

“The harvest truly is plenteous” — these words have never been truer than they are today, yet the laborers are still few and far between.

The stories within this book are accounts of those who heard the call of God to go forth as laborers into the harvest. Some heeded the call and found that, as they went forth weeping, bearing precious seed, they returned rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Others ignored it, only to discover that, by seeking to save their life, they lost the greater rewards that God would have given them.

Let these stories open your own heart to the Cry of the Harvest around you, and inspire you to heed the call of God in your life when it comes.

Cry of the Harvest



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**THE STORY OF
CHRISTIAN AGGERSON**
As Told by Himself

PART 1 – CALLED AND CHOSEN

Mine was a life of simplicity, a life of giving. I was not famous, nor was I much thought of by men, but still I gave. My name is Christian Aggerston, and I was a missionary to China in the late 1800s. There were those who doubted that I could ever do anything of note for the Lord—not least among whom was myself. Even now, I do not count myself to have done any “great” thing for God. I simply answered when He called, and lived a humble life of service to my Lord and King—and the people of China to whom He sent me.

Let me go back and tell you how I got saved. I grew up a farm boy in the north of Sweden. When I got older, I became tired with life on the farm and wanted to spread my wings and reach for something other than the chores and drudgery that the farm had to offer. I was tired of feeding the pigs and tending the sheep, and I wished I could explore other lands and do something more exciting. I couldn't understand when my father would not let me go to the big city and try to make a name for myself.

“Son,” he told me one morning, “the Lord has a special plan for you. We've always felt that—even

from the time we first carried you to the church to have you baptized by the preacher. We just knew that God had a special purpose for your life. It was a miracle that you were even born. As you well know, when your mother was pregnant with you, she was very sick with the flu that many others had already died from. She was near death more than once, but the Lord promised that He would keep both of you, and that you would go on to fulfill His mission.

“To this day I don’t know what that mission is, but I do know this much: He has kept you through many things that could have taken your life. Remember how when you were just a young child, the Lord protected you from being killed by that runaway team of horses pulling the hay wagon? You remember how the wagon just missed you by inches as it thundered by? Your life belongs to God, Son, and He has given me the responsibility of tending it, and of raising you in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So that is why I will not let you just go and follow some half-cooked scheme of your own.”

While I saw the truth and some reason in what my father said to me, I still resented him for it. He was keeping me on the farm when I wanted to be off exploring. I daydreamed about joining the Navy and sailing to far off places. I even dreamt one night that I had joined an expedition to the North Pole. But no, when I woke, I was back at home—and back to feeding pigs, tending sheep, tossing hay, harvesting potatoes and caring for the farm like I always had before.

This was certainly not what I planned to be doing for the rest of my life. After my father’s talk I determined that I was not going to spend a moment longer on that farm than I had to. I began taking every opportunity I could to get away for short times. Whenever there was a special school activity after hours, you could be sure that I was there. Or if there

was a meeting at the town hall, you could be sure I was not going to stay home. Even if I didn’t attend the meeting I would go and visit friends. Anything to get even the shortest distance away from the farm.

But still I longed for the day when I could leave the farm for good and strike out to find a life of my own. That day finally came when I turned eighteen. I now considered myself a grown man, and my father knew he could not keep me home any longer. The morning of my birthday I packed my things and made plans to set out for Stockholm. My father watched gravely as I gathered my belongings, and then waited, sitting at the kitchen table, for me to say farewell.

When I came into the kitchen, he was still sitting, reading his Bible. The sun had set and darkness filled the room, except for the feeble glow of the candle. Before I could say anything, he spoke. “I want to read you something,” he said. He then proceeded to read in a quiet voice the story of the prodigal son. I waited standing, impatient for him to be finished so I could be off. I had wanted to leave earlier than this. Finally he was done, and he closed the book. After what seemed like an eternity of silence he opened his mouth to speak, but I had had enough and interrupted him.

“Father,” I pleaded, “I don’t need any more lectures. Just bid your farewells and I’ll be gone. I’ll make it, you’ll see.”

I could see the pain in his eyes as he said goodbye, but only now do I realize how difficult it must have been for him—and my attitude didn’t make things any easier. He was giving up a priceless treasure that the Lord had placed in his hands to care for, and now, after all these years, I was leaving—and it wasn’t to find the calling the Lord had in store for me.



I arrived in Stockholm and found work for several months at the docks. It was hard work, but I was willing to do anything to get started. Besides, as a country boy I was accustomed to manual labor. During this time I was also trying to educate myself. I spent many long hours at the college library. But after over a year, the work at the docks became tedious. It was no different than working hard on the farm, and it soon became twice as boring. Since I had now saved up a bit of money, I decided to move further into the city, and rented a small room over a shop.

I wanted to spend more time studying, but, still needing to have some source of income, I began to work as a carpenter's apprentice in the afternoons, while pursuing my studies at the local college in the mornings. I learned much during this time, both in carpentry and academics, but I still had a desire to do something more with my life.

One day I was introduced to Kristine, the daughter of one of the professors at my college. After meeting her I could think of nothing else. I was so in love with her that I would skip classes, meals—whatever it took to be with her. She loved me very much in return, and we began seeing each other—and continued to do so for the next two years. I was certain she was the one for me. By this time I had become quite proficient in my trade and had completed my studies, so I started my own small carpentry shop at the early age of twenty-four. Business was good, and I was earning some respect for myself. Kristine and I were eventually engaged. Things were looking up in every area of my life, and yet, something was still lacking—though I never gave much time to such feelings.

I had stopped attending church, as I didn't see the need for God in my life. I had made it this far on my own (or so I thought) so what did I need God for?

Religion, to me, meant little more than books full of rules and regulations that I now found it impossible to live by. It seemed that everything I wanted to do was in direct opposition to what God wanted. So I decided to push Him out of my life altogether, and declare myself an atheist.

Now in those days atheists were not very common. Almost everyone believed in God. Even if some people didn't do much to practice or show their beliefs, they were still a rooted Christian society. I knew that it pained Kristine to see me going down the path of unbelief, as she was a strong and dedicated member of the local church, and she had a faith that I clearly did not possess.

Then, one day while busy in my workshop, an old man entered, carrying with him a small chest of drawers. He asked if I could refinish the cabinet, and told me he would pay whatever it took to have this done. The chest, however, appeared in pretty good condition.—There were no cracks or peeling paint, or even any signs of wear. Still, the man persisted that it was to be refinished, so I agreed. Then, as he left he said a very strange thing to me. "Pay close attention to the drawers. After you have worked on them, you will never be the same."

"The drawers?" I questioned. The man just smiled, and walked out into the street. Overcome by curiosity, I began to pull out the drawers, but couldn't find anything unusual about them. "Silly old man! Perhaps they have some sentimental value to him. And now I'll never be the same? Bah!"

I had no other work that afternoon, so I set off to examine the cabinet almost right away. I took the usual steps of sanding and stripping the paint off to clear the surface as much as possible before applying new layers of varnish. But strangely enough, nothing I tried seemed to work. Neither sanding nor stripping could peel the coat of varnish

off this chest. It looked no different from any other piece of workmanship I had seen in my six years of learning and doing carpentry work, and yet, for all my sanding and stripping, the varnish remained smooth and unblemished. I could not understand why.

Frustrated, I put it aside and decided to work on something else. But the thought of the chest of drawers haunted my mind for the rest of the day. It nagged upon me and tugged at my thoughts till finally I could think of nothing else. I couldn't work this way, so I closed up the shop and went home. I visited Kristine and told her about it, but all she said was, "What a peculiar story," and went on with her housework.

All night long I tossed and turned, trying to push thoughts of what the old man had said out of my mind. Each time that I succeeded in thinking about something else, a picture of the drawers would materialize like a vision in my head. I thought I would go mad. Finally it was dawn, and none too soon. I set out at once with a fresh determination to find out what it was about this simple piece of furniture that was having such a strange effect on me.

I opened the shop and found it just as I had left it—except for one thing. An arrow was drawn in the sawdust and it was pointing to ... no, it couldn't be! It was pointing to that confounded set of drawers. This was getting downright spooky. There was only one entrance to my shop, and I had found it locked just as I had left it. I was sure that this arrow hadn't been there the day before because I had worked on that very bench, and with all the sawing and hammering I had done there would have been no chance for such a symbol to be so perfectly formed.

I lifted the chest back on to the workbench, and then began to look for footprints or any other such

clues to this mystery. I pulled each of the three drawers out and looked them over carefully, but as the day before, I found nothing.

"I must be losing my mind!" I said to myself as I continued to look for some explanation.

Then as I slid the drawers back in I heard a soft click, and all on its own, one of the sides of the chest fell off and hit the floor with a clatter. I nearly jumped, and quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching. Positive that I was still alone, I slowly turned the cabinet towards the open side. There I found, written into the sideboard, these words: "Art thou called being a servant? Seek not to be loosed."

Those words dug deep into my heart, as I knew what they meant. My father had often quoted this verse to me when discussing my desire to go to the city. I was called to be a servant of God but I had sought to be loosed.

I sat there for what seemed like an eternity, looking those words over as they were etched into my memory. Memories suddenly began to flood my mind of all the times the Lord had come through for me, every time He had protected me, provided for me and cared for me. And how had I repaid Him? I had turned my back on Him and become an atheist. I had despised Him, cursed His name and spoken against Him to all who would listen.

I felt sick with shame. Was this the way to repay the God Who had kept me all these years? Was this the way to show my gratitude to Someone Who had shown me nothing but love and tender mercy? Each new question stung my mind and heart.

I dropped to my knees and cried, "Oh, Lord, my God! What have I done to You? I have offended and hurt and cursed You when all You gave in return for my railings was love. You dealt with me not after my iniquity, but You have dealt with me in loving

kindness. Can You still forgive one such as I? Show me, Lord, what You would have me do. I yield myself to You now, and I ask Your forgiveness for my rebellion and my waywardness. Show me Your way, O Lord, and I will tell others of it.”

A peace began to come over me—a peace that I had not known since I was just a boy. This peace—I knew—could only come from Him. Somehow I knew that He had heard my prayer and my plea and that He would do something about it. As I walked home that night it seemed as if nothing else mattered but finding out what God’s will was for me.

When I visited Kristine she looked startled. I didn’t know the change had been all that apparent on the outside, but whatever it was, she could see it. I walked up to her and held her in my arms, then I told her all that had happened. She held me and cried tears of joy. “Oh, my dear Christian, how I have prayed for this day! How I have sought God on my knees for this blessed moment! Thank You, thank You, my dear Jesus, for answering my prayers.” With those words we held each other and wept.

