these people, but neither had it been their choice. Evidently it was all in the providence of God, and they must look forward, not back. "There are wonderful people wherever you go," Linda said truthfully.

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CHAPTER 21

After a little visit over Sunday with Father and Mother Winters, Noel and Linda and their little ones set out on their twelve hundred mile trip to the Southeast. After paying the last installment on the car, Noel had seventy-five dollars with which to finance the trip. When fifty dollars of that went to pay for the trailer, Father voiced his fears that it was risky to attempt such a journey with only twenty-five.

"What if a tire goes bad, son? You'll be stranded somewhere down in those mountains. Better take this twenty, and you can send it back later if you don't need it."

But Noel would have none of it. "It'll take us through, Father. That's what the Lord has allowed us to get there on, and we won't need any more."

Father never knew it, but the first night out, Noel and the boys slept on the ground, and Linda and Catherine curled up in the car to save expenses. For four days the little party travelled in perfect weather through the golden haze of autumnal glory before they touched the border of Tennessee at Bristol. Never had the little ones seen mountains before, and never had the mountains been more gorgeously clothed. On both sides of the winding road were breath-taking blendings of splendor -- bright greens, deep greens, scarlet reds, maroons, purples, browns, bronzes, and golden brilliancies more fantastic than any artist but the Master Artist could have painted them. Linda clasped to herself all this grandeur that she knew now she had been starving for out on the prairie. Yes, there were grandeurs there, too, but of a different sort, and it seemed to take them both to round out all the demands of one's aesthetic being.

On Thursday, the car with its cargo trailing behind, came to a stop before a one-story, friendly, rambling parsonage, furnished with the conveniences of a city dwelling. It was cozy and comfortable, and Linda felt at home at once. Though the journey was completed without a single mishap, Noel awoke the next morning after their arrival to find that one of the trailer tires was flat, as though now, having performed its duty, it felt justified in indulging in a period of relaxation.

The Winters' appointment centered in Glade, a small city poured out over a circle of hills with the valley down in the center of them -- a setting not unlike a huge bowl lined with houses and lawns and factories and creeks. Their parsonage sat on the flaredout rim of the bowl. Here they were then, on a spacious plateau of the Smoky Mountains where the summers were never too hot and the winters never too cold; where the air was sweet and fresh under the blue sky everywhere, and one had the feeling of living on top of the world. Only a few miles to the east, the great Scenic Highway wound its way through the skies, connecting Maine with Florida. On any clear day one could stand on this highway at the edge of the ridge and look down upon the miniature doings of mankind thousands of feet below and then beyond them to the mists hovering over Carolina's Pilot Mountain fifty miles away. Linda loved the country with its ever-changing beauty, its mountain cabins and leisurely, humble folk. On the other hand, she admired its aristocracy, its gentility, and soft voices.

Noel had seven churches on his circuit -- Mt. Vale, Oakland, Glenwood, Asbury, Bishop's Chapel, West Glade, and Savannah, this last one situated just across the North Carolina line. Edwin and Harriett had preceded him here and had left a good foundation on which to build. For the rest of his life, Noel would have a warm place in his heart for the Glade Circuit, especially so for the Glenwood Church. In this church Luther Payne worshipped. He was a mountain preacher in his own right and a lover of the old writings of Methodism. He loaned Noel a copy of John Fletcher's Portraits of St. Paul, which was to enrich the younger man's ministry ever afterward. This introduction to Fletcher and his later acquisition of all of Fletcher's works meant more to Noel than much of his seminary training. He now entered what he called, "Brush Arbor College," and the revelations of truth opened up to his heart therein blazed from glory to glory throughout the years ahead.

Noel started into his work with the same spirit which possessed the rugged pioneer circuit riders of our country's infancy. His spirit of enthusiasm caught even the boys. How could they help? Linda got each of them a horn with money she received from the sale of a musical instrument

of her own --a trumpet for Danny John and a cornet for Kent. Their playing could be a lift in the singing where there was no piano in the church. They learned their notes quickly. They worked faithfully to get clear tones and were soon playing duets. Before long Noel took them with him whenever he could and found them to be a big help.

The fall in Tennessee this year was long and beautiful. Day after day came and went without bringing any signs of chilling weather, except the gradual thinning of leaves in the maples and chestnuts. Then, just as November passed its halfway mark, a moist wind blew, cold and hostile through the tree tops. The last leaf was torn from its twig and spun down. Winter had come. The remaining days of the month dragged by, cold and dark and awesome. December stepped in, awesome and dark and cold.

It was a Monday in mid-December. Linda did not feel well, but it was washday and the work must go on. She helped Noel put the big boiler of water on the stove. The fog was still heavy and chill on the mountains when Linda hung out the "miles" of clothes. Perhaps later it would clear away and the sun would shine upon them. Back and forth from the house to the clothesline she went, leaning upon the Strong for strength.

The sun did not appear all that day, but the mountain breezes swept away the low fog and dried all the clothes. Linda took them in that evening, got the supper and did the dishes, washed the little ones and tucked them in bed. After all this was done and there was no more that could be done that day, a little son was born into the Winters household -- Noel and Linda's third son. Like Kent, he was born at home, and for the same reason -- the hospitals were too expensive.

"He didn't want to interrupt the doings of the day, so he just waited until he was sure he'd be welcome," Linda smiled. "Noel, he couldn't have suited me any better. He's just perfect!"

"Sure!" Noel agreed. "Just what we wanted!"

"Exactly!" Linda whispered. And then, "O God, please grant that he may grow up to be a saint that will challenge the world to holy living!"

The next day Noel and Linda named the little newcomer Wesley Fletcher. "It's fitting that one of our boys should bear the names of these two men whose writings have been such a help to my ministry," Noel said.

By Christmas day Linda was strong enough to sit at the table for the festive dinner. Ollie, who was the nurse, was also a good cook. Her special pride was baking biscuits of melting fluffiness, a delicacy rarely available in such a degree of perfection except in Tennessee. The remains of that wonderful dinner were packed in a basket for Ollie to "tote."

Ollie left when Wesley was three weeks old. Linda could manage things now, they thought. Linda, too, thought that she ought to be able to. Never had she had help longer than three weeks, sometimes not that long. Still, the work looked like a mountain to her, and the weeks that followed were nightmares of heavy loads to pull. Each evening found her tired out. Apparently there was nothing that could be done about it. There was no money to hire additional help. At this

unseasonable time the churches had begun failing to pay their promised apportionment of the pastor's salary. Oakland, alone, was faithful. There was this to be thankful for -- that it was Oakland. Without their twenty dollars a month, things would look dark indeed. But what of Mt. Vale, Asbury, Glenwood and others? Had the people exhausted their funds at the Christmas season, or was the inclement weather occasioning such small attendance that they could not get enough resources together to pay? Linda needed the best of food. But even with milk at seven and a half cents a quart, they could buy only a quart a day, which was just not enough to go around. And always the children came first.

One day a neighbor woman knocked at the door. Linda had been throwing their table scraps to her chickens, and now the woman handed her two half-gallon jars of string beans. How nice of her, Linda thought. They would be a welcome addition to their skimpy diet. But no sooner did she take them into her hands than she noticed that the lids were bulged. The beans were buried in the garden.

Toward the end of January, Noel became determined that the situation must change. One whole day he closeted himself in the bedroom and prayed as only Noel could pray in emergencies. Oddly enough, all that day Linda felt herself weakening more and more under a sudden attack of flu. It seemed that adversity was following upon the heels of adversity. Not a cent did they have to see a doctor. Linda could see that Noel was puzzled. All that day of prayer, and matters steadily getting worse instead of better. Well, it was no time to quit. There was no help anywhere if not in God. Back to his prayer closet Noel went and persisted until late that night.

The next day Linda was burning with fever and was so weak that she could hardly lift the baby from his bed to feed and care for him. By afternoon pain was shooting in her ear, the old, familiar trouble of years before, and besides all this, each of the three older children was fussing with sore throat. Noel put on his hat and coat. He was going to see a doctor. Linda tried to soothe the kiddies as best as she could. Help would come. God could not go back on His promises.

Presently, the children stopped their whining and drew closer to Mother. Someone was knocking at the door.

"Come in," Linda called, and while they all waited uncertainly, the door opened upon a distinguished member of the Glade First Church.

"Why, good morning, Mrs. Girsch," Linda greeted her. "Come in and sit down, won't you please? We're embarrassed by illness in our family. I'm sorry not to be able to greet you hospitably."

Mrs. Girsch was as gracious as she was distinguished. Her unaffected manner and low, musical voice bespoke that pleasing gentility which is inherently a characteristic of southern aristocracy. "I came to see if you would do some art work for me, but since you are sick we'll leave that until some later time. You need a doctor and some help. Is your husband?"

Just then Noel stepped in the doorway, disappointment written on his face. "Doctor wasn't in, dear. O, Mrs. Girsch, pardon me for not greeting you first. I didn't know we had a visitor."

"Perfectly all right, Rev. Winters. I'm sorry to see your family in such straits. Your wife needs a doctor. If you'll permit me, I think I can locate one for you, and it won't cost you a cent."

Before Noel could decide whether to remonstrate or to speak for his gratitude, Mrs. Girsch had sensed their relief and with a smile for Linda and a loving pat for each child, she was off in her big car for aid.

In ten minutes she was back. "Dr. Cox is in and wants to see you in his office, Linda," she announced. "I'll help you get ready."

It was as Linda had known all day. Infection had flared up in the same old trouble spot. The doctor ordered hospital treatment at once "But take her to Roanoke," he advised. "We have neither the facilities nor the doctors here in Glade to treat this. She needs the care of a specialist, and the sooner, the better."