The next morning I awoke with a renewed determination to find what God’s will was for me. I had wasted enough time seeking to gratify the desires of my own heart, but now something had changed and I knew I had to find out what it was that I had been missing in these last—and lost—six years of my life.

I hurried back to my workshop. I could hardly wait to see again this strange sight that had brought my heart face to face with my God. With trembling fingers I unlocked and opened the doors of the workshop. But, to my shock, the cabinet was ... GONE! It was nowhere to be found. I searched and searched the room, but it was nowhere. My heart was pounding as I turned and walked slowly towards the bench that just the day before had held

the mysterious cabinet, once again looking for clues as to what might have happened. Again, there were none. Yet, somehow I knew that there would be something there, waiting for me to discover it.

Sure enough, in the sawdust lay another message for me. Five letters stared up at me as if they had been written by the very hand of God—perhaps they were: C-H-I-N-A. China! Was this it?! Was God telling me that His plan for me lay in China? Surely not!

“Lord, this could not be Your will, could it?” I spoke aloud, more to myself than to Him. “I mean, I don’t know the first thing about China—much less about preaching. What would I do there?”

Then a voice spoke in my head, words that I had not heard for a long time, but that suddenly rang into my memory as clear as anything: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” Then another verse—one that left me with an even greater struggle: “And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

My heart pounded with a sudden thought. No, Lord! Please, not Kristine. She has been such a strength and inspiration to me. If it weren’t for her prayers, I would probably have never come back to You. Surely there must be some other meaning.”

Again the Voice came. “Let him deny himself and let him follow Me,” was His only answer.

My heart was heavy. I gathered what few valuables and coins of mine were in the shop, and closed its doors for what I knew would be the last time. It was still morning, so instead of going home, I headed out towards the pier where I had once worked, and watched the fishing boats and those who were working on them just as I once had. I struggled with how to tell Kristine the news of my calling. I was unsure how she would react. Would

she be overjoyed, as she had been yesterday when I announced my newfound faith? Or would she—as that unexpected verse was perhaps trying to tell me—reject the idea? Would she be less than eager to marry a missionary on his way to China?

I tried in all earnestness to think of a way in which to convince her that this was truly the Lord's will, and persuade her to come with me. I didn't know if I would be able to make it without her, though the call had been definite, and I knew that one way or another God would have me go. But I decided that I would have to at least give Kristine a chance.

Finally, having resolved that I would accept whatever it would be that the Lord would require of me, I turned towards her home. She was surprised to see me so early.

"Kristine," I blurted awkwardly, "God has shown me what I must do."

"Tell me, Christian. What is it?" She asked eagerly.

I suddenly felt wooden, and wondered if I had it in me to finish telling her. "I fear that you might not take kindly to this idea, but I must tell you anyway. You see, God has called me to be a missionary to ... to China. I must begin my preparations immediately."

"China?!!" she replied with a notable edge in her voice. "Are you out of your mind? Nonsense! God couldn't be asking *you* to be a missionary to China. You've been a Christian for all of 36 hours and already you want to be a missionary and run off to China?" She emphasized the word China with notable disgust. "Tell me you're not serious!"

"But Kristine," I pleaded "you are the one that had always hoped and prayed that I might come back to the Lord. It was your prayers that brought me to this point to begin with."

"I prayed for you, yes, because I couldn't possibly

marry an atheist. But I never thought it would come to this! Please, just forget about it. You've found God. Just leave it at that. Come to church with me. Let's get married and settle down. You can even teach Sunday School if you have to. But forget about this business of going to China. I will have none of it! Please, just don't even bother to come back to me until this foolish idea has left you." With this she walked to the door and held it open for me with a stern look in her eye. I walked out without saying a word. This was not how I had hoped it would go.

Heartbroken, I walked aimlessly through the city. I didn't know where I was going and I didn't really care. I just had to think. Perhaps I was going mad. Perhaps I was taking it all a little too seriously. I had to find out for certain. As I walked about, I came across a beggar who reached out his hand and asked me for a coin. I reached into my pocket to pull out whatever change I had, when I suddenly recognized the face. It was that of the old man who had brought the mysterious chest into my workshop.

"Wait! Don't I know you? Aren't you the man who brought that chest of drawers to my store to be fixed just two days ago?"

He suddenly lost the beggarly air, and spoke with quiet authority. "God sent the chest of drawers, my son. I was only the messenger. Now you have a choice to make. Will you heed His call, or forsake Him for want of a family? Will you give up everything and launch out into the unknown as you have always dreamed of, or will you turn your back on Him, and settle for some common earthly pleasure? God has called you to China, but the choice is yours. Think carefully and see if you can't hear His Voice in your heart telling you now what you must do."

It did not even occur to me as strange that I had not mentioned any of these things to this beggar. For

all his appearances, he was at that moment nothing less than the very mouth and messenger of God.

“Yes! Yes, you’re right,” I responded. “He is calling me to forsake all that I have and come and follow Him, just as His first disciples did. I must do that. It’s just that ... well, you see...” I hesitated at the thought of questioning this messenger, but he nodded for me to go on. “Well, it just seems like an awful lot to give up for something that I cannot see, for a totally new life that perhaps I won’t even enjoy. What guarantees do I have that I will be happy? I love Kristine very much and it strikes me as being somewhat extreme to be asked to just drop her and gallivant off to China.” The frustration and unspoken thoughts of my heart came to the fore as I expressed these things, and tears began to well up in my eyes.

He looked at me with a grave face, and he nodded his understanding. Then he laid his hand on my shoulder and said, “Jesus once said to His disciples, ‘Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.’ He knew what it was like to give up all He held dear. He gave up His place in Heaven to come to Earth. That is a much further distance to go than China is. He knew what it was like, and He knows now the feelings that you have. That’s why He promises to give you a hundredfold in return. That’s a lot. Have faith. Trust that He is at the helm of your life. He won’t leave you without anything that you need.”

I nodded my agreement. I was beginning to see the light. Finally I spoke: “Yes, you are right. Thank you, thank you.”

“Don’t thank me,” the beggar replied. “Thank God!” He shook my hand and smiled. “He’ll always be there for you. Now go on.”

I began to walk away. When I turned to take a last glance at this mysterious man, it was just as I had expected—he was nowhere to be seen. He had vanished—as mysteriously as the strange cabinet he had brought to me.

The following day I set off for my parents’ farm. As I opened the main gate and started up the little road that led to the house, my father spotted me from the porch. He came running out to greet me, and it was as if he already knew all that had taken place in my life. “It has happened. It has happened!” he shouted excitedly. “Oh Mother, come and see. The prodigal son has returned, and the Lord has revealed His will unto our Christian. Praise You Lord! Thank You for fulfilling Your Word, and for answering my prayers. Oh, thank You!”

That night I told them all about what had happened since I had left the farm. There was much to be said, for although I had written, my letters had been less than frequent. Finally I arrived at the tale of the old man, the mysterious chest of drawers, receiving my calling, and of course about Kristine not wanting to have anything to do with it.

“I can see that look, Son. I have seen it in you before when you were determined to do something. I saw it the day you left for the city, and I can see it again now. You will do what you determine to do, and *this time* I want to do whatever I can to help you on your way. Come, come with us to the church tonight, and share with the whole congregation what the Lord has done for you. I am sure He will not fail you now.”

Father was right. I went with them to the church that evening—the first time I had gone to church in several years, and there told my testimony. The pastor was all too happy to see me again, and canceled the rest of the meeting to call me up front. He too could see what the Lord had done and wanted me to tell my testimony.

That night the church took up an offering for me and the next day people were visiting all day long to bring supplies and clothing, donations and everything they could think of. It touches my heart even now to remember the looks on the faces of those dear ones whom I had grown up with. It felt good to be among people who understood what it meant to me to follow the Lord's call, and who would do whatever they could to help send this boy off to the mission field.

It was just a short month later that I set sail for China, where I began a whole new life, teaching and preaching the Gospel to all who would listen—and many did. And so a great work was begun—not great in my own eyes, and not great in the eyes of those around me. But it was great in God's sight, for I had found His highest calling for my life, and had followed it—all because of one verse, an angel sent from God, and my loving parents and friends. Never underestimate the power of God in one's life. It is real and it works and it can do miracles. He did it for me, and He'll do it for you too, if you'll ask Him.

PART TWO – MIRACLES IN CHINA

Life wasn't easy in China. When I arrived I met another missionary family who had been in China for over six years already. They had lost two daughters to sickness because of the squalid conditions of the village in which they lived. They had set up a small missionary center, which consisted of two huts and a tent, and villagers would come from the surrounding towns to be treated at their small clinic.

It wasn't the people so much as the cultural differences that came as the greatest shock to me when I first arrived. Here I was, fresh out of a society in which certain manners and customs were undisputed. And here was a totally different society made of its own beliefs and traditions that seemed so utterly foreign, and largely incomprehensible. Most of the time in those first months I felt like a fish out of water, struggling to make sense of everything I was feeling and experiencing. Everything was so new to me, so strange, so different: the smells, the living conditions, the strange rituals of the Buddhist monks and the feeling of being totally different from the multitude of short, dark-haired Chinese.

As you can imagine I was quite a spectacle among them. Being the thoroughbred Nordic that I was, my blond hair and tall physique^{*} stood in stark contrast to the people I had come to minister to. It took quite a bit of adjusting for me before I felt settled in.

To make matters more complicated, naturally I didn't speak the language. This meant that my first months were spent performing menial tasks for the other missionary family. It was those first months that tried my faith the most. Here I was, fulfilling the "special calling" the Lord had given me, and all I was doing was feeding animals, drawing water from a well, cooking, and performing household chores—the same ones I had sought to flee in leaving the farm those many years ago. I believe the Lord wanted to see if I was willing to take the humble road. It was a time of great breaking for me, because I had been so used to having my own way and being in control. I really did want to learn, but at times it just seemed too much to bear. It was at times like these that the Word was a great comfort and strength to me. The missionary couple also helped me greatly with their counseling, gleaned from their years of experience and wisdom in working with the locals.

The couple I stayed with, Mark and Sally, were American, and we got along quite nicely. I had studied English at the university, and was thus able to communicate with them. Every evening they would have Chinese language classes with me, and I believe the Lord gave me a special talent for Chinese, because the rate I was learning was nothing short of miraculous. I wrote home once a month, and Kristine about two or three times a month. I was still very much in love with her, and wished so much to be with her again. But the Lord had called me to fulfill my mission on this field for Him. How could I do any less for Him, when He had done so much for me?