Linda's heart sank, and she could see that Noel's face was anxious. Not even enough money for adequate food, and now a hospital bill! And how could she leave with the children all sick? But Mrs. Girsch was taking the situation in hand.

Now. Mrs. Winters, don't you worry one minute. I'm taking them home with me after Doctor gives me medicine for them and I'll send Lucy right up to help you get ready to go to hospital. With a few days' treatment, you'll be back again, rested up, and stronger than ever."

"O. . . . do you really think so?" Tears were almost audible in Linda's voice. An operation had seemed inevitable, but Mrs. Girsch seemed so confident, that Linda began to hope it might not come to that.

Mrs. Girsch left and Lucy came. Lucy was Mrs. Girsch's colored help -- a young woman of slight build with fine features and a real love for children. She straightened up the house, collected together the children's clothes according to Linda's directions, bathed the baby, ironed and packed his clothes ready for departure with his mother, and helped Linda prepare to go. Linda had never known before how attractive Lucy was. She was beautiful!

No one had thought of it being dinner time until Mrs. Bunts came in with a basket on her arm. Mrs. Bunts was the wife of the minister of First Church. Evidently Mrs. Girsch had told her how things were at the little circuit parsonage. In her basket was roast beef, potatoes, and all the rest. There was a whole quart of orange juice especially for the patient. What luxury! How they would have feasted on that bounty a few days ago. It had been weeks since any of them had seen roast beef. And oranges! Now, no one felt like eating. Before going out the door, Linda glanced regretfully at the untouched basket on the kitchen table. She hoped Noel would be back to enjoy it before the contents wasted and spoiled.

Noel stayed with Linda at the hospital until they had lanced and drained her ear, administered seven pills of the new sulfa drug, and pronounced an operation not likely to be necessary. Noel went home to meet his church appointments on Sunday.

Sunday for Linda was very quiet and painless and strangely sweet. God again had lighted her candle in a dark place. "How good it is," Linda thought to herself, "to have a hospital to care for you when you are sick, to have others -- nurses, doctors, good friends -- to assume the responsibilities you are not able to carry, and then how good it is just to rest!" She felt assured also that God was going to work out the financial problem some way. All day she delighted herself in this land of quiet weariness, this cool, free from fever, pleasant day-after-sickness land where there was no stir except the tiptoeing of white-clad nurses and the falling of white snow outside.

It was nearly a week before danger was definitely past, but finally on Wednesday, with the permission of the doctor, Noel came to take Linda home. He had much to tell her. The kiddies had all been nursed back to health, and Rev. Bunts had so pled their cause among the churches on the circuit that every cent of Noel's salary had been paid up-to-date, topped off by a love offering to help in their present emergency.

"I had enough to pay the whole hospital bill," Noel informed her, "and Dr. Stone refused to charge anything." This unexpected mercy of the Lord was just like the "exceeding abundantly" that characterizes Him.

When, on their way home, Noel and Linda stopped at Mrs. Girsch's to get the children, Linda's joy was complete. By this time it was hard for the Girsches to give up their charges. Daddy and Mommy must stay until Catherine played "Jesus Loves Me" on the piano.

"Picked out that tune by herself," Mr. Girsch boasted when Catherine had finished her one-finger performance. "Now that's some kid, I'd say, for a four-year-old."

"And you should have heard us laugh at her the other day," Mrs. Girsch hastened to relate. "I was warming milk for their breakfasts when a caller came to the door. Of course, I forgot the milk until right in the midst of our conversation, Catherine came tripping to me singing in the greatest glee, 'Hi-lo, the dar-i-o, the milk's boiling over!' Now did you ever!"

The Girsches laughed as though the whole scene had just taken place. Noel and Linda joined with them in their amusement over the incident, but knew they were laughing more at the novelty of having someone else "show off" their own child to themselves than over what she had done.

It was wonderful to be able to tuck her little ones into bed again, Linda thought, and to lie down in her own bed once more. How good God had been! How brightly He had made her candle to burn, and how marvellously He had worked out a seeming tragedy to their blessing and good. Noel must have been having similar thoughts. "To think," he mused and then chuckled, "I prayed my wife into the hospital!"

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CHAPTER 22

As the months sped by, Linda gave more and more time to the children. To Danny John and Kent she read Bible stories, simple biographies of missionaries and great and good people, also choice bits of poetry and history. Even Catherine seemed absorbed in this diversion of their evenings, though Linda wondered just how much of the reading a four-year-old could absorb. More, perhaps, than one might think. Now, with the four to wash and iron for, feed, and keep clean, it was a struggle to rightly cultivate the intellectual and spiritual in her little charges, but she valiantly seized that hour before bedtime each evening and redeemed it for the higher things of life. The more she sacrificed for her little ones, the more she wanted to give them. She marvelled at their hunger for her companionship, and then often found them at their play telling over and over to one another the stories she had read them.

Though his duties were numerous, Noel, too, took time to instruct the children in the way of salvation. He taught them about God and His commandments, about heaven and hell.

One day the little ones had been exceptionally unruly. It seemed they just could not keep out of trouble. Finally, Noel administered punishment and then took them out for a walk. He told them that Jesus was coming back to earth again and that He might come any time. "Jesus is not pleased with naughty boys and girls," he said, "and Jesus cannot take them to heaven when He comes, unless they feel sorry for what they have done. They must ask Him to forgive their naughtiness and pray for Him to help them not to do bad things any more."

"Then can they go to heaven?" one of them asked.

"Yes, then they can go to heaven."

Back at the parsonage they all went into the bedroom and knelt down.

"Daddy will pray to Jesus," Noel said, "and if you are really sorry and want Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your hearts so you can go to heaven, you say the words after Daddy."

Noel prayed a little prayer, the children chiming in together after him.

When it was over, Danny John jumped to his feet and danced around, clapping his hands. His eyes sparkled with joy. "O, I'm so happy!" he cried. "O, I'm so happy!"

Catherine Beth followed suit. All the next day little Danny's face beamed with the blessing of his new-found Saviour. It was an experience he was never to forget. Kent, though not quite so demonstrative, came to Mother with his eyes bright. He had received a perception of spiritual things characterized by reality, which demonstrated itself periodically in the many days to come. At one time when the Winters were visiting Grandpa and Grandma Kent, Jeanne Hall stopped by to see them. As she drove up the driveway she heard loud talking and shouting emanating from behind the garage. Danny was standing out in front, and when Jeanne got out of her car, he looked at her very solemnly and explained, "Kent's prayin'."

One could not tell what possibilities lay in those little minds and souls, and it was going to be wonderful through the years to watch their development, but Linda knew she must pray for them mightily, for the enemy of souls would not let them grow up to serve the Lord, if he could help it.

One morning in June, Linda felt unusually solicitous over the children. Danny was busy putting wheels on some kind of soapbox cart. But Kent and Catherine were restless. School had just closed for the summer and Kent did not seem to know what to do with himself. Linda wanted to make some iced cupcakes for dinner, but she was out of sugar. That would give Kent something to do -- go after the sugar. He might as well get a can of peas, too, while he was at the store.

Linda called him in. Yes, he would go. "But can't Cathy go, too?" he begged. "It's lonesome to go by myself."

"Are you sure you're big enough to take care of Cathy, Kent? She's quite small to go downtown, you know."

Kent straightened his little shoulders, and the look in his eye left no need for words. Of course he was capable! Linda watched them go. They looked so little when they were a block away. Maybe it had been risky to let Catherine go, but Kent had gone many times before. There was no reason why they could not make it.

Linda went back to the kitchen. There were a few pieces yet to iron before she started on the cup cakes. The children would be back by the time she was ready. Fifteen minutes passed. Twenty. They should come now. There. Someone came in the door. No, it was Danny telling his father in the study that someone out front wanted to see him. Linda left the kitchen to see for herself. Danny held something out to her -- two objects.

"Why, Danny! Where did you get these?"

"The man gave them to me." Danny handed Linda a broken sack of sugar and a can of peas with a huge dent in the side of it.

"O, Danny!" Linda wailed. She ran trembling to the door. "That man came to get Daddy, and they're gone! Something's happened to Kent and Cathy! Come on!"

She pulled Danny with her as they flew down the street. Where to look? Had they gone this way and been run over by a car backing out of the service station? O, why hadn't the man waited for her? Didn't they know she could tell something had happened by the sugar and the. . . Danny was whimpering. Linda was chiding herself. In all this excitement and anxiety she was blaming herself. She might have known. They had looked so little when she had watched them go.

But this was no way to do. "My candle, Lord. Remember to light.."

At the corner a blue car drove up and stopped. Catherine was waving to her out the window, but Kent was not there. It was he, then hurt. . . or.

"What happened?" Linda's voice was muffled, as though it had stopped in her own ears.

"A truck," the man was saying, "bumped him. I think he'll be all right soon. He's at Dr. Cox's. Step in. I'll take you down."

Little Wesley was alone in his crib at home, but no matter. Linda never knew how she made her way through the hushed little crowd outside the doctor's office. The nurse took her to the examining room, and there she saw him. So little, so crumpled now, white, unconscious. Her boy! She bent over him. He was breathing, thank God! Noel was there. He took her hand.

"No serious injuries showing up yet" The doctor's voice was far away. "Bad bump on that left temple and ear. Hard to tell what complications might develop. Keep him in bed."

"Mommy. . . ." Out of the shadows the word was spoken.

"Yes, darling. Mother's here."

"Mommy, I'm sorry... I went. . . the wrong way."

"Yes, dear. Just rest. We'll talk about that later."