The Lord did many exciting things for us as we continued to carefully teach all those we met about Him. One time when visiting a neighboring town, we ended up staying later than we had planned. The road home was a dangerous one by night. The villagers shook their heads gravely and recounted stories of ruthless bandits who lived in the area. We were asked to stay but we knew we had to return home for the following morning's business. It was already dusk, and the looming shadows were fast giving way to the dusky gloom of the approaching night. We had a good prayer before setting out, but for some reason I still wasn't at ease. Something just wasn't right. The feeling intensified the further we walked. I wondered if it was just my own nerves, or if Mark felt the same.

Finally I turned to him. "Does something seem wrong to you?" I asked. "I have an eerie feeling."

"I know what you mean," Mark responded. "I too, feel a strange sense of foreboding, but I don't know what it is. But we have prayed, and the Lord knows we must be home by tonight. So we'll just have to trust Him to keep and protect us. Let's stop and pray."

With that we both put down our bags and knelt in prayer. Just then we heard a twig snap in the darkness to our left, followed by footsteps slowly approaching. Without looking up, we glanced at each other and started to pray in earnest. The footsteps drew closer until finally we could make out in the moonlight a group of bandits all around us. This did not look good. Each bandit appeared to be holding a large knife or spear. They did not move or speak. Perhaps they were waiting for us to stand up first. We, however, remained on our knees, and in silent but desperate prayer.

Finally, the leader of the group grew impatient and shouted at us in Chinese. "You are Christians!

I will have no Christians in my village! You must die, now!”

We looked up at each other, our hearts sinking together. Then all at once we began praying aloud, pouring out our hearts to God in fervent prayer. We expected at any moment to become the object of their blades. Then Mark switched, and suddenly began to pray earnestly in Chinese so that the men around could understand him. I could not understand all he was saying, but I could tell it was a prayer of unwavering faith, and yet filled with emotion. He was weeping for the souls of these men. As he prayed I listened, spellbound at the obvious eloquence that was inspiring him. I could only understand a few phrases here and there, and I caught portions of scripture he quoted which I had learned. All the while, my own heart continued crying out to God to somehow deliver us from this dangerous situation.

After what seemed like an eternity, but had only been about five minutes, Mark slowed in his prayer, and then stopped. I was afraid to open my eyes, but finally I could not bear to keep them closed any longer. What I saw was nothing short of an unexplainable miracle and manifestation of the saving power of an almighty God! Every last one of the bandits were on their knees, and some were weeping quietly. The leader stood up and walked up to Mark. Finally he said, “Never, in all my life, have I seen such power, such fearlessness, such courage in the face of death. Tell me where this power comes from.”

Truly amazed and praising God for His mighty hand, we began witnessing to these men. They all received the Lord and escorted us safely all the way back to our village. This was just one of many miracles the Lord did for us.

On another occasion, I was working on the roof of one of the mission huts when a fire broke out inside. These huts had thatched grass roofs, supported by

the wooden beams upon which I was balanced, so it was only a matter of time before I would be burned by the fire if I didn't get down fast. I scrambled as quickly as I could over to where I had left the ladder, but the panicking animals below had knocked it down. I could jump, but the mission was built on stilts, and it was quite a ways to the ground. There was no guarantee that I would not still do myself great injury if I leapt. To drop through the thatched roof into the burning house was not an appealing thought either. For a split moment I clung to the roof, totally at a loss as to what I should do.

Just then, it started to rain, and I don't mean drizzling lightly, I mean really pouring. It was so heavy that it stung my skin as it came down. It hurt, but it was clearly the Lord's way of protecting us. It soaked the roof and it began to leak through all the cracks the fire had already opened, into the house. It had come just in time, because these huts would have burned up within minutes, being made mostly of dry grass and wood. Someone then came to put the ladder back up, and I managed to get down safely. The relatively minor damage to the mission house was quickly repaired. Thank the Lord!

My parents wrote me often, and they always included a little donation from the local church for our ministry to the Chinese. It was always good to hear from home, and especially from these so dear to my heart. Kristine would also write occasionally, and in time I began to notice a change in her letters. It was hardly noticeable at first, but with time she began sounding less accusatory, and more understanding, even loving. She had been very angry for months after I made my decision to leave for China, and felt that I had totally forsaken her when I had done so. I supposed she felt that the only way she could really let these feelings out was to criticize me,

and accuse me of leaving her. This she had done quite frequently in her earlier communications with me, but now it was beginning to change.

Then one day I received a letter from her with an enclosed donation. I was shocked! Not only had she come to accept what I had chosen to do with my life, but now she was actually supporting me? This was more than I could have even hoped for. One donation led to another, and soon she was sending me donations with every letter, which also were becoming more frequent. Then, one day came the unimaginable, but always hoped for.

“My dearest Christian,” she wrote, “I have been thinking about my life a lot recently, trying to carefully weigh out the things I have been living for. I have found that I am really not happy with the way I have chosen to serve God. I had been content to limit myself to going to church, making offerings, and doing occasional deeds of goodwill to those less fortunate in our community, but there is an urge inside of me to do something much more—something that is more worthwhile. I can’t ignore this feeling that has been in my heart for some time now, and is only growing stronger. I have come upon a decision, and beg that you will hear it with an open mind and forgiving heart. I have decided that I want to leave Sweden to join you there in China, if you’ll have me.

“I know now that you were right, that there is nothing greater than following what the Lord has called you to do. As I read your letters and hear of the great things God is doing for you there, I can’t help but want to be there with you. I pray that you can forgive me for the way that I treated you, and that you’ll believe me when I say that the love I feel for you is very great. And although this love has played no small part in bringing me to this point, I must also say, with the Apostle Paul, that ‘the Love of Christ constraineth me.’

“Please don’t turn me away. Let me join you. Let me work together with you. Let me be by your side, and let us labor for our Lord together. Please don’t say it is too dangerous, too perilous for one such as me. I eagerly await your reply. With all the love of my heart, Kristine.”

Upon reading this I jumped for joy! I rushed to tell Mark and Sally the good news. They rejoiced with me, and we all praised and thanked God together. This truly was a fulfillment of my heart’s desires—desires I had forsaken to fulfill God’s will, and which it seemed He was now returning to me an hundredfold more. Now I could think of nothing else. I hurriedly wrote a reply so that it could return on the first ship to Sweden. It would take some time to reach her and until then I busied myself with preparations for her arrival.

The first task was to build another hut for us to live in. The trade I had learned as a carpenter once again came in handy, as it had many times before in this country. In fact, many of the things I had learned throughout my life seemed to have been in preparation for the task that God had ordained me for here. I went about my work with such vigor and determination that Mark had to literally pull the tools out of my hand to get me to come and eat.

Nearly six months later we received word that she was on her way and would be arriving by ship via England. By this time I was incredibly impatient and nearly sick with anticipation at seeing her face again. I was so happy. Several days before the ship was due to arrive we started preparing for the journey to the port town where she would be arriving. It would take three days in our borrowed cart and mule, and I wanted to be there in plenty of time to greet her when she arrived.

Then tragedy struck. We received news from traders that the ship on which Kristine was to arrive

had gone down in a storm, and there were no reports of survivors. I listened to the news in a dazed state, then wandered back to my newly built hut and collapsed on my bed.—The bed that I had built for Kristine and I. I was crushed beyond grief. Then I was angry at God for having so suddenly taken away from me the most wonderful of all His blessings. Mark and then Sally came and tried to comfort me and help me see that God must have a plan and a reason, but to no avail.

I sat alone on my bed that night, with my head in my hands, weeping for the loss of the one most dear to my heart. Then a verse entered my mind. As clear as a note from the distant Buddhist monastery bells it rang in my mind: *“Only believe and she shall be made whole.”* Could this really be God’s voice telling me that she was safe? That she was sound? That she had somehow managed to survive? That she would still come to me? Or was this just a cruel trick being played on my tormented mind? Was it only because I myself was wishing, beyond reason, for her to come back to me—and now this wishing had caused me to lose my mind?

It came again, and this time, it sounded as though someone was whispering in the darkness across the room: *“Only believe and she shall be made whole.”* I tried to remember where this passage was from, so I rushed over to my table and lit a candle. Then taking up my well-worn Bible and thumbing through it, I reached Luke chapter eight. *“There came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue...”* I read through my tears the story of how Jesus healed the young girl who was dead, how He brought her back to life. If He had done it for her, the thought struggled to express itself, could He not now do it for my Kristine?

I dropped to my knees and fervently and earnestly besought the Lord that He would spare her life and

bring her safely home to me. I spent three hours on my knees in prayer. Finally, after the candle had long burned itself out, a peace and hush came over my spirit. I had confidence that He would care for her and that all was well. I went back to my bed and was soon asleep. Now, the next part of my story is truly amazing. It is so miraculous that you may have a hard time believing it. But I swear that it is the truth, exactly as it unfolded.

I was awakened suddenly by some strange noise. I sat up in my bed, and my room looked strange and different, somehow smaller. I suddenly began to feel the strange sensation of the entire room rocking. I rushed for the door but I stopped before opening it. Was I dreaming? I slapped my face several times to try to wake myself up, but it was no dream. I was there. I grabbed the door handle and flung open the door only to find that I was out at sea, and on what appeared to be a small sailing vessel. All around me, as far as the eye could see in every direction, was water. It looked as though the sun had yet to rise, and the ocean and the sky joined together into a canopy of swirling blackness.

I could see debris and bits and pieces of wood floating in the water all around the ship, and immediately thought of Kristine and the sunken ship. I rushed up to the railing and began instinctively calling her name. I ran around the railing shouting and calling for her to answer me, but there was no answer.

I’m having a very bad dream, I thought to myself, and I tried every thing I could to wake myself up. But as I turned again to find the cabin from which I had come, I saw my reflection in one of the porthole windows.—It wasn’t me! It was someone else’s face. Stunned, I lifted my hand to feel my face. It was real all right, but it wasn’t mine—nor were the hands I now found myself staring at. Suddenly a voice called

out to me in the darkness, and I jumped in shock. It appeared to be a sailor, and he was addressing me as his captain.

“Captain! I see something!”

I rushed to his side and there, floating about 200 meters away, was a large piece of wreckage from a ship. It had four bodies on it, and as we sailed closer we found to our joy that these people were alive, or almost. Hastily we pulled them aboard and brought them warm blankets and tea. There were three Chinese and one foreign man, who was the first to awaken. “Please,” he whispered, “there is someone else out there. You must save her.”