Linda kissed him tenderly. How gracious God was to spare him! Noel picked the little limp body up in his arms and laid him gently on the back seat of the friendly blue car. It was not until they got home that they knew just what had happened. The incident was pieced together by the stories of the truck man and Catherine. Kent had seen a riveting machine at work across the street opposite the grocery store. The temptation was irresistible. He must watch it just a minute. They could cross the street there just as well as farther up where he usually did. He would watch the red and green light.

He did watch the light, but when it was green for Kent, it was also green for an ice truck which swung around the corner and caught Kent before either one saw the other. Kent had been hurled ten feet in the air ahead of the truck and had come down on the hard pavement, landing on his temple and ear. Little Catherine, more timid, had not yet started across the street. Standing on the sidewalk, she had seen it happen. The blue car saw it, too, and befriended the frantically sobbing little girl and the unconscious little victim.

Now, with Kent at home laughing and talking again, Catherine took on a new role, that of the heroine in a thritting neartragedy. She poured out her story like water gurgling from a jug. "And Mommy," she piped superiorly, "I even had to tell them what doctor we used!"

* * * * *

CHAPTER 23

Down towards fall the year sped on. The Winters had been at Glade almost three years now. Incredible, it seemed. Soon the day would come that conference would convene, and they

would be hanging over the map of Tennessee as precariously as the last fall apples were hanging on their stems. Would they land again in Glade or in some new spot in the great orchard of life, looking now so foreboding because so unknown? Conference met in Bristol the last week of September. Appointments were read on the last Monday, but Noel would not be home until midnight. Was there not some way of having the uncertainty settled without waiting for his late return? Linda scanned the evening paper. It was hardly possible they could have gotten the report in time to publish. But just then, a small notice at the bottom of the first page caught her eye.

"Dr. W. M. Bunts yields pastorate of First Church, to become district superintendent of Cumberland District. Dr. D. W. Matherly, former pastor at Abingdon, will be his successor here."

Linda hurriedly skipped the details of this account, but lingered long on a single statement at the end of the paragraph. "Rev. N. D. Winters, pastor of the Glade Circuit has been appointed to the Thurston charge, located in the Cumberland District. Rev. R. B. Gibbs comes to take his place."

"Located in the Cumberland District," Linda read again. Since they had to move, it was too bad all the adventure and anticipation they might have had in going to a new place was squelched by that phrase. Linda's impressions of Cumberland District were quite unfavorable because of her memory of one of its towns. Stonega was a pastorate in this district which Edwin and Harriett had served. It was a coal camp, made up of two rows of dirty shacks, a railroad between, and coke ovens nearby, rolling out their soot and cinders into a perpetually smoke-saturated atmosphere! Even with all the windows down and the doors shut, Harriett had been unable to keep the black powder from sifting in on her curtains, upholstery and rugs. It was a continuously losing battle to try to keep things clean, and all but ruinous to one's furnishings. No doubt the town of Thurston was a coal camp, too. They all were, in the Cumberland District. How could she leave the clean, clear air of Glade and go into that grime? How could she? Well, there were lost sheep there, and some shepherd must go to find them. At once the challenge cheered her.

They started to pack the next day after Noel came home. He was boyishly enthusiastic. "We'll have just three churches there, dear. I can give more time to individual people. They're hardworking coal miners, no doubt, and will stand as rugged a Gospel as I can give them. We'll have a great time!"

On October the second they moved. In spite of her trepidation as to what kind of living conditions she would find, it seemed to Linda that they would never get to their destination. Much of the first seventy-five miles of the trip was through rolling wooded country, beautiful now in its fall array. Just as a signpost announced their approach to Hathaway Gap, the woods ended in a great semicircular sweep, as though the trees had been sown by the mighty hand of God and there had been no more seed in the sack. The road widened, the vegetation withdrew, and they were in the town.

"What an interesting name it has," thought Linda. Her mind went back to saintly Rev. Hathaway who had married them. They soon left the town behind them, and for five miles more, they wound around rugged, rock-jutted mountains beside a torrential creek, until they came out on a road cut from the side of one of those mountains. And there they were -- houses, rows of them

down below, lined up along the railroad. A typical coal camp. Linda's heart sank. But no! These houses looked empty! They were! It must be an abandoned camp. On they went, circling, climbing, then rounding a rock wall. Abruptly they came into the town. Noel slowed the car. Quite nice houses lined the road on each side. There was a church to the right, but it was not theirs. Next to it were two, large, up-to-date school buildings and then the business district. Here the street was more crowded. Slowly the car wended its way past the stores and between houses again. The houses here were smaller, for the most part -- a few neat white houses, but more and more cabin-like dwellings, little cheaply-built red ones. Which one would be theirs, Linda wondered. They passed an old, large frame church building on the left. Yes, it was theirs, they learned from a passerby whom they asked. He would show them to the parsonage, too. Farther down on the left, he pointed it out -- a cozy-looking white bungalow, crowded in by two less sightly habitations. Mingled with the gratification that their dwelling was one of the best in the town was Linda's sense of their unworthiness to be thus blessed above the people they would minister to.

A hasty inspection of the house proved it to be almost new, with running water and a brick foundation, features generally lacking in most of the houses surrounding them. The red cabins across the road stood on six to eight feet stilts which raised their porch floors to the level of the road, while directly back of them, and, after heavy rains, more truthfully under them, ran the ever torrential mountain creek which served as the village dump, garbage disposal and sewer. Behind the creek rose the stiff side of one of the mountains of the Cumberland range -- a mass of autumnal beauty looking down benignly on all the untidiness below. Back of the parsonage there proved to be a small garden hemmed in at the rear by four rows of railroad tracks, on which, night and day, moved a never-ending line of "empties" on their way to the mines, and then the filled cars, pulled by massive Tennessee "mallets" on their way back to the four corners of America. Beyond the railroad appeared another row of conglomerate cabins and cottages backed in the rear by a second range of the Cumberlands. The trains would be responsible for enough smoke and grime, but they could not compare with Stonega's coke ovens, Linda thankfully decided.

There are always some things in every new place which have a way of jumping out to meet one's attention, so to speak. After living in Thurston a few weeks, there were three phenomena that characterized the place as being different than any Noel and Linda had seen before.

First in evidence were the cows. Since there was obviously no pasture land for the animals, they were allowed to roam the roadside to gather what provender they could. How they managed to make a living at all was something of a mystery. There was so little greenery that the cattle had to keep on the move continually to get even a skimpy meal.

The fact of the cows' presence was the explanation for the fences surrounding every house and yard, the importance of which the Winters soon discovered. It would not do to forget, ever, to latch the gate, for if and when they did, some cow in the neighborhood always knew it and at once took the opportunity to feed on porch vines, the contents of flower boxes and even store boxes thrown on the trash heap. The climax came one day when Linda washed her kitchen curtains and hung them on the line in the back yard. Linda had made the curtains and had decorated them with her own needlework-appliqued borders of climbing green vines. On this day the gate was forgotten, and some poor cow, taking the vines to be genuine, ate off every border. The only comfort Linda could get out of the affair was that her art was so realistic as to fool even a cow, but

it was rather far-fetched comfort, since she was now obliged to make new curtains. Linda often wondered what kind of milk such rations would afford, but she never found out, for Noel bought their milk from a dairy near Jonesville where farmers had genuine pasture for their cows.

Thurston's second distinctive feature was the prevalence of snakes, though not necessarily where one lived. There were many rattlers and other species of venomous snakes on the mountains and in the creek, but none of the Winters saw one in their yard or in the garden back of the house. Only Danny was ever in close proximity to a rattler. This was while he was hoeing in Daddy's potato patch across the creek. He heard an ominous buzz behind him, and, turning in time to see the reptile coiled for a spring, jumped the remaining rows of plants to safety.

It was not these snakes at large, however, that gave most anxiety to Noel, his family and congregation, but it was those captured and harbored for religious worship by a certain group in town. The authorities had attempted to put a stop to the weekly procedures of the cult, but as long as no one was fatally bitten in the services, no charges could be brought. There was nothing for it, then, but to pray that no new devotees would be deceived into joining the group. Linda had never gone near their meetings which were held on the stony banks of the creek just out of town. But Noel had come upon them suddenly at a bend in the road as he returned from one of his country churches on a hot Sunday afternoon. The snakes were lazy, whether because of the heat or because of some deadening serum given them, Noel did not know, though the party always denied doping their reptiles. Six or seven large rattlers were being handed around among the company by men and women alike. One mother draped a snake around her own baby's neck. Noel said the baby screamed with such terror as to look as though it would go insane.

"A mother like that doesn't deserve to have a sweet, little innocent baby," was Linda's outspoken opinion. For days she could not get the thought of such cruelty off her mind. Now and then someone was bitten by one of these serpents of worship. It was remarkable, though, how they all seemed to recover without the aid of a doctor -- a token, they thought, of divine favor.

"No way to explain it, but just the mercy of the Lord," Noel remarked. "How infinite must be such mercy that can extend itself to people who so daringly tempt an Almighty God!"

It was not hard to tell when one of the number had been bitten on Sunday, for whenever this happened, the whole group met on Monday morning at the home of their leader to pray for the victim. The Winters could hear them, a hundred yards across the railroad tracks to the rear of the parsonage, singing, praying, shouting, stomping. Could there be greater darkness than this in the depths of Africa?

Another feature of the daily life of this village which always sent the blood curdling through Linda's veins was the screaming siren of the ambulance as it sped to one of the mines and then back again to the hospital with an accident victim. So many things could happen to the hard working diggers in the earth. Falling slate, explosions, motor accidents, gas. Linda's heart bled for the poor men and their white-faced wives and children gathered at doorways and gates to see whose "man" it was. They would know by the siren. The ambulance driver would give it a different wail in front of the house where the man lived. And then what heartbreak! Shrieks of hysteria in those more excitable. Always crying and tears in unashamed abandon. These

simplehearted mountain miner folk made no attempt to control their grief. They were just what they were and acted just like they felt.