The blood rushed through my veins like a torrent and I ordered the man in the crow’s-nest to keep a look out for other survivors. For what seemed like an eternity, our search was futile—nothing but the same small bits and pieces that littered the ocean all around us. I paced the deck in extreme agitation. Then, we saw her! Could it be? There, clinging to what looked like nothing more than half a door, was the one I loved so dearly. I let out a mighty shout and called for the rowboat to be dropped. I pulled her on board myself and found that she wasn’t breathing. I immediately began trying to revive her, but I had never learned how to resuscitate someone. I had no experience in this, nor had I ever seen it done. It was as if an unseen force was directing my every move. After blowing into her mouth several times she coughed and choked and began to spit up sea water.

My God, I thought, she’s swallowed half the ocean!

Her misty eyes rolled back and forth several times till they finally came to focus on me. She didn’t recognize me at all. I began to rub her arms, which were freezing, trying to get the blood circulating again, when suddenly, like a flash I found myself sitting upright in my own bed again—back on land, and many miles away from any ocean.

“It was a dream!” I realized disappointedly. And yet it all was so real. I could still feel the chill of the sea air, and smell the salt air which lingered in my nose. Then I felt the blood begin to rush inside of me. “She is alive! I know it! She is alive!” I shouted.

Mark rushed to the door and asked me if I was all right. I told him that I had to get to the port, that Kristine was alive and needed me this instant. “I must go now,” I said, as I threw my clothes on and stuffed some things into a bag. He stopped me at the door with his upheld hand.

“One moment, Christian,” he said in what he hoped was a stern voice. “Just stop and think for a minute. You had a dream. A simple dream, and now you’re going to embark on a three-day journey to the port just so you can see whether it’s true?”

I knew he meant well. Yet I knew in my heart that this was more than a dream. I had been there, and with God’s help I had saved her. “It is real! You’ll see. I know it! I have to go! I have to find her!”

Mark sadly assented, afraid that I would only be left more broken-hearted than ever. I saddled our best mule and rode as fast as it would carry me towards the port.

It took me only two-and-a-half days to get there, but when I arrived at the port I found that no ships had come in for awhile. But I was determined to wait, and to find her, and I promised myself that I would not leave till she came in.

The next day I returned to the port from the little inn I was staying at to see if there had been any word, but to no avail. There was a commotion at the end of one of the docks, with coolies and other men standing around talking loud and fast about something that seemed to be of great importance. I walked down and asked one of them what was going on? He replied that someone had heard a rumor

that a “gwilo” (white devil) had washed up on the beach several hours from here. I jumped, thinking that this could be her, but when I questioned them further as to where the gwilo had washed up and when, they were vague. It was just a rumor, they said. They did not believe it anyway, one of them. The Lord quieted my anxious soul and told me to wait. Another day passed, and still no word.

On the morning of the third day I was woken early by a strange urge to go walk by the pier. There had been many such hunches, and with nothing else to do, I had followed them all. This one was no different—it seemed. As I had done numerous other times by now, I got dressed and headed for the pier. As I walked, the Tempter came and started to sneer at me and laugh. He told me that I was wasting my time and my hopes—that she had been lost at sea, and that there was nothing anybody could have done—or now could do—about it. I was following a hallucination. I tried to fight back with all that was within me, trying to find some element of logic in what I was doing, but there was none. He was gaining ground and my spirit was slipping. The barrage continued till I came to a bench by the beach, sat down, and hung my head.

The pier was only a short distance up the beach from where I was, but the heaviness of my heart now made it seem as far away as the hope it represented. The sun had not yet risen and the darkness and cold depressed me even further. Still, the Tempter didn’t quit.

There is no reason for you to be here! You could wait till dawn, and dawn the next day, and the next. There is no hope—and there is no God Who can prove otherwise!

That’s when he went just a bit too far. I knew without any doubt whatsoever that there was a God! That was the foothold I needed to lift me up, and it stirred my spirit up like never before.

“I know that there is a God,” I shouted back into the morning air. “Above all things, that one thing I know, and am sure of!” I threw Satan’s words back in his teeth. “There is no God? Why, you fool! You imbecile, you really think I am going to swallow that line? Get thee behind me, Satan, for my God doeth all things well! There is hope and I am here to prove my Maker. Get thee hence and be gone, for Christ maketh me strong.” The spirit of God rose up within me and I fought back by His power.

No sooner had I made this declaration of faith within myself, when the words of God came flooding back into my heart: “*Only believe and she shall be made whole.*” The sun tinged the horizon out at sea, and the light was breaking through the gloom. It broke through the gloom of my heart too, and the darkness fled.

Only believe! “Yes,” I said aloud as I stood up. “I believe.” I started to run towards the pier. There was no turning back now. There was no shadow of doubt—I knew that my Kristine would be there and that God had made her whole. As I reached the pier I saw the form of a ship breaking through the early morning mist. I ran to the end of the pier where they were mooring the boat, which I recognized instantly as the one in my dream. On the deck stood the man with the face I had seen in the porthole reflection in my “dream.”

Here was the fulfillment of God’s Word. They let down the gangplank and scarcely had it touched the pier but I was on it, calling out Kristine’s name as I rushed onto the boat. The sailor standing by pointed to a door leading below. “Gwilo’s,” he said. I was in there like a flash and down the steps into the hold. There she sat with the others, all huddled in blankets and looking very pale. Kristine was coughing badly. I walked up to her and just stared down at her, too happy to move, too happy to speak.

CRY OF THE HARVEST

She finished coughing and realized that someone was standing over her. She looked into my face.

“Christian!” she said weakly. “Is it really you?”

“Yes,” I replied, finding my voice once again. “It is me. God has brought you back to me. Oh, praise His Name.” I held her head tight to my breast and rocked her and cried and praised and cried some more. She started sobbing. It was the happiest moment of my life.

She was placed in my room at the inn until she recovered. It was a long hard road to recovery, as she had contracted pneumonia from being out in those cold waters for so long. But every day I quoted the verse that had sustained me over and over again: “Only believe and she shall be made whole!”

As surely as the promises of God come true, she was made whole, and came to join us at our little inland mission. There she was a great help and strength, not only to me, but to the hundreds and thousands of others who came to know God through our ministry to them.

It is still a mystery what happened the night that Kristine was rescued, but she later said that she had an unmistakable feeling that I was there, on the ship that had rescued her and the others. So was I really there? My only answer is, “With God nothing shall be impossible.”



SUN GYI'S GOD

As Told by Sun Gyi San

*I come to speak to you, from a land of yesteryear,
 To show you of a time, that for me was very dear.
 I lived in a land of many trees,
 and a river great and wide.
 The hills, the plains, the lands, the sea,
 the delta, all combine
 To make the land, the land I love,
 where I lived and learned and grew;
 I grew to know the King of all,
 and now I share with you
 My story, so that you may find, within its pages,
 truth and light;
 That you may come to know and trust,
 the God of all, and King of might.*

The Missionary

My name is Sun Gyi San, and I grew up in Myanmar—also known as Burma. My mother and father, brothers, sister, and I, lived in a little bamboo hut in a peaceful village. Our house was built on stilts so it wouldn't be flooded when the monsoons came. It was a peaceful life, and a beautiful one.

My mother and father were good and wise, and they brought us up to be just, fair and kind. They were Buddhists, and they passed on their religion to us as well. Life was simple and joyful. We lived happily, watching the beautiful sunrise over the river each morning and the fiery sunset each night. My brothers and sister and I busied ourselves with small chores, going to the market with mother, and helping father plow the rice fields. We were busy—always busy—but life was serene.

One day, when I was about twelve, a missionary came to our village. He came to the village square. Many were frightened, as we did not have foreign visitors very often and some in our village had never seen a foreigner. This man spoke in a language that sounded very strange to us, yet he could also speak a little of our language. The small children were most interested in him. They would run up and look at him and then run off as if they were

scared. He only smiled, and asked them if they wanted to play a game. My youngest brother and sister were quite bold, and they went up to him to play this game. Soon other children joined in his game—he called it “Ring Around the Rosies.”

The man was very kind to the little children and made them laugh. He had a puppet show that fascinated everyone. Some of the grownups were scared and worried what the man might do to their children, but they were too afraid to go up to him and take their children away, so they waited on the side, watching carefully.

I, too, was on the side observing the man. Something about him fascinated me. I could not figure out what made him so different. It was not just his looks or his language, there was something else. He was interesting.

That night, I stole to the window of the little hut where he was staying. The candlelight inside sent a warm glow throughout the room. I listened carefully as it seemed he was talking to someone. I peered into the window and saw that there was no one in the hut but him.

He was on his knees and he was weeping. I did not understand what was making him so sad.

His eyes were closed, his hands were folded and he was speaking to someone called “Jesus.” I thought he must have been praying to some god. I had never heard of a god named Jesus. The only gods I knew were gods from the temple on the hill, and every time we wanted to pray to any of the gods, we had to go to the temple and perform a ritual of offering sacrifices and prayers.

But this man had a God that he could pray to in the privacy of his own hut. I liked that. And the tears—I had never seen a man weep as he prayed to a god. Yet here was a man weeping. Much of what he said I could not understand, but somehow I felt

that he was praying for the people of our land—praying that they all might come to know this Jesus, and that, from the great darkness, a light would shine forth so bright that it would engulf the darkness.

As I walked back to my hut that night, I was filled with questions and great wonderment at the foreign man and at what I had just seen. I lay down on my mat on the floor next to my brothers and sister, but it took me a long time to go to sleep. My mind was racing with questions and thoughts.

In the days that followed, I watched the missionary with great interest, but I could never bring myself to go to him or to begin conversation. He spent most of his days in the central area of the village, talking to and entertaining the children.

Encounters by the River

One morning I went to the great river that flowed by our village to get some water. It was a beautiful morning. The early mist had lifted and the sun shone brightly. The river looked like a blanket of stars that twinkled.

All of a sudden, I heard a strange voice behind me. It was the usual and customary greeting of our region, but spoken by a very different voice. I spun around to find the tall, blond missionary standing behind me with a warm smile on his face. I dropped my water pots in surprise and stood frozen to the ground. My thoughts divided me. On one hand, I wanted to run and get as far away from him as I could, but on the other, I had so many things I wanted to speak to him about.

He stooped down to help me fill my pots again and fasten them on the stick across my shoulders. With a warm smile and a pat on the back, he told me that Jesus loved me. I mumbled a quick goodbye and was off, making my way up the little trail that

led back to the village.

My mind was full of many thoughts. I wondered how a God whom I did not know, had never seen, and never offered any sacrifices to, could possibly love me. Surely the only gods that were kind and benevolent* were the gods that were appeased by many sacrifices and peace offerings. And even then, if a person didn't continue with the offerings, the gods would be upset and could bring many difficulties on the person and their family.

But this missionary's God seemed different. When I got back home I was very upset with myself, because I had been given the opportunity to talk to this man, but I had been too scared to utter a single word. I wondered if he went down to the river every morning. I would find out.

I went down to the river the next day, and there he was, sitting underneath a tree, reading. I stood where he could not see me and watched him for a long time. Every now and then he would look around and admire the scenery, and then He would look up to the sky with a contented smile on his face. After he finished reading, he got on his knees again and started to pray. I couldn't hear anything he was saying because he was a distance away, but I resolved that the next day I would get closer so I could hear what he was saying.

Early the next morning, as the sun was just beginning to rise, I ran down to the river and climbed up the tree that the missionary had sat under the day before. *Up here, I thought, I will be able to hear everything the missionary says.* I had to wait for a while before I saw the missionary come down the path and settle himself beneath the tree. I watched him as he read silently, and listened as he prayed. What could he be reading?

After the missionary had finished praying, he was quiet and he kept the same position—on his

knees with his head bowed and hands folded. I wondered what he was doing. After a few minutes, he stood up and looked up into the tree—right at me!

Oh no, I thought, He's seen me! I am caught! What shall I say?

He gave a big smile and motioned for me to come down. I slid out of the tree and stood looking at the ground, feeling ridiculous. Then I looked at the book that he was holding, and he showed it to me. He explained that it was called the Bible, and that it held the words of his loving God and His Son, Jesus.

We sat down together under the tree and spoke for a long time. I came to understand Who Jesus was, and why it was that He loved me. The missionary, whose name was Andrew, read parts of the Bible to me. I couldn't understand everything he said, but I knew in my heart that this man was special and that what he was telling me was the truth.

In the days that followed, I often went down to the river in the morning to talk to Andrew, to hear more about his God, and to listen to him read to me from his Bible. I was very happy. I prayed with him one morning, asking Jesus to come into my heart. I loved this new God, Jesus, and started to pray to Him along with the missionary. For about a month I met Andrew at the river each morning, and we would talk and pray and sing.

One day Andrew told me, "Sun Gyi, there is something else I must teach you." He went on to explain that I could be persecuted for my new faith. He read to me many passages from the Bible about persecution. That same day he also gave me my very own Burmese New Testament. I was honored to receive such a gift.

"I will keep it with me always and treasure it as no other possession," I told him.

"That's my boy!" Andrew replied. "If you read it

faithfully, you will find a strength and a peace that you have not known. You will come to understand Jesus much better."

We promised to meet again the next day, and said goodbye.

Trouble

When I arrived back at my hut, I found my father standing in the doorway looking very angry. "Where were you this morning?" he demanded.

"At the river, Father. I often go there in the morning."

"I know! I saw you there talking to the strange man that has come to our village!" Father was very angry. "You must not speak with him. I have heard that he will put a curse upon you, and you will anger the gods. My rice crop will fail if the gods become angry at me for allowing you to speak with the stranger."

"He is a nice man, Father," I replied. "He will not hurt me. I read with him out of his book. You know how much I like to read."

"Arrgghh," my father screamed! "Not that book! It is an evil book, full of lies, false stories and wickedness!"

"How do you know, Father? Have you ever read from it?" I asked him.

"No! And I would never read it! I have heard from my friends that it is evil, and that is all I need to know. I forbid you to ever talk to this man again! You will not be corrupted by his words or by his God. We are Buddhists, and we worship the gods in the temple. We will worship no other. You will not speak to the missionary again."

"No, Father!" I pleaded. I cried and begged my father to let me speak to the missionary, but he grew angrier and beat me and threw me onto my mat. He refused to let me go out or give me food or drink until I promised to obey.

I remained in that hut a long time. Alone and very hungry, I took out the New Testament that the missionary had given me and began to read. I fell upon a verse that said, "Honor your father and mother" (Mat.15:4). I also read the verse that says, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mat.5:10).

As the sun that rises in the morning, light flooded into my soul. I knew what I had to do. I called my father and told him, "Father, I will obey you. I will not speak to the missionary." He was pleased and let me out of the hut.

That night as I lay on my mat, I thought hard. I must find a way to tell Andrew why I can no longer come to the river in the morning. I decided I would write him a letter and ask someone to deliver it. To ask my sister or one of my younger brothers would be too dangerous. Father would find out. I thought about my friend, Eiang! Yes, he would be the right one.

I devised a plan. After school the next day, when everyone went home, I would send word with my sister to Father, telling him that I needed to stay longer at school to finish my work. Then I would take paper and pencil (for we had none at home) and write to Andrew. I would tell him of all that had happened to me. All this I did the next day.

The following day, I found Eiang and asked him if he had delivered the letter. He nodded and pulled a paper out of his pocket and gave it to me. "Andrew is a good man," he said, as he ran off to play. I sat down and read the letter.

My dear Sun Gyi San,

Eiang gave me your letter. I am very sorry to hear we will not be able to continue to spend time together each morning. I will pray for you

every day. Please read the book I gave you, for in it you will find the strength that you need, and you will continue to learn about Jesus.

Be kind, helpful, and obedient to your parents. They will see your love and your respect, and if you are patient, one day you may have the opportunity to explain to them Who it is that makes you this way.

I will end with a promise that Jesus gives to you. 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Mat.28:20).

Your brother in Christ, Andrew

I cried tears of happiness! I felt a peace in my heart, and I knew that my new God, Jesus, would be with me and help me through these difficult times. With great interest and excited determination I read the New Testament Andrew had given me. I had to read it secretly, as if my father found that I had it, he would take it away from me. I did my best to follow Andrew's instruction to obey and respect my parents, and show love to my younger brothers and sister.

The Patient Years

As the years went by, I kept abreast of what Andrew was doing. He built a little chapel* that he used as a school during the day. Some of the mothers and fathers would let their children attend. There was great uproar in the town over this and much arguing. My father was foremost amongst those who spoke against the missionary. Then there were those who had been converted and who loved Jesus as I did. They would try to explain this to my father and the other villagers, but few listened.

I would write Andrew from time to time, giving my letters to Eiang to give to him, and Andrew would

write me back. I treasured his letters and kept them in a secret place along with my New Testament.

When I was sixteen, my father arranged a marriage for me. I was pleased when I found out I would be married to Pearl. She was fifteen and very beautiful. I had played with her as a child and sometimes saw her at the market. She had a coy smile and beautiful eyes.

Our wedding was grand, and most of the village attended. After days of feasting and ceremony, I was finally alone with Pearl. I spoke to her of my faith in Christ. She knew nothing of Him, but was interested in learning. We fell in love, and in the months that followed we spent much time together by the river, reading from my beloved New Testament and praying.

Not too long after Pearl and I were married, we had a son. I named him John. My father was not pleased with the choice of name, knowing that it had something to do with what the missionary had taught me, but what could he say; John was my son to name.

Pearl and I continued to live with my parents, for that is the custom of my country. Many times I longed to be my own man and be head of my house, away from my father's rule, so that I might be able to see the missionary whenever I wanted. But as an old saying goes, patience must be served, and I had many things to learn.

It seemed that as the years went by, my father's hostility* towards Andrew and all those that followed him grew. Father was a village elder, and so his influence was strong. He could not forgive the missionary for converting his son. Most of the people in the village, however, did not feel as strongly as my father, and were not interested in cooperating* with his threats and evil schemes* to run Andrew out of town. They had seen Andrew's work, and if

they did not believe in his God, at least they respected him and admired his patience. They knew he truly loved the people of our village.

A Change of Heart

One day my father was struck with a terrible illness. The doctor was sent for, from up the river, but it looked as though he would not arrive in time. The whole family gathered around Father's bedside to pay our last respects. My father ordered everyone out of the room except for me. When they had gone, he spoke to me, laboring* with each breath and word.

"Son, I ask your forgiveness. I have watched you all these years, and though I have openly spoken against the missionary and his work here, I have seen with my own eyes the way in which his God has worked. Of all my children, you are the one that has remained kind, patient and obedient, despite my anger. You have honored me and have been a good son. I have refused you all contact with the missionary, but you have remained constant in your faith. I have been watching you and I have seen this. Although I have been frightened by it, that little book you read has given you a strength and peace that is only seen in those that follow the missionary. My dying wish is that you explain to me what is the secret, so that I may die with the same tranquillity I see in you."

At last, the moment I had waited so patiently for had come. I could explain my belief to my father. Overflowing with joy, I shared many things with my father, and he humbly received Christ as his Savior! When the rest of the family was called back in, my father proclaimed to them all, "Follow Sun Gyi's God, for He is the true God—the God of peace, and the God of love." With that, my father died. Although I was sad, I was satisfied, for I had shown

my father my God, and he had accepted Him. I would be seeing my father again.

After the elaborate funeral ceremonies were over, and the business was taken care of, I went to the little chapel to see Andrew. I was so pleased to see him. We embraced and spent many hours talking. I loved Andrew dearly, for he was the one who had introduced me to my beloved Jesus. Despite the long years of absence from each other, we were true brothers. The book I had so faithfully studied had watered and nurtured* the small seed that had been planted in my heart. It had now grown into a tree, and I, with a happy heart, dedicated my life to helping Andrew and spreading these seeds to others.

This caused no small stir in my family. But I was a free man—free to go where I chose and do what I would—and what I chose was to be a missionary. In the years that followed, I spent much time with Andrew, helping him, learning from him, learning the loving ways of a missionary, and especially helping him to translate passages of the Bible into the dialect* of my village and the surrounding area.

These were joyful times, as I filled my heart and mind with God's Word. Pearl and my three children busied themselves with the school, helping Andrew in as many ways as possible. Andrew was now growing older, and the youthful energy with which he had come to our village was beginning to fade. But in its place had grown a wisdom and a love beyond his years. Those of us who had been introduced to Jesus by Andrew considered him our elder, for he was wise and well respected. He knew the Word of God like none other in the village, and he taught it to all who would listen. He was a blessed man who gave his life, his energy and his love for all those in our village and in the surrounding area.

I would accompany him on journeys to the surrounding areas where he would preach to other villages. A great friendship grew between Andrew and I. In many ways I considered him my father. Andrew would often say that I had been his first and most faithful convert. Although there were many years when we had no contact, God had sent me to him when he needed me the most—that first time many years ago, at the river, when he had been discouraged by the lack of results of his preaching. And now God had sent me to him again, when he was older and needed my assistance in his ministry and in translating portions of the Bible.

I smile at the wisdom of our God. Truly, He does all things well.

A Turn of Events

Life in our peaceful village was not destined to remain calm. Word came from down the river that war was on its way. The Japanese were invading. Already they had taken over many towns along the river, and it seemed that we would not be spared.