It was that way when Virgie's baby died at the grandmother's house across the road from the parsonage. Linda was awakened that night by a low, wailing cry that rose to a shriek. No one in the parsonage seemed to notice it but Linda. Then it came again, a low, minor wail that built and built until the final note tore through her like a knife. Finally, it became muffled behind closed doors. Linda thought of the terror of all the shrieks in the night the world over and she could not sleep. She could not be sure whether this one was a cry of sorrow or the delirium of some drunken woman. In the morning she went to the house she thought the woman had entered and there they told her that their wee baby had passed away. Virgie was sitting by the east window, her weeping subdued now, waiting for the undertaker to bring her darling home. Laid out on the bed were new little pink shoes and dress, and a soft, wool-filled silk coverlet. Virgie wanted her baby wrapped in it when they laid her away, so that she would not have to think of her little one as being cold under the winter snows.

What need was at their very door, throughout the village, and all over the surrounding mountainsides!

O, God, help us to make some impression on the dear folk that will let them know that we love them and that God loves them. Help us to challenge them to righteous and holy living!

As the days came and went, it was heart-warming to see the solid work-a-day men and women and their families welcome Noel's strong presentation of Gospel truth. For four eventful years this was to be so.

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CHAPTER 24

To Linda it was a miracle how quickly Noel was becoming acquainted with the church members and townspeople of Thurston, while her only acquaintance with them after being there a whole month was limited largely to names -- the names by which Noel called them -- and a sea of faces to few of whom as yet any names belonged. But it was not to be wondered at. While she cleaned, unpacked, put things in place and made the parsonage livable, Noel made it a point to find out who they all were. He rose early in the mornings to pray and then went to the mouths of the mines and preached to the men before they went to work. He went to their places of business, their stores, their homes. Fletcher's writings were still setting his heart aflame. Noel preached on the streets, the boys helping with their horn music. Linda saw the people only at church and prayer meeting, and now, once a month at the meeting of the missionary society, which was really only a step ahead of being just another Ladies' Aid. Its functions brought back memories of the "white elephant sales" and "silver teas" of their Mentor days, and Linda wondered what they could do about it. While she planned a cautious approach, Noel had already slipped into one of his sermons a good word for tithing. But, though this initial step had been taken, and some had been led into thoughtful consideration thereby, the custom of previous years still prevailed in the thinking of the majority.

As it had so many times through the years, the feeling again stole over Noel that he was still in school and his churches were the problems. He could wish that churches were like the pages in the arithmetic book where all the problems are alike. When you've worked one, it's easy to work them all. But every church he had had reminded him of the pages at the end of the chapters where the miscellaneous problems are. There, one has to use his brains. With churches, one has to use all the brains the Lord has given him and desperate prayer besides.

In spite of problems, however, the work in Thurston was becoming increasingly interesting. Noel came home from his calling with the most extraordinary tales of the country he saw and the people he met.

"Today," he told them one evening at supper, "I went up into Slaughter Pen Holler again..."

"What a name!" Linda interrupted.

"Yes, it is some name. I've been learning a lot of unique names lately. For instance, I've been all the way to Horse Pen Cove, Buzzard's Roost, Puckett's Creek, Dry Branch, Bonny Blue..."

"Bonny Blue -- that's really pretty."

"I visited an interesting little cabin today," Noel continued. "I drove as far as I could up the mountain trail off the highway. You know what those trails are like, Linda."

Yes, Linda knew. Halfway up the mountain the trail would wind around, fern-fringed and enticing, climbing back out of sight into the cool upward shadowed curves until it became only a wrinkle in the coverlet of trees, or a steep boulder-littered creek bed ending at a little home in the fold of the hill.

"When I saw how far it was going to be," Noel continued, "I was almost of a mind not to go. Then, the thought came, 'Jesus died for the folk that live up there,' and there is always something in that thought that won't let me turn back. I had walked only a little way when a mountaineer with his horse and wagon came along, and when he asked me to ride, I got in beside him. Suddenly, from nowhere, it seemed, John Struthers came out of the thicket and started up the mountain.

"Get in and ride,' my driver cheerily invited.

"No, thank ye,' John refused, scarcely turning his head.

"Better rest ye're weary bones and let the mare do the pullin'. Won't cost ye nothin'."

"Nope,' insisted John, 'I'm in a hurry.'

"We both chuckled at that," Noel recalled. "But he knew what he was doing, I guess. It wasn't long till his lanky legs had carried him way beyond us and out of sight. When we got to the

little cabin, I knew why John had been in such a hurry. He had twin grandbabies there, and one of them was sick unto death. The mother and father were there and two or three older children. I tried to comfort their hearts as best I could, as it did look as though there was no hope for the babe. But just before I left, I knelt down and with my hand on its burning forehead, I prayed for the little one. I could see that the prayer touched the hearts of all the family."

Two or three mornings after Noel's account of his experience, a knock sounded on the parsonage door, and when Noel went to answer it, he found the raw-boned grandfather on the porch.

"Baby died last night," he announced brokenly.

"It's gone, then," Noel said sympathizingly.

"But not th' one ye prayed for," the mountaineer hastened to explain, "t'other one. It was yer prayer et saved that'n, and ef ye'd been there last night t'other one woulda lived, too. Died 'fore we could tell ye er git a doctor."

Noel said nothing. Just gripped his hand.

"Want ye ter have its funeral s'afternoon. Can ye come?"

"Sure, I'll come," Noel assured him with feeling. "So sorry about it."

The raw-boned hand tightened on that of the man of God. "Knew ye would be, Preacher." There was tenderness in the older man's eyes and a huskiness in his voice. "Thank ye. G'bye."

"What strange ways God has to reach the hearts of these simple mountain folk," Noel remarked when the man had gone. "Far be it from me to despise the poorest of these sheep. Some of them may get into the Kingdom ahead of some of us. It's a great mission field, I tell you."

Linda looked at him strangely. "Mission field?" Had Noel meant to say that? Linda thought about it -- mission field. She would not have thought of calling it that. Could it be that all this time she had been on a mission field and did not recognize it?

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CHAPTER 25

As it had been everywhere else, so here, the focal point of Noel's planning for the year's crusade was an old-fashioned revival. It would be the first two weeks in December. Linda just as naturally planned for the entertainment of the evangelist. At this time she did not even know that sometimes evangelists stayed elsewhere than at the parsonage. But even if she had, she would not have felt right not to do it herself. The privilege of having a man of God in their home so outweighed the extra work that the latter was waved aside as insignificant. However, some planning ahead made everything easier when the time actually came. Two or three days before his

arrival, Linda would clean the house extra thoroughly. With that done she would spend the day of the evangelist's arrival putting the finishing touches on the guest room, dusting furniture and floors again and getting the first company meal. Howbeit, it must not be supposed that the Winters had a real guest room. The boys would be moved out of their room and bedded down on the floor of the study.

With the details thus planned, life went tranquilly on, but only for a week. Then a telephone call from the evangelist came, who said that he could bring his wife with him to help with the music for the revival, if she was wanted, and if the revival date could be moved up to November fifteenth. Of course she was wanted, and Noel enthusiastically assured him of it.

Linda herself felt it would be a real asset to the meeting. Then suddenly she was clutched with the realization that here was another guest to plan for -- a lady guest. She left the washing she was doing and began tidying up the house, removing her apron, pushing chairs a few inches from their original positions, picking up toys that were scattered on the floor, as though the evangelist and singer would walk in the door any minute. She had already changed the "guest room" from the boys' room to the larger bedroom in which she and Noel and the smaller children slept. She would fix beds on the floor now for the little ones, and extend the studio couch in the front room to double-bed proportions for herself and Noel.

Then she thought of the washing. She put on her apron and went back to the kitchen.

The next two weeks went off very much as planned. When the guests at last arrived, Linda was lifted above her inferiority complex regarding her role as hostess and cook into a blessed exhilaration that she was privileged to entertain some of God's children.

Linda soon rearranged her menus to accommodate the dieting of her guests and entered into the services with all her soul. Somehow she managed to attend all the day and night services, besides keeping up with all the extra cooking, washing, ironing and cleaning. It was only God, she knew, that enabled her to do it.

The end of the meeting found her, as always, worn to a frazzle physically, but lifted in spirit. This meeting had been worth more than all the efforts combined, for in it Willie Jo Evans had bowed at the altar and surrendered her life to Christ. Willie Jo -- beautiful, intelligent, talented. She was undoubtedly their most spectacular victory, but there were others, too, who were sure to make a marked change in the future life of the Thurston Church. There was Mrs. Martin, for instance, vivacious young mother of three children and the wife of the town's theater operator. Since she surrendered to Christ, there was now a chance that Mr. Martin could be won and that movies in the village would be discontinued, on Sunday, at least.

Mrs. Martin's interest was not just momentary. She soon took responsibility in the Sunday School and faithfully interceded for her family at the prayer meetings.

New interest prevailed throughout the congregation, and Christmas time witnessed the largest attendance the church had ever known. True, it would have been accurate, if not proper, to take leave of some of those present at the Christmas program with a handshake and a

"Good-by-see-you-next-Christmas" adieu, but Noel knew that he could count on most of them and that he had their hearts.

All through January and February the winter wind whistled crisply through the brown fingers of the branches, rattling the dry leaf ghosts on the mountain trees overhead. Occasionally, snow spread its white blanket over the mountainside and pencilled every frond of the hemlocks and every twig of the bare brown trees with white. But its stay was short. In little rivulets its melting beauty slid down the mountainside to swell the sinewy current of Stony Creek. Only on the lofty peaks at Bonny Blue could the snowy whiteness be seen all winter.