Those of us who were Christians met together to pray and discuss the options available to us. Some left the village immediately and went into the hills. Andrew, Pearl and the children, along with some other Christians, and myself remained. There was much fear and uncertainty among the people, and we were able to comfort many with the message of peace.

Then it happened! It was late one night. My wife and I and our children were sleeping peacefully when we were woken by roars overhead and the screeching of bombs as they fell through the air. It was an air raid'. People were screaming and running everywhere. Fires spread instantly.

Our house did not take a direct hit, but unfortunately the little chapel where Andrew stayed

was demolished. As soon as the planes had gone, Pearl and I ran over to find Andrew, but sadly, he was buried amongst the rubble. Andrew, who had worked so long and hard and dedicated his life to our village, to bringing the Gospel to our people, had gone to be with his God.

For Pearl and I, it was a great personal loss. We would miss him. Yet we had little time to mourn Andrew's passing. In the middle of this chaos, there was a great need. Many lives had been lost, and there was much work to be done. There were fires all over. Large portions of the village were engulfed in the flames. The fire raged like a wild animal out of control. There was much confusion and chaos, with people and children running here and there trying to escape—first from the bombs, and then from the fire.

The men of the village formed a line from the river to the village, passing water. They tried desperately to put out the flames, but it was no use. If something did not happen soon, the entire village would go up in flames, and many lives would be lost.

"Call for Andrew!" someone yelled. "Ask him to pray to his God to stop the fire."

"Andrew is dead," I quietly replied.

"We must do something! We must stop this fire before the village is destroyed," the people cried.

Although Andrew was gone, I knew his God was not gone. I fell to my knees, lifted my arms to the heavens and cried out, "Oh God, save us! From the ends of the earth we cry unto Thee. We are Your children. You are the God of gods, the Lord of lords. All power is in Your hand. Save us now, for we trust in Thee."

Others of the villagers who were Christians joined in with their prayers. Suddenly, from a clear night sky filled with stars, clouds began to form. It was the hot season, during which it seldom rained, and yet, great rain clouds were forming above us.

The rain began to fall, harder and harder, until it was almost like the monsoon. Slowly the rain put out the fires.

There was great joy and rejoicing! Many people were in awe, for everyone knew a great miracle had been done by Andrew's God—Who remained our God, even though Andrew was no longer with us. The village and many lives had been saved. God had answered the prayer of one of His small, humble children in their time of dire need.

Pearl and I went from house to house and person to person administering first aid and helping all those we could. Our house became a makeshift hospital, or at least a place for the wounded to lie. Night and day Pearl watched over the wounded with great care.

Then the word came. "The soldiers! The soldiers are coming! They are coming this way! We must all leave! We must leave now! Take your possessions and your food and run for the hills." Time was of the essence. We had to get to the hills as quickly as possible, for the soldiers were very close.

It would have been easy enough for Pearl and I to leave with our children, but what about the wounded? Many of them were the lone survivors of their families. There were not only the wounds of the body to consider, but also the wounds of the heart and the spirit. We could not leave them in the town to meet their fate with the soldiers. To my heart came the passage, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa.40:11). Was God calling me to be a shepherd?—To lead these people to the safety of the hills?

As quickly as possible, we gathered mules and carts and loaded the wounded, our possessions and as much food as we could find into them. Many of

the village people joined us. We formed a great company as we left the village and slowly made our way towards the distant hills. We would have to make our home in the mountains until the occupation was over.

Attacked!

With Andrew gone, people now looked to me as their elder in Christian matters. I was not used to this position, and yet, I found that in these times of difficulty and hardship, passages from the Bible would spring from my heart with increasing regularity. It was as if each portion that had been carefully stored away was now coming back to aid me.

It was a long journey to the hills. We made our way slowly, for we were a great company. The paths were steep and perilous. Many times there was danger of a cart or mule slipping off the path into the abyss below.

One night we were camped in a small clearing. The fire was out and everyone was still and sleeping. Near midnight, a loud roar tore through the camp. It was a tiger! Chaos sprung forth instantly as the tiger tore and ravaged through the camp! We had no guns, only sticks and knives. We were no match for a crazed tiger. After terrorizing us all, and wounding some who got in his way, the tiger ran off into the night, carrying with him a small child. The damage had been done.

Quickly a large fire was lit in hopes that it would ward off any further attack. Everyone huddled around the fire, most weeping, and some too shocked to even speak. I wept and sobbed. What am I to do? What if the tiger returns yet another night?

Some of the wounded cried out to me, "Why have we come all this way? Why did you take us out of the village? It would have been better to face prison

than to be out here on the mountain with no defense. We cannot even run to protect ourselves! Where is your God now, Sun Gyi? Why did He not spare us?"

These words cut me to the heart, for I was as distressed as everyone else. With a grieving heart I went a ways off by myself and fell to the ground weeping, "Oh God! Oh God, why has this happened? What am I to do? You told me to bring all the wounded with us, but here we are, defenseless. I am unable to protect them. Only You are powerful! Only You are able to defend us."

I spent hours that night praying and beseeching God for His protection. I claimed many scriptures, holding God to His promises. When I was spent, I lay down and looked up at the beautiful stars in the clear night sky as the scriptures of Psalm 91 comforted my heart. It was as if I could hear a voice speaking to me. "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him." Thus, with my heart comforted, I fell asleep.

The next day we continued our journey up the mountain trail. As we traveled that day, everyone was quiet and watchful. I had an ominous feeling that I could not shake—as if danger was lurking around the corner. I fully expected the tiger to return at any moment, springing down from an overhanging rock.

To keep up our spirits we quietly sang. We sang as many of the hymns that Andrew had taught us as we could remember. God kept us safe all that day. As we camped for the night we made a large fire and took turns tending it through the night, hoping the fire would ward off wild animals.

Everyone bedded down, still rather worried. I don't believe anyone slept well, with the memory of the previous night's attack fresh in their mind. I was woken in the middle of the night—it was my turn to tend the fire. Rather sleepily I stood gazing at the flames. All at once the words came to my mind, "Stand and fight! For this day is victory delivered into your hands."

Instantly I was wide awake, listening for any sound. I reached for my knife and held it ready.

Then it happened—a roar tore through the night. The tiger had returned, but this time I was prepared. With a strength not my own, I ran towards the tiger and fought him. He threw me to the ground, tearing at my arm, growling and snarling. Despite the wound, almost supernaturally, I continued wrestling and stabbing him. At last, I delivered the final blow, and the tiger lay still in death.

Shouts and cries of joy went up from all those in the camp. We had been delivered! My wife came running over to examine my wounds. The cuts in my arm were not deep, and in time would heal well. It was a miracle. I had wrestled in combat with this fearsome, angry beast, and yet I had but a small wound to show for it. I could have easily lost my life, but it had been preserved by the same power that had assisted me in my fight.

Everyone was astonished! "Ohhh!", they exclaimed. "Andrew's God is with Sun Gyi!"

Conclusion

The next day we made it safely to the hill camp.

We were greeted happily by the villagers who had gone ahead of our company. There were many stories to tell—and they were told with great excitement—how God had sent rain to stop the fire, and how He had saved us from the tiger. Many praised me for killing the tiger, but I could only explain to them that it was not I that brought down the rain from the heavens, and it was not I that fought the tiger.—It was my God, Jesus, Who had sent the rain, and it was He Who had given me the strength and the courage to fight the tiger. For all could see that I was a weak and small man. I was not strong, neither brave, but God had been with me in my fight and protected me from serious injury. I testified to the attentive crowd of the power and love of my God, and many were converted that day.

We settled in the hill camp, and spent our days caring for the wounded, ministering to the broken-hearted, and, when there was time, translating portions of the Bible into the local dialect. We made the beautiful mountains our home, and Pearl, the children and I would travel from camp to camp, telling others about Jesus and spreading His Word.

We were able to continue the work that faithful Andrew had begun. Many in the hill country came to love my Jesus. I was just a small man, but God was with me and He was able to use me to win many to His Kingdom. Many times I could feel Andrew's presence with me, helping me.

And, when my days were ended and I reached my Heavenly Home, Andrew was there to greet me. Happily, we embraced, and marveled at what had been accomplished, and the many that had been converted because we—two humble men—had given our lives to serve our beloved Jesus.



WALKIN' THE 'HOOD

As Told by Cheryl LeRoy

Hi, guys and gals! I'm Cheryl LeRoy, a woman with some tales to tell. I never went to a far-flung, exotic African or Asian country like many of my fellow missionaries; my mission to mankind took place right on the streets and alleys of my own home country, in my home city of Philadelphia, in the USA.

I got my call to serve God when I was singing in the choir in church one Sunday.—Now don't go thinking I was some ordinary goodie-goodie church-going girl, no way! What I wanted to be was a singer, and I'll tell you, in some of our Black churches, well, as far as good singing goes, it don't get much better than that. There was this really cool guy, Reginald Brown was his name, who led the choir and taught us to blend, harmonize, emote and most of all, to really raise the roof and fill the building with soul! It was there, in our simple neighborhood church, that I heard the call of God one day.

I'm getting a little ahead of my story here. First let me tell you a little more about myself. I was born in the late 60's. My parents were somewhat of an odd combination, and the whole story of how they got together is one all their own, but just to give you an idea, my mother was a white girl who wanted to be an actress when she was young. She came all the way over from Oregon, hoping she'd get famous

somehow. But she didn't, and when she found herself down and out, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to, she found Jesus. She also found out about the crime, racial tensions and lack of proper childcare and education and all that, down on the 'other side of the tracks.' You may think things were relatively calm back then as far as 'wars and rumors of wars' on our own streets, but if you'd have lived in my daddy's neighborhood, you'd know otherwise.

Anyhow, my mamma was part of a sort of social/Christian women's group who tutored poor kids, and one of the kids she taught was my half-brother. When my daddy was just 17, he got together with some girl, who was already well into her 20's, and they had a baby, but when he was just barely a year old, she took off one morning and left my daddy and the baby. They never saw her again ... at least not for a long time.

My mamma met the two of them when little Arthur was four years old, and she saw how he needed a mommy, and how my daddy needed somebody too. My daddy hadn't done bad for havin' to handle a kid for three years on his own, but he was just about comin' to the end of himself.

You know, this is all what Mamma would tell me, but Daddy will say, "Oh, Honey, your mamma was in love with me from the first time we looked on each other," and something about the look in Mamma's eyes and her blushin' face told me it was true. They moved to a part of town that was a little better, though they still weren't a rich household. I thought theirs was a beautiful love story and life, and I wanted somethin' just as picture perfect for my little self, but I felt, too, that I was really one born and destined for adventure—or more like danger.