Linda wondered how many of these people living in the grime and tawdriness of the valley ever looked up. And if they looked up, did they take a deep breath of the vast, fresh blue up there? Just now was there anyone but herself feeling the thrilling tremulos of the ice symphony that was playing all over the mountains? Was anyone else watching the sun sinking behind those golden peaks? The rippled water of the creek was smoothing to glass, talking to itself as it did so, and the spruces were darkening to a shadowy black -- all quiet, all cold, all lonely. The air grew more still and frigid. Little lights twinkled in a hundred cabins below the blue-black sky, and night was there. Thousands of times the evening had fallen just as beautifully, and a thousand times it would happen again, with not a soul to watch its peaceful change.

"And yet millions watch the movies," Linda mused. "How can it be that men love the real world so little and love the sham they have manufactured so much!"

Noel was still doing all in his power to create public sentiment against the village theater, but people do not easily relinquish their hold on a god so fascinating. It was hard to tell how many of those frequenting the church on Sunday were free from patronizing the show-house through the week. Noel had pled with Mr. Martin to close the place on Sunday during service time, at least, but to no avail. It was even rumored that many of the young people went from the evening youth meeting straight to the theater. It was plain that too few of them stayed for church.

March came, and spring sunshine slanted warmly upon the little village between the mountains. Stony Creek was swelled to twice its usual depth. The water was chilly and ran rusty from the recent rains. Willows began to show signs of a pale lacy green bursting from the drooping branches. It seemed to Linda that it was too bad to have to let all the tender beauty of a new season pass without enjoying it to the full. But many duties indoors called her from its loveliness.

War had reached its ruthless fingers even so far as Thurston, and rich and poor, saints and sinners, were saying good-bye to their boys. Willie Jo's husband, Carl, Mr. Martin and other fathers of little ones, as well as the unmarried were being snatched out of the arms of loved ones. How would it all end? And how could the church best serve in the meantime?

No one ventured an answer. Some did chance a prophecy, however, that as far as the Martins were concerned, the movie business was at an end. It could hardly be hoped that it would close its doors entirely. Being owned by a large concern as it was, it was likely someone would be sent to take John Martin's place. What actually happened stunned the theater fans themselves, for it proved to be none other than Mrs. Martin who occupied the operator's chair in the movie

projector room as soon as John left. People opened their eyes even wider when they saw Mrs. Martin clad in slacks, pasting up announcements for next week's shows, including Sunday, on the billboards from one end of the valley to the other! Moreover, it was incredulous how, unabashed, she continued faithful attendance at all the church services and prayed and testified in prayer meeting.

Noel was not one to countenance such "imprudence." The word they had come to use in describing Mrs. Martin's conduct was admittedly deficient in strength, but Christian charity proceeded slowly in yielding to strong denunciation in the hope that this soul might yet be salvaged. When Noel and Linda and even Willie Jo pled with Mrs. Martin to have nothing to do with the furtherance of their business, her attitude was one of helplessness. Against her will she had been coerced into it, she sobbed.

In the midst of the problem, Noel engaged an evangelist from Virginia to come for a week the last of the month, and Linda hurried to get the housecleaning done before he should arrive.

The church was filled to its capacity the first night of the meeting. Townspeople loved this "fightin'" preacher from the Virginia hills, to whose early Sunday morning broadcasts they had often listened. Brother Shaddon was fearless and dynamic. He was also brilliant and warmhearted. The splendid audience that came to hear him afforded the chance of a lifetime, and Brother Shaddon took advantage of it. People looked at one another in surprise when he, too, took his outspoken stand against the movies. They had not expected this.

"Fortunate for us," Noel confided in Linda that night when they were alone, "that Brother Shaddon told them we were not his informants concerning the movie trouble here. Our people would never forgive us if they thought we had been tattling to the evangelist."

"He has an uncanny way of finding out things. If there's a fight on against any form of wickedness, he seems to feel it in the air. But if you ask me," Linda ventured, "I think it was none other than some of Mrs. Martin's friends, who, in pleading for her, let the cat out of the bag. It is too bad for Mrs. Martin that she is drawn into this embarrassing limelight, but sin is sin, and if it is overlooked in one, how shall we wage war against it at all?"

Night after night the increasing crowds came to see what Brother Shaddon would do next. The meeting would soon end and the movies were in full swing, with no sign of giving up on the part of Mrs. Martin. Indeed, by this time she had dropped out of the services altogether.

"My hope was that it would be the other way, of course," Noel said to Linda after church the first night Mrs. Martin quit coming. "We all have hoped and prayed to the end that it would be the business she would drop out of, but if it couldn't be that, it is better the way it is than for her to continue a pretense of religion while holding to this worldly business."

The meeting closed and the movies went on. It did seem that once again wrong had triumphed over right. No, one could not say that, if he only looked far enough -- as far as into eternity. Brother Shaddon had not been daunted for a moment. He had admitted fear, however -- not fear for himself or the right, but fear for the poor, misled little woman who had given up her

birthright in the Kingdom for a mess of pottage, and fear for the poor, deluded people who patronized her business.

"Some vindication of the principles your pastor and I have been preaching will come before I return next year," Brother Shaddon warned before he left. "In all earnestness and gravity, I feel safe in prophesying that this town will be overtaken by some tragedy or tragedies before a month passes. When judgment comes, remember what I have said."

It was a solemn warning. The Christian hearers shuddered. The others were grim-faced in spite of their unwillingness to yield.

It was a warm day in April when Noel went to visit Mr. Whipple, ill in bed with a fatal malady. The rooms were close, situated as they were above Thurston's Novelty Hardware. The air was still. Mr. Whipple was too ill for a prolonged visit, so, after a warmhearted prayer and a word of encouragement for the sick man, Noel prepared to go.

Suddenly, through the quietness of the drowsy afternoon, ripped the scream of the fire siren, and immediately the town rose to a noisy alert. From stairways and doors everywhere streamed a white-faced, wide-eyed populace. Where was the fire? Noel stood with others on the sidewalk and looked up. Black columns of smoke climbed into the sky from a nearby roof—the roof of the theater building!

It had been one month to the day since Brother Shaddon had made his prediction! People watched without a word to one another. Words were not needed. Noel stayed long enough to learn that there had been no one hurt, though an explosion in the projector room would now put the concern out of business indefinitely. Then he went home.

Supper at the parsonage that evening was hushed by the event of the previous hour. It was as though the great hand of God had reached down into the valley that day to show Himself strong in behalf of the right and in judgment of the wrong. What more would it take for man to learn his lesson?

Within the next week after the fire, Mrs. Martin sold her home in Thurston and moved to Grandview. The theater battle was won, as long as Noel continued his stay in the valley, at least. But to him, the victory held no sweet morsel of remembrance in years to come. Instead, it was always to be the sad, sad tale of a sheep that had strayed away from the fold.

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CHAPTER 26

Besides the theater triumph, the work of the year left in its wake other victories. Willie Jo, animated and inspired by her newfound experience in Christ, was able to swing the missionary society from silver teas to tithing. The women surprised themselves by giving an offering of thirty dollars at their first meeting under the new regime -- more than they had ever made at a tea, and without the hard work! When, at the third meeting, the offering soared to seventy dollars, and

attendance had increased fifty per cent, it was safe to prophesy that the doom of former methods of raising money was sealed.

Then, there was the case of Neal Rutherford. A drunkard, with a family so poorly provided for that they had almost lost heart in living, Neal finally yielded to the entreaties of Mr. Gilliam, faithful lay preacher in the church, to allow a prayer meeting to be held in his home. Noel's heart went out to this hardworking miner, so helplessly enslaved by the drink habit. He poured out his soul in deep-felt supplication for Neal and then, upon sudden inspiration, rose from his knees and said, "Neal, the Lord is going to save you."

Neal thought about that a lot the next few days. It pulled at his heart. It gave him hope. It gave him determination. Finally, he yielded to the Saviour and found glorious deliverance from all his sin. No longer did he have a craving for drink or any desire to indulge in his former sins. He bought a home with the money he used to spend in his wicked pursuits. He bought tracts and good books and became the village colporteur in his spare time.

It was about this time that the church pianist, Sarah Black, took an interest in six-and-a-half-year-old Catherine and offered to give her music lessons free of charge. Sarah was an accomplished musician, having herself studied piano at the University. How grateful Noel and Linda were for this kind overture! They had been able to get a Wurlitzer spinet with farewell money gifts from the wealthy members of Glade First Church, and now the Lord was providing for lessons for Catherine. It was wonderful indeed. Catherine loved her music, and by the time she was eight, gave a recital all her own.

That summer was the summer of the new church building. It was a momentous day when they started tearing down the old structure. By the time school was dismissed that May evening, the windows were out, and men were tearing off the old tar-paper roof. Though the district superintendent had given Noel the "Go" sign for its demolition when the building had been condemned as unsafe for use, he came to the parsonage on this evening, fearful and trembling.

"Do you really think you can swing a new building, Brother?" he asked Noel in a hoarse whisper.

"The Lord will help us do anything that needs to be done," Linda heard Noel staunchly say.

Good strong Neal. Nothing could daunt him once he knew he was in the Lord's will.

The summer was not an easy one, however. War requisitions were closing up in an ever-tightening vise the materials needed for the building. Noel was gone from early morning until late at night, scouring the lumberyards as far as Kingsport for supplies to keep the carpenters busy. It was marvelous how the work went on. God led Noel to just the places where he was able to buy the best materials at the lowest prices. By the time cold weather came on, the building was enclosed and Noel had more time to be at home. Linda was thankful, for she was not feeling well.