There was always some danger around us ever since I was born, I know that, but because of my mamma and daddy's love for us, and their faith and

trust in God, He protected us, and things went along all right when I was little. Once Arthur and me were old enough that Mamma could send us to school and didn't need to be there with us all the time, she went back to the old 'hood and kept up her work there. A lot of people gave my mamma a hard time about fallin' in love with and marryin' a black man, not to mention one who had already been livin' with another woman and had her child. But Mamma was a strong woman, and not until I started followin' somewhat in her footsteps did I find out just how strong, and about all that she had endured.

Back to that day, when I was 15, and practicin' with Reginald Brown and the rest of the choir. In the middle of singing "How Great Thou Art," the church door went burstin' open and in walked Tom and Ron, two guys about five years older than me, carryin' the body of one of their pals, Elroy, who'd been shot by a local gang called "The Jackals." These three weren't no gang members, they were ordinary naughty teenagers, and Elroy had just had a bit much to drink the night before, and went off a cussin' and tauntin' a group of white boys who belonged to one of the most violent gangs. They told him they'd find him and kill him if he didn't shut up, and sure enough, they did that, just the next mornin'.

That was my wake-up call, the time I realized what this world was really a comin' to. I'd been fairly sheltered for a girl of my standing until then, but that was over, and I knew it. I don't know quite how to describe it, but something happened inside of me that afternoon; it was almost like another person came inside my body and took over! I started shakin', and broke out into this cold sweat.

I went up to Tom, and I asked him, "Did Elroy know Jesus?"

"No, he didn't, Ceecee. He didn't like none of this church stuff, just like I don't."

I went over and sat down on one of the pews and cried my eyes out. It broke my heart to see how quickly a life can end, to think how many more lives would end just that way, so many of them not knowin' their Savior. I knew then and there that God wanted me to spend my life talkin' to and teachin' and preachin' to the rough and wild, the tough and untamed, to those who weren't gonna find God through the 'usual' channels. I was just a little girl then, though, and when I told Mamma, "I don't wanna be a singer no more. I wanna do somethin' like you do, for other people," well, she was happy, though a little surprised—but she had no idea.

I started pretty much right away, at least to take a few steps in the right direction. When I was done with school, I'd go with my brother Arthur, who I had persuaded to come along and take care of his little sister if he was that worried about me, and we'd go hang around in different poor neighborhoods. We didn't know much about anything, and we weren't no preachers, but I loved Jesus with a passion, and I didn't want anybody to miss a chance to know a Friend like that too. We took it easy, because we knew it could be dangerous business, but we made a few friends pretty quickly.

One of my first days, I came across this boy, Thomas was his name, that was just about my age, and he was just sittin' there lookin' off into space like he didn't care if he was alive or what. We were nervous as anything, but my big brother and me walked on over to him and just started chatting about something or another.

"Whatcha doin' with yourself today?" I asked after a few minutes.

"Same as always, nothin'. There ain't nothin' to do but be good and go to school, or be bad and get in trouble. The good stuff is too boring, and the bad stuff, well, I don't wanna hurt people."

"Have any friends?"

"Nope, nobody."

"Do you like music, man?"

"Well, I fiddle around with the drums a bit..."

"You play drums? That's wonderful. Arthur plays the guitar and I sing. We oughtta get together some time and jam a bit."

"Hey, that sounds cool ... but you guys don't even know me."

"I know everybody needs a friend, everybody has a dream, and we can't go it alone without a little help and support in life."

Within a couple of weeks, I wish you could have seen the change in Thomas. We told him about Jesus and how much He meant to us, and that He could fill his life with some meanin' and be a real friend to him, and he was glad to give it a try. "If He makes people as nice as you all, He's gotta be a good dude."

By the time I was 18, school was done with for me, and after I graduated high school I got myself a job in the bakery down the street. But that was just something I was doin' to help my folks out and keep things goin' until I could get into what my real life's work would be. Meanwhile I kept meeting more kids in the 'hood, but I stayed away from the 'bad guys' like everybody was tellin' me to. But I didn't wanna stay away from them forever. I knew they was some of the ones who needed Jesus more than anybody, and if some of those mean dudes would get turned around, a lot less killin', fightin' and fear there would be.

Call me crazy, but I wanted to change the world, and I could see it was a big bad world to be changed, and we'd never get through with it all. But, hey, if I could save one life, or make one person's life worth livin', it'd be worth it. One life wasn't enough, though, for me. Thomas and others like him were doin' a lot

better, but they were only child's play compared to what else the Lord had in store for me.

I asked my mamma if her mission group had other people doin' somethin' like what I wanted to do, like convert the incorrigibles, but she said, "Forget it, Girl!" They weren't about to go riskin' their lives for some heathen colored boys carryin' guns. My mamma admired my courage, though she couldn't get them to change their minds, nor could we find anybody else that we knew who wanted to do anything like what I had been called to.

One day in the kitchen, Mamma was real quiet. She said, "Cheryl, sweetie, you know and I know that if God's called you to do something, He's gonna make a way for you. But I do want to warn you, you have no idea what you're getting yourself into. I've never wanted to worry you and Arthur, but over the years, my life, and that of your father and you children, have been in danger many a time, just because I was doing something different. People don't like it when people are different; it upsets the status quo, it rattles their prejudices, and they just want to hurt you when they don't even know why. My own mother and father disowned me when I married a black man; the neighbors here pressured me, and called your father names to his face and mine for about 10 years until they finally gave up on me, and realized he was here to stay.

"In my time down in the 'hood teaching those kids, I've met both kinds—women who will practically kiss my feet because they're thankful I've taught their little Johnny, and mothers who've told me 'touch my baby and I'll kill you, white girl. We don't need you and your charity. You ain't gonna come along and save the world by teaching our littlen's to read and write. Get yourself back where you belong."

"People on both sides just don't understand, and they've got all sorts of hang-ups. And that's the nice

people, the family people. You're talking about converting the gang boys, and honey, they eat girls like you alive. I love those boys too, and I know God loves them, but don't you think He could call somebody else, somebody like other young men, or some older folks, to minister to them? Don't you think He can work in their lives otherwise, without you risking yours? And even if they happen to like you, and don't want to get rid of you, are they going to listen to someone like you, or will they just look at you like one more pretty face, and give you no respect?"

"I know, Mamma, that everybody thinks I'm crazy, foolish, and throwin' my life away; that no good can come of it, that I'll do more harm than good and probably get myself killed in the process. But I know, too, that God called me, and I can't shake that feeling in my soul. I won't rest until I've at least given my all to try and help some of those kids. He could have called somebody else, I suppose—but He obviously either hasn't, or they haven't listened, because I don't see them anywhere around here, do you?"

"You and your missionary sisters are the only ones in these parts that even come close. I know it's dangerous, and I know I may not last long, but I want my lasting, however long it may go on, to make a difference. I don't want to just be born, live and die, and have people say 'she was a nice girl.' That ain't enough, Mamma. When I die, I want to be able to know that there are people in this world who can say, 'That girl helped me find Jesus, and if it wasn't for her, I probably never would have.' That's the legacy I want, Mamma, and I know it's what He wants too."

She smiled and, through closed eyes and falling tears said, "You follow your heart, baby. You do what God has called you to do." Then she opened her eyes and looked straight into mine, "But you know you're going to have to go it alone, because it doesn't look

like there's anybody else doing what you're doing, or that wants to."

I tried to persuade Arthur to be my buddy. We'd done well together with the bored kids hanging around in the neighborhood alleys; we had our little music room in our garage that we'd play around at; we helped some of them with their homework and housework when they needed a hand, and Arthur would organize basketball games for the boys in the afternoons and on weekends. We were just there for them if they needed a shoulder to cry on, or a little friendly counseling.

"But that's as far as I'm gonna go, Ceecee," Arthur said in a definite tone of voice, when I tried to pull him in further. "I've got a girlfriend now, and we're going together and wanna get married. I want her to have a decent living and a husband who's there, and my kids to have a daddy that provides for them and plays with them. You'll see, soon enough you'll find somebody too, and you'll want the same for them."

"But Mamma and Daddy found each other, and Mamma still found time to help other people too, didn't she?"

"You go and be a nurse or a teacher like Mamma then," he advised, "and I'll keep helping you with the tutoring. But no bikers, no gun-carriers, no drug-peddlers, no pimps. Uh-uh."

Maybe I've been wrong all along, I thought. Maybe I'm doing enough. I have led people, all these kids who hang around with us, to Jesus, and they wouldn't have found Him in a church. God, did I get it all wrong? Do You want me to give this up, and forget it, and just 'keep up the good work,' following in my mamma's footsteps?

Then I heard Him, for the first of many times. "I want you to follow in My footsteps, Cheryl," He said. "I didn't just give a little and then quit. I went all the way, even to the death. I gave My life for you, and for each one

of those bad boys and girls, but they'll never know it unless someone tells them, and you're the one I've called. I know you're just a young girl fresh out of school, you're not rich, you don't think yourself exceptionally intelligent or talented, and it seems like you're on your own; but you've got fire in your heart, and that's really all it takes. And you're not alone, because I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

That was it. No more doubts! But just in case, I decided to open my Bible, now pretty well worn since the time I got it for my 10th birthday, especially with all the classes I'd been giving the kids lately. *Lead me, Jesus, to something I can stand on,* I prayed in my heart, and my eyes fell on a favorite verse from the 23rd Psalm:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me.

I knew He was with me, and therefore, from that day onward, I feared no evil. I was just bidin' my time now, waiting for an open door. Then one day, I got my 'big chance.' It was like the day my mamma was always waitin' for when she started her acting career, though hers never came around in the same way.

I was ridin' my bike home from the bakery, a bag of fresh bread in my basket that I'd give Mamma to set out with supper. It was a pretty evenin', and dusk always was my favorite time of day. I so enjoyed it that I hardly noticed that a motorcycle started ridin' right alongside me when I was a couple blocks away from home.

"Hey, girl!" To my surprise, I turned to see two young white guys, maybe in their twenties, now just a few inches away.

What could they want with me? I wondered.

"I can't say I've seen such a pretty face in a long time, have you?" one tauntingly asked his friend.

"Not a colored one anyway, and I haven't laid one of them yet either," he added.

"Stop the bike, Sweetheart," the first demanded.

I did as asked, my hands trembling on the bars as I tightly squeezed the brakes. Then, as calmly and slowly as I could, I stepped off the bike and put down the kickstand.