One chill morning she rose and looked spiritlessly at the ironing waiting to be done, but she knew she would not be able to do it that day. Yes, an ironing to be done. There would always

be things to do, even when you came to die. Everyone leaves things unfinished. She had learned long ago, however, that no matter what happens to you, the world somehow manages to go on. There would be someone else to do your ironings.

At nine-thirty that morning, the eleventh of December, Noel and Linda's second little girl was born. It was interesting that she should be born in Hathaway Gap, the town bearing the name of the dear old servant of God who had performed their marriage ceremony. Noel had taken Linda to the beautiful little hospital there among the hills. Wesley, four years old on the morrow, at once claimed the wee little sister as his particular birthday present.

Linda looked the little one over fondly. What a gift from God! What a responsibility was this new, little soul. "This one also for Thee, Father," Linda prayed. O, let Him claim each one of their children for His service and her fondest dreams for them would be fulfilled. "Protect them from the evil of this world," she pleaded, "and fit them for Thy courts above." They decided to call the new, little girlie Marilyn Linda.

By the time the first Sunday of the new year came, the church was ready for use. That next summer, to the evident gratification of the once fearful district superintendent, the church was dedicated by the bishop. It had been a remarkable achievement, in that all materials had been available when needed, thanks to Noel's constant search through towns and cities round about, and everything had been paid for as they went. Not a cent of debt stood against it. No wonder the congregation was pleased with their well-modeled brick building with oak interior. Besides being a boost to their faith, the accomplishment was good evidence that the tithing method of giving worked!

Many outdid all their former habits of giving, led most outstandingly by Willie Jo and her husband. In addition to their initial gift of one hundred dollars, they gave one thousand dollars the night before Carl left for overseas; and after he went, Willie Jo, teaching school, gave out of her own check, another one hundred. Willie Jo -- what wonders God had worked in her! Beautiful, possessed of a lovely personality, popular wherever she went, Willie Jo could have moved with ease in the most sophisticated circles, but she had chosen the better company of the lowly Lord Jesus. Peerless company! And what a worthy choice it was!

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CHAPTER 27

It was an evening in the next winter that Noel was reading with all his family around him, each one busy with his own pursuits. "Linda," he suddenly exclaimed, "at times it all makes me just plain sick."

Linda looked up in surprise from helping Wesley undress for the night. Linda was one of those mothers who have many-storied brains, the party that lives on the lower floor being able to do the task at hand, while one on an upper floor constantly looks out the window and hears all that is going on around about. Tonight it was that way. She had just explained to Danny why the form "doat" would be incorrect for the third person singular of the Latin word "do." "O' is just the

ending of the first person singular, and 'd' is the stem," she told him. "Therefore, the third person singular, present tense, is merely 'dat.'" He looked at her in amazement and commented unbelievably, "My, how those Romans did shrink it up!" Now she was simultaneously helping Catherine with her multiplication table, coaching Kent in his first attempt to run down the evaluation of the ever elusive "X" in his Junior High Math, and by every faculty left, trying to assure Noel that she was ready with undivided interest to hear what he had to say.

"Just plain sick!" Noel reiterated. "Here's our church paper -- just a promotional paper, that's all it is. Full of news items and programs, but not a grain of food for the hungry people. All about a 'Crusade for Christ,' and Jesus' name not even mentioned. They're asking now for twenty-five million dollars! My Father, help us! They shear the sheep and give them nothing at all to eat."

It was not the first time Linda had heard this gone over. She knew there was a growing discontent in Noel's heart for the slowness of the church in getting the Gospel to the people. But he was continuing.

"Now take this program for the week of prayer. Everything written out. In our thousands of churches, these prayers will be just read off, in most cases with no heart. What is the use, anyway? They might as well hand this leaflet to the Lord and say, 'Here, Lord, these are my sentiments. Read them when You have time!'"

The whole thing was too serious to laugh over, but Linda could not suppress a chuckle, at that.

Kent had been working an extra long equation, dealing in endless numbers and various minuses and pluses, and he took this release of tension to exclaim to his mother that, after all, X had equalled zero. Then he added with a deep-seated sigh, "Buddy-O, Mother, what a lot of work for nothing!"

Again Linda laughed, but whatever of mirth was in the air was soon sent scuttling out of countenance.

"Do you know what I think I'll do?" Noel rose from his seat and paced the room. When Noel acted like that, fear froze Linda's heart into a little shrunken ball. Something cataclysmic was coming. She knew it!

"I believe it's time to leave the pastorate," Noel announced, feeling his way. "My work is nearly done here, my methods are in direct contrast to the demands of church leaders, calls are coming from everywhere for revival meetings. I believe God wants me to go into evangelistic work at the end of this conference year."

The air hung laden with the weight of his words. Linda took Wesley and Marilyn on her lap. The three older children instinctively looked at Mother to see what she would say.

"Why, sure, Noel," she assented feebly. And then drawing from an inner reservoir of strength, she followed up more firmly, "Of course, dear. I've always felt evangelistic work was one of the highest callings one could have."

Noel now accepted every call for meetings that came. Thus it was that the middle of January found him in Chattanooga with Edwin and Harriet. The spring and summer months, too, took him far from home at times and more calls were coming frequently. It did seem that God was surely leading in this change that to Noel was so inevitable.

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CHAPTER 28

One day that summer the children came in from a walk with a little, stray puppy they had found on the mountain. It was a perfect pet, but as much as it hurt him to do so, Noel told the kiddies it would be impossible to keep that dog, because it was the kind that would grow too big to keep in town. The afternoon he took it out to give it away, Linda put aside every pressing duty to continue her reading of Uncle Tom's Cabin to the children, only to discover that the chapter next to be read was the story of little Eva's death. It did seem that the disappointments were piling up just too big for even the stoutest heart, when Noel came home and told the little ones that they could get one of the grocery man's little terrier puppies.

What a comfort the little fellow was! He reminded Linda of the Jippy she and her brother Richard used to have, except that theirs had been black trimmed in white, and this one was white trimmed in black. It was surprising how easy it was for Danny to work on the woodpile with that little dog close by. It gave him a comfortable feeling that he had never had before in the company of an ax.

Linda did not know what she would have done with Noel away so much, if she had not had the antics of the children to liven her. Wesley was always surprising her with some quaint question or saying. One morning he unexpectedly asked her, "Mommy, are snakes Quakers?"

Linda laughed. "Why, no, darling, what made you say that?"

"Well, Mommy," he answered thoughtfully, "in the Garden of Eden, the serpent said to Eve, 'Thou shalt not surely die,' and the Quakers say 'thee' and 'thou.'"

Another time Wesley played in the back yard almost all afternoon. Presently, Linda was attracted by someone praying loudly. Was it Mrs. Large next door, or was it a Tongues prayer meeting across the tracks? She went to the back door to listen and found that it was Wesley praying. "O, God," he was pleading, "encourage the people. Help them to pray! O, Lord, bless our home," and on and on.

"If the Lord can't get older people to pray," thought Linda, "He'll find willing hearts in the little lambs."

When he came in the house, he said, "Mommy, do you know what I do sometimes? I nod my head like this [exaggerated nod] and whisper, 'Yes, Lord, I'll do Your will.'"

Once Catherine slipped off without his knowledge, leaving him in the grocery store while she went across the street to the post office. All at once he missed her and, going to the woman in charge of the store, he asked most maturely, "Can you tell me where my mother's children are?"

They were all of them a lively set, healthy and, for the most part, happy. The two older boys faithfully chopped up discarded railway ties into kindling, which they sold from door to door to buy a new bicycle. No one could say they were not enterprising boys or that they were lazy. Linda put them to as many tasks as they were able to do for her, one of these being dishwashing, from which neither Catherine nor the boys were exempt. It was a struggle, at first, to get them to go at this distasteful task without some rounds of protest, but after it was learned that there was no getting out of it, they actually went to work singing. It was good for them, Linda reassured herself. Why, they were even learning to harmonize. Someday they would all go with Noel and help with the music in his meetings. The boys were excellent horn players, Catherine was making rapid progress with her piano lessons, and now, they were learning to sing together.

She listened to Kent's fine ear for tenor, Danny's strong, clear soprano, and Catherine's sweet alto. But what were they singing? It sounded like the tones of a chime clock, and it was!

"Mac -- a -- ro -- ni, mac -- a -- ro -- ni, mac -- a -- ro ni, Cheese, cheese, cheese, cheese!"

"Now let's do it with a little more pep," Danny was urging. "That sounded like a dangling doll."

Linda smiled to herself. "A unique way, indeed, to ease the pain of washing the cheese and macaroni baking dish."

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CHAPTER 29

Because Noel was a graduate of Christian College, his district superintendent advised him to transfer his membership from Tennessee to the Virginia Conference, where he would be more likely to be granted the evangelist's appointment which he desired.

When Bishop Watkins of the Virginia Conference presided at a special gathering at Yeagley, Virginia, about fifty miles from Thurston, Noel went to see him. Yes, he would accept the transfer, if Bishop Dale of the Tennessee Conference agreed.

There was no time to lose, as the Virginia Conference was due to convene at the college in College Town in a few days. Noel wrote to Bishop Dale, but had no answer before he left for College Town. Two days of the three-day conference passed, and still there was no answer. Friday morning dawned. Was Bishop Dale purposely holding off until it would be too late? Noel went to the telegraph office at the depot. And to his real surprise, there it was -- a telegram for

Bishop Watkins. He hurried back to the college with it, but when the bishop read it, he shook his head.

"This amounts to nothing," he told Noel. "Bishop Dale agrees to the transfer if I need you."

Noel went to the phone in desperation. He called Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, where the bishop was reported to be, but could not reach him at the moment. At noon, however, Bishop Dale called back.

"Your telegram was only a conditional release," Noel reminded him. "Bishop Watkins wants full and positive permission from you for this transfer."

"All right," agreed the bishop. "I give my consent."

Noel's name was then referred to the chairman of the Board of Evangelism, William Johnson, president of Christian College, who readily recommended him to the field of evangelism. The bishop then gave him the appointment.

"It was only the Lord that did it," Noel said to Linda when he returned home, "and since He worked it out this way, I am more convinced than ever that I have rightly interpreted God's leading."

The summer slipped quickly into fall. Before the Winters family knew it, it was time to pack their things and plan definitely for their move to Homestead, where they would make their home while Noel ministered in the evangelistic field.

On Thursday morning, the eighteenth of September, before the sun had peeped over the piled up peaks of the mountains in the east, the Winters family drove out of Thurston. Even Jippy was in the company, curled up in a box at the boys' feet. There had been a question as to whether the dog ought to go.

"What if he gets car sick?" Linda worried.

"O, Mommy," Kent reassured her, "there's no danger of that! Why, Noah took all those animals in the ark, and none of them got seasick."

At the edge of town, Linda looked back at the ravine between the mountains and the familiar row of cabins which were already blended by the morning mists into the rugged miles of mountainside. There had been so much of joy and sadness there, so much of struggle and victory, could it be that it was over, sinking into memory, and that the many who had lived these four years together were now being scattered, never to reassemble? This was so much a part of the life of a preacher and his family -- this running from loved acquaintances towards new affections, which, too, would be broken off by new farewells.

Now, behind them the great notch in the hills that held Nigger Head Rock and marked Stony Creek Gorge, folded together, and all vestiges of the little village faded into blueness.

The little family rode on for long moments in silence; and as they did so, Linda looked into the sunrise of the dawning day, and it seemed that in it she saw the heartening flame kindled by God's own dear hand -- the same flame that had lighted all her untried way.

"And because it is His hand that kindles it, I know that in the future the light will still glow exceeding sure."

What a comfort this thought was in the ensuing days in Homestead as with Noel gone now most of the time, Linda felt a double responsibility for the children.

Danny was in High School now, Kent in the eighth grade, Catherine in the fifth. How fast they were growing! Both Linda and Noel were thankful that the schools in Homestead, as had the schools in Glade and Thurston, recognized the Lord in daily opening exercises and did not countenance the teaching of evolution. Worldly activities were at a minimum, and participation in them was not compulsory. God had honored their taking the stand they did for the protection of little Danny by giving them good schools wherever they were. Though they could not foresee it at this time, in the years to come, little Wesley and Marilyn were to have the privilege of attending a Christian academy and college at Daley. God had not let them down!

Each of the older boys had paper routes after school and could usually make it home at a regular time for supper, but on nights when they did their collecting for the week, darkness overtook them before they finished. Linda sat by the west window where she could see far down the street and get the first glimpse of their return. When they were later than usual she was plagued by thoughts that they could have been slugged over the head and their money taken away. She could see them run down by big motor freights on the highway or by hit and run drivers. If Noel were home, he would chide her, she knew. But she felt so alone in this responsibility. Yet not alone!

Take care of them, Lord-our boys. Bring them safely home.

And how merciful God was to answer her prayer!

No less did Linda feel the extra responsibility of the spiritual guidance of the children. They had prayed for all the children before they were born, had asked the Lord to set them apart for Himself. Though Linda's prayers had been warm and consistent through the years, they now became the agony of a life and death struggle. She must see them truly saved. Many a time she cried the same cry Judah voiced to Joseph centuries before -- "How, O, how shall I go up to my father and the lad [lads and lassies in this case] be not with me?" It must not be that they be not with her! She read and re-read a certain promise she had underlined in her Bible long before. How tremendous it was! "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in."

Linda's great-grandmother had laid a good foundation, but some in the line since then had let decay fill it with breaches. Noel's ancestors had blazed good pathways to walk in, but some

since had let them be all but obliterated by weeds and brambles. O, that their children might be repairers of the breaches and restorers of paths to dwell in!

"Forbid," she prayed, "that our children should ever trust in their own goodness, their good upbringing, their knowledge of the Bible, to get them through. May they realize it takes a striving to enter in, a separation from the crowd of even respectable church members, a deep sense of their utter undoneness outside the mercy of God, their unworthiness of the least of His notice, a consciousness that human righteousness is as filthy rags, that it takes a total commitment to God, a daily, moment by moment trust in the blood of Christ alone, a constant, careful, holy walk with God!"

On one occasion when Linda asked desperately for a special promise straight from God, there came sweetly to her heart the words, "What more can He say than to you He hath said?"

So she recalled the wonderful promises God had already given her and rested her faith upon them. Peace fell upon her heart and from that hour "How Firm a Foundation" became Linda's favorite hymn.

How sweet to see each of the children at one time or another bow at an altar of prayer and come up with shining faces. Even little Marilyn, on her third birthday, fell into her soft bed and with a deep, tired sigh, looked up as though she were looking into heaven itself, and whispered, "O, Jesus!"

"Yes, darling," Linda comforted her. "Jesus will help the tired, little girl and give her a good sleep."

"Jesus is in the Good Book," the little one went on.

"Yes, in the Bible -- the Good Book," Linda said softly.

Then it was heartening to see Marilyn grow in her love for Jesus. When she was ready for school, she was not afraid to go dressed as she always was before, with her long, white stockings, her dresses and sleeves a modest length. Yes, she was different from the others, but she wanted to be, so that she might please the Lord.

"You wear long stockings because your church believes that way, don't you?" the little playmates taunted. "Aren't you awful uncomfortable in hot weather?"

Marilyn thought a bit and then she said bravely, "No-no, I don't do it because the church believes that way or anyone makes me do it. I do it for Jesus."

When she went to her playmates' house she was careful not to let her eyes wander to their television. To be sure she would not see it, she sat in a swivel chair on the same side of the room with the television set. Once, after she left, the television would not work. "Marilyn jinxed it," they said.

Marilyn's conscientiousness reached to the little money she earned by helping Wesley with his paper route. She not only tithed her nickels and dimes, but she re-tithed them, because she wanted so badly to give a generous part to missions.

"Father, hear us, we are praying,
Hear the words our hearts are saying,
We are praying for our children.
Keep them from the power of evil,
From the secret hidden peril.

* * *

Read the language of our longing,
Read the wordless pleadings thronging;
Holy Father, for our children.

And wherever they may bide,
Lead them Home at eventide."

-- Amy Carmichael

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CHAPTER 30

Since Linda must solve the family's problems by herself now, it did seem that their number should have diminished to only half of what it was when Noel was there to help. But such was not the case. God was with her, however, and He took each problem in hand in such a miraculous way that, in the end, they actually proved to be a blessing, and a boost to the faith of both Linda and the children.

One evening Linda called Wesley and Marilyn from their play on some huge piles of rocks, sand and dirt which an excavating shovel had scooped up on the back of a building lot.

"Coming, Mother," Wesley shouted.

In a few moments the three of them -- Mother, Wesley and Marilyn -- were standing together on a wind-swept knoll as the evening breezes stroked their hair and whispered to them from the vastness of earth and sky. The sun was peeping at them for one last moment before dropping below the rim of the world. The heavens flamed with red and gold as though trying to display all their gorgeous splendor at once, before covering themselves with the dark robe of night.

"What a wonderful evening to be alive," Mother said softly.

But Wesley was not sharing Mother's feeling about the wonderful evening. "Mother," he ventured in a troubled voice, "I can't find my shoes."

"Can't find your shoes? Why, Wesley, they must be right where you left them. We'll all go back and hunt."

"They were right there," Wesley pointed, as they neared the first pile of earth. "I took them off before I climbed to the top."

"But, Wesley, bushels and bushels of dirt have sifted down here as you climbed and slid. They've been covered up by sand. We must get the shovel. Come, Marilyn. You can carry the flashlight. It's getting dark already. Wesley, you stay here and keep looking."

Mother and Marilyn started off for the house and Wesley was left alone. O, where had he left his shoes? Wesley puckered his brow. Maybe they were at the next hill. He couldn't be sure. He ran to the second mound and the third. He climbed the knolls and looked down their other sides.

If he had only changed to his old sneakers after school. But these were his new shoes and now they were lost! Wesley began to cry. If he could only remember exactly where he had taken them off! This was Friday night. He must find them before Monday. Daddy would return from his preaching engagement then. He couldn't let Daddy know he had been so careless. Those shoes had cost dollars that Daddy couldn't spare without robbing himself and the rest of the family of other things needed. Oh -- Oh -- Oh!

Wesley ran frantically here and there, around the hills and over them in search of the shoes, but nowhere were they to be seen. They must be buried in the sand, as Mother said. Finally, Wesley rounded the mound of dirt where he first thought he had dropped them, and there was Mother shoveling sand with the big coal shovel.

"Mother, Mother!" Wesley cried as he ran to her. "O, Mother, don't! That is too hard for you. You will get hurt. Let me take the shovel."

But Linda went on working. "We brought the small shovel, too, Wesley," she said, almost out of breath. "You take that one, and we'll work together. Marilyn, hold the flashlights, so we'll be sure to see the shoes if we do uncover them."

By this time it was so dark they all had difficulty distinguishing roots from rocks and clods from clumps of grass.

"Are you sure, son, it was here?" Linda asked, straightening her tired back for a moment.

That was the trouble. Wesley could not be sure.

"Think hard, my boy. You know how Daddy saved to get your shoes for school. Shall we try at another hill?"

"They might be there," Wesley said weakly.

For moments that seemed like hours they shoveled more rocks, more roots, more sand.

"O, Mother, you must quit," Wesley gulped. "You'll-you'll. . . . O, it's all my fault. Let's quit now and you get me up in the morning before the men start to work with their machines. I'll find my shoes by daylight."

"Yes, we must do that if we can't find them tonight," Linda agreed, "but let's shovel at least one more place. How much happier we would be all evening if we could just find your shoes now."

Linda started to shovel again. What was that? "Here, Marilyn. The flashlight. Why, it's a sock! Your shoes must be here, too."

"No, that's not my sock!" Wesley wailed. "That's Jimmy's sock. He found his shoes and one sock. My socks are in my shoes."

"But didn't you put your shoes where Jimmy did?"

"I don't know" Wesley wailed again "I can't remember"

Again Linda was digging.

"Here, Marilyn Bring the flashlight over here." This time there was a note of horror in Linda's voice. "I thought so," she shuddered. "A snake! I unearthed a snake!"

At that Marilyn screamed and fled in the direction of the house, taking the flashlight with her. Linda and Wesley followed, dragging their shovels behind them. Digging was over for the night, but the gloom shrouding the lost shoes still lingered.

"Let's kneel and pray about the shoes," Linda suggested, as Wesley went to his room for the night.

"That's just what I was thinking," Wesley said wistfully.

Linda tried to comfort him. "No trouble can come to us without our heavenly Father's permission," she reminded him. "We'll try to see His purpose for us even in this. Remember He said in His Word, 'All things work together for good to those who love God. . . .' No doubt He wants us to learn to trust Him more fully than we ever have before."

All that night Wesley tossed restlessly on his bed. When he dropped off to sleep, it was only to awaken at intervals to see a spectre of his lost shoes. At last, morning came, and Wesley was up before Linda had a chance to call him. Things seemed more hopeful in the daylight. He went to the mound where they had found Jimmy's sock, and began to dig. Scoop-plop! Scoop-

plop! The shoveling went easily at first, but soon every shovelful was weighted with heaviness. And no shoes were yet to be seen!

Wesley was out of breath and suffering from an unutterable gnawing in the region of his stomach. He stuck his shovel in the limitless dirt and trudged dejectedly homeward. As he entered the kitchen with no shoes, Linda showed her disappointment, too.

"I'm sorry, son, but you must keep on," she told him. "Here, eat your breakfast and then we'll have prayer. God is interested in all that concerns His children. We'll ask Him again to help you find your shoes, or, if this is not possible, that He will help you find little jobs after school so that you can earn money to buy another pair."

Wesley felt better after his short rest, his warm breakfast and his prayer time with Mother, but this time he did not go to his shoveling with quite the eagerness that he had in the early morning. He had felt so sure he would find those shoes the first thing, and he hadn't. Was there any use to try again? Then he thought of Daddy. He just couldn't worry Daddy with his carelessness. Scoop-plop! Scoop-plop!

The sun was high enough to burn down on Wesley's back and neck now. Sweat drops were running off his forehead. The dirt was getting heavier, heavier. . . . Wesley couldn't lift another shovelful. Must he give up, after all? He climbed to the top of the mound and looked up into the sky.

"Dear God," he pleaded in childish distress, "dear God, will you please help me dig some more, or else show me where my shoes are, or-"

Wesley buried his head in his arms. "I'm so tired," he sniffled to himself. "O, what shall I do?"

Again he looked into the sky, expecting a solution to his problem from above. "I believe You're going to help me, Jesus," he said with a sudden new faith. "I believe You are!"

Then his eyes fell to the waving grass at the foot of the hill upon which he sat. He wiped his tears on his shirt sleeve and blinked the mist away. Was he seeing things? Why there-there were his shoes! A dozen times before he had looked at those grasses and hadn't seen them, but there they were. The wind must have blown just right to expose them to view. Wesley fairly rolled down the hill in his excitement. Half-hidden under the grass were his dear precious shoes, sure enough! Wesley grabbed them and hugged them to him as he flew across the lot toward home.

"Mother!" he squealed. "My shoes! My own real shoes!"

Linda stood motionless as Wesley thrust his shoes toward her. "Why, Wesley, where did you find them and how? Tell me about it," she urged.

How excited Wesley was to see Mother's joy as he told how God had shown him where his shoes were.

"And now you know for yourself, don't you, son, that God answers prayer -- even a boy's prayer?" Linda smiled.

"I sure do!" Wesley said with triumph. "And do you know I promised God on the way home that some day when I'm a preacher, I'll tell other boys and girls how He answered my prayers when I was eleven years old."

* * * * *

CHAPTER 31

All that year Noel was kept busy. Along with his study of Fletcher, he was still delving into the treasury of John Wesley's Journals and Sermons. His ministry became a new delight to himself and held a new richness for his hearers.

Then, unaccountably, calls for meetings dropped off until there were none booked ahead. Noel and Linda were desperate. Though offerings had never been exorbitant, the Winters had been able to live comfortably and keep out of debt. They would not consent to the thought of going into debt now, but what would they do? Their financial status was indeed critical

One evening Noel was sorely pressed in spirit He prostrated himself on the living room floor and poured out his heart in agonizing cries for a move on the part of God to relieve the situation It was not only that they might have their needs supplied, but that the door might be open for Noel to be busy in the ministry of the Word. Linda joined in, with her tears falling freely on the rocking chair seat at which she was kneeling The prayer meeting lasted until they felt they were literally wrung out and that God had an answer on the way

And God did have an answer on the way! Within a day or two a letter came asking if Noel could hold a meeting in November in the western part of the state. While he was at this meeting a call came from southern Kentucky, for him to be their evangelist in February, and it came by a strange providence Harold Thompson, a college classmate of Noel's had been asked first but could not fit the services into his schedule He recommended Noel Winters in his place Noel gladly accepted the call for he had learned to love the people of the "hill country" while holding meetings in communities in nearby areas

The Kentucky people welcomed the old time Gospel Noel preached like parched ground welcomes rain. Where had he ever seen a people so ready to pray and obey? His own heart was fired for new conquests in faith. Nothing was too hard for God! It was a gracious, melting time, with an upsurge in spirituality that evangelist and people had seldom seen and would never forget. They wanted Noel back in the fall, the people said.

Noel returned home with an offering far more generous than he was used to receiving, besides gifts from the ladies for Linda -- sheets, pillowcases, towels, and lengths of dress materials. It was all so wonderful. How could they ever thank the people and God?

There were enough meetings through the spring and summer then that the Winters felt they could manage to take a trip with the children. Noel said it would be their last chance with all the family together.

"O, surely not," Linda objected. The thought frightened her.

But it was. When summer came a year later, both the older boys had jobs and were saving their money for college. Danny was already sixteen and Kent nearly fifteen. In two years Danny would be gone from home! Where had the years flown?

When the family left, pulling a rented camping trailer behind their eight-year-old Chevy, Noel had only one meeting in September booked ahead. But more calls would come, they felt sure. There would be mail when they returned home.

There was mail piled up when they returned, to be sure, they looked forward to the next mail. But neither the next mail, nor the next, nor the next brought any answer to their prayers and hopes. Occasionally Noel was asked to supply on Sunday for some pastor who was ill, but that was all. In February, a church in Surbrook, knowing something of the Winters' straits, arranged a revival with Noel as the evangelist. But all through the winter months, Noel and Linda scrimped along on meager and unpredictable income. Somehow the Lord enabled them to keep every bill paid. They were so very thankful for this.

Day after day, Linda knelt by the rocker in the front room and poured out her heart to God for an opening of the way before them. Noel, too, lay on his face before the Lord, hours on end. They had been poor before. This was not so hard to take. But the fact which puzzled them was that there was no work for Noel. What did it mean, and what was God trying to show them?

Linda thought about the story of Jacob in Exodus 15. How he must have watched day after day and day after day for his sons to return from Egypt with the corn they needed for the starving household! At long last, when over the brow of the hill Jacob saw a caravan coming, it was not a train of camels and donkeys laden with bulging sacks, but wagons! And all of them loaded! The recalling of the incident encouraged Linda to trust a little longer. Who could tell but that over the bare, brown hill of her life and Noel's the wagons might be just ready to come into view! Loaded!

And it came to pass just that way! Again a letter came from Kentucky. They wanted another meeting soon -- in June, if Noel could come. He could, for sure! The clouds were lifted. The household was merry once more and supremely thankful. As it turned out eventually, Noel's meetings in the area totalled seven in all.

For some time Noel had been feeling his way in the matter of leaving the old Church and allying himself with a distinctly holiness group in Pennsylvania. This same June the change was consummated, and a new field opened up which offered greater and greater opportunities. Besides, the fellowship with these holy people was beyond anything the Winters had ever before experienced. How did it come about that they, so unworthy, so faltering, so stumbling and blundering, had been welcomed with open arms by these saints so much farther up the road in spiritual things? It was God. There was no other answer. How they did thank Him then and ever

afterward for the miracle He had wrought! O, how good it had been through all the years to walk just step by step by faith in the path of the lighted candle -- the candle God lighted!

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CONCLUSION

To say the story is finished is not true. Faithful to its purpose, it has chronicled a few family experiences for the children which transpired before they were old enough to remember. Furthermore, in reality no family history can be said to have either a beginning or an end. One cuts out only a bit from life, trimming away all that went before, all that will come after, and much in between, but God grant that what has been told may show His infinite grace and mercy and marvelous leadership in behalf of an ordinary family in a way that will glorify His name and encourage others to walk in His candle-lighted pathway.

"For Thou wilt light my candle. . . ." Psalm 18:28a

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THE END