One of the boys kicked the bike, and I found myself knocked to the ground, my bicycle on top of me and the bread buns gone every which way across the sidewalk.

Why is there no one around? I called out desperately in my mind.

"Oh, she's gonna be a good one, she is," one whispered to the other.

Okay, God, I thought, now's Your time. Help me out a little, won't You?

I heard Him again: *You've gotta help Me out too. They need Me, and you're My instrument, remember? Ask them if they want to come home for dinner.*

If I was talking to anyone else besides God, I'd have told him he was out of his mind. But as surprised as I was at the thought myself, as the boys lifted the bike off of me and pushed it aside, I called out, "How would you guys like to come to my place for dinner, and we can take things from there?" I didn't tell them, of course, that Daddy, Mamma and a few other neighborhood kids would be there too, but I figured I was starting out brave enough.

They looked at each other and laughed mockingly.

"Jesus loves you both, you know," I added.

One of them grabbed my arm and pulled me to my feet. "Okay, little girl, take us home. Maybe you can show us more about how much God loves us!"

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw one of them picking up my bread basket and putting it back on my bike. *Maybe we're getting somewhere*, I thought hopefully, though I knew full well that anything could still go wrong, and now I might be getting

Mamma and Daddy into it too.

We got home in just a minute and as I unlocked and entered the door, followed by these two burly strangers, wearing chains and leather straps, and whom I now noticed were also covered from head to toe in tattoos, I called out cheerily, "Mom, I'm home. I've brought over a couple more friends for dinner ... is there gonna be enough?"

"Sure, Honey, always room for one more," Mamma called back, but let out a restrained gasp a minute later when she stepped out of the kitchen and saw who these "friends" were.

They both acted kind of odd ... it was hard to tell whether they were upset, or just shocked, but they went quiet for a long time. No more laughing, no more comments, no more threats.

When my mamma left for a moment to attend to the food in the kitchen, one of them finally broke the tense silence. "So you brought us home to your white mamma, did you? You think you're so smart, don't you? You think we'll just eat in peace and then leave, do you? Well, you can be watching your back, little missy. We don't take orders from nobody, and we don't get brushed off by nobody neither."

Just then Papa and Arthur came in, with a couple of fourteen-year-old boys from the 'hood tagging along behind. They paused at seeing the hefty and rude-looking characters, who had taken the liberty to recline themselves on the living room couches. Not quite sure what else to do, my daddy walked over to them and put out his hand.

"I'm Robin LeRoy. Welcome to my home, and thanks for joining us for dinner."

Arthur looked over at me and rolled his eyes, as if to say, "What have you gotten us into now, Ceecee?"

"Okay, gather 'round everyone," Mamma called cheerily as she finished setting out the last places

for supper. Our two visitors silently rose, silently sat, silently ate, and when they were finished stood up, walked toward the door, and called behind them, "We'll be seeing you."

Once the noise of their no-muffler motorcycle had faded into the distance, the sparks began to fly.

"Are you crazy, girl?" Arthur started, "You can't be bringin' home fellas like that!"

I tried to tell him, as calmly as I could, what would have happened if I hadn't brought them home. "God told me to do that, and if I hadn't, I wouldn't be sitting with you right now. He's promised me that no harm would come to us if we're faithful to preach the Gospel and show a sample of it to everyone. That's what He's called me to do and that's what I'm going to keep on doing."

We ate the rest of our meal in silence. I wanted to be brave, but I was a little scared. I knew these fellas weren't to be taken lightly, and that they probably would be comin' back for me. It was just a matter of when and where. But, though I was a little worried, my encounter with these two brutes, and seeing how they had seemed, even if but for a moment, to soften up a bit and accept our hospitality without mocking or cursing at me or my parents, or causing a big ruckus in our house, gave me hope that there was hope for them, and all others like them.

The next day when work was over, I decided to take a "long" route home, and see who God might bring along my path. I detoured to a nearby neighborhood that everybody at school always said to stay away from, and it didn't take long to figure out why. Girls, most about my age, give or take a few years, were hangin' out on the sidewalks and in doorways, most clad in about as little as you can wear without bein' naked.

I started riding my bike a little slower, to get a better look at them, and find one who I could start

talking to. The awkwardness of approaching strangers, especially of this sort, was something that took me a mighty long time to get used to, but I knew I had to keep at it.

One of the girls called out as I passed, "Are you lost, baby girl?"

"No, actually I came to see you," I answered.

"Oh, you wanna join the business?"

I stopped the bike, walked over to where she stood, and we were soon engaged in conversation.

Her name was Annie, and she had run away from home two years before and taken to prostitution to support herself. "Pays better than anything else a stupid girl like me can do," she confided. "But it really sucks. Soon enough you don't want nobody touchin' you, because you've been in bed with so many brutes. You look like a lucky girl—a smart one you are."

She looked me over from head to toe, not too impressed with my simple, and comparatively conservative outfit. "I don't think you could understand what it's like to live like me," she continued. "You have no idea how trashed life gets, and how many times a girl can wonder what she's living for anyway. I just hope that someday, somehow, something's gonna get better. Maybe some Prince Charming will discover me and take me out of here, before I get old and ugly. One way or another, I ain't gonna let myself get old and ugly in this place. So what do you have to say, baby girl?"

"You're right, Annie, I have had a sheltered life, and I can't claim to say I know just how you feel. But I do know that there's always hope, and I do know that there's a Prince Charming for you. I'll introduce Him to you right now if you like..."

Annie smiled sarcastically, "Oh you will, will you? I don't see nobody," she challenged.

"He may not be exactly what you had in mind, and your first thought might be 'Forget it, he's not

the one for me,' but will you at least give Him a chance, Annie?"

"I ain't got nothin' to lose, do I?" she said, a glimmer of curious excitement in her eyes.

As I told her about Jesus and His love, about the Friend that He wanted to be to her and the hope He could fill her heart with, the promise of a better world and Heaven to come, she got real quiet, and stayed that way for a long time. "Like I said, I've got nothin' to lose. Tell me, what do I do to get myself connected to Jesus?"

I held her hand and prayed with her then and there, and oh, did the tears begin to fall. I had never seen something quite like that before, and it was the first time of many. Oh, I understand why all the angels in Heaven rejoice, because there is nothing more beautiful than to see a sinner, without hope and drifting out into the ocean of despair, find and fall upon the Rock, and discover that all is not lost!

That was just the beginning, though, and of course Annie had a million questions from there. What was she to do now? She wanted to change her life, but how? I honestly didn't know what to do with her, except to continue to visit her, be her friend, and teach her more about Jesus and the Bible, and trust Him to show us what to do next.

One evening I went to pick up the ringing phone and was less than thrilled at what I heard: "I hear you've been seeing my girl."

"Excuse me, Mister, but do I know you?"

"Not yet, but you should. I'm Jeffrey James, I'm Annie's 'protector.' Seems like you've been thinkin' to take my place or something like that. That's not a good idea, little Ceecee. You keep yourself away from little Annie now, you hear?"

What to do now? I had no idea what he had done or would do to Annie. She had told me what a creepy fellow he was, how he used to beat her and threaten

her, and I knew she couldn't get away from him for nothing. She wouldn't have given him my number of her own accord, I knew that much. But I had to see her again, I had to at least make sure she was all right. I set off on my lunch break, and passed by where she usually stood every day, but she wasn't there. I tried again, for days and days, but couldn't find her.

Oddly enough, it seemed some of her buddies, several of whom I had gotten to know and who had also received Jesus, didn't seem to be anywhere around. I didn't know what else to do, so went to the nearest police station and asked the officer to see if they had any idea of Annie's whereabouts. Sure enough, as I had suspected she had been arrested just that day, along with four of her partners. Jeffrey, the pimp, had managed not to get caught this time. They let me in to see Annie and the girls, but we couldn't talk a whole lot, my being about 10 feet away and her being in a cell with eight other girls, some waitin' to be moved on to their next spot.

Annie pled with me to do something to get her out of there, but there really wasn't anything I could do. I wasn't anybody. Nobody would take my word for nothin', and besides, they had caught her 'in the act,' and her being underage and refusin' to let the cops know where her parents could be contacted didn't help make them any friendlier. "They'd be all too happy to see me locked up," she told me defiantly. "I ain't never asking them for help for as long as I live."

Visiting time up, I walked out of the jailhouse dejectedly. *Jesus, You've gotta show me the next step here. What can I do now to take these girls, and others like them, further? How can I help them get out of this lifestyle and find something better? There's got to be something I can do, or someone that can help me!*

He gave me an idea, and I got to work on it right away. I started sending out letters, making calls, running ads, paying friendly visits, posting signs,

and whatever else I could think of, asking and advertising for someone who would support a mission of rescuing “fallen” girls, giving them a home, some job training and schooling. I didn’t go as far as to tell them that so far the mission consisted of just me and my bicycle—I didn’t want to scare away any potential patrons or donors, or co-workers for that matter. I figured if someone would “bite,” I’d fill them in.

To my disappointment though, I didn’t get as much as a letter or a phone call for over a month. By now I had quit my job at the bakery, as God had told me to do. He had given me this idea, and now He was going to have to make it happen. Something needed to be done, and I knew He had called me to do it, to get it going, but I couldn’t do it myself. I couldn’t organize or support anything—I couldn’t even support myself, but was still livin’ with my mamma and daddy—but I knew He could send someone that could. I kept busy looking—asking, seeking and knocking as the Scripture tells us, but everyone I talked to, from fellow students to bank managers to preachers and teachers, all said it was a good idea, but way out of my league and theirs.

One quiet evening, after a day visiting with some of Annie’s friends who hadn’t gotten locked up, I was relaxing in the living room talking to Mamma about how things were going. I was getting pretty low, and starting to feel a little aimless, beginning to wonder if maybe I was wrong and that I just didn’t have what it took, that this wasn’t the way my life ought to go.

The phone rang, and I heard a sweet voice asking “Is this Cheryl LeRoy?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Can I help you?”

“Actually, I was hoping we could help each other...” *Was this the answer to my prayers?!* “I read your ad a few days ago. I’ve been thinking about doing something similar myself for a long while,

but I hadn’t stepped out yet to actually get started. I needed someone like you to get me going. Can we meet and talk tomorrow?”

All the next day I waited excitedly for the appointment with my mysterious caller—I had been so excited I forgot to even ask her name. She had said my house was a long way from where she worked, and asked if I could come to her place for dinner. As I stepped off the bus a block or so from her house, I wondered all the more what kind of woman this was. I hadn’t been to a neighborhood this fancy in my whole life. These were the kind of houses you saw on TV and in the magazines, and growin’ up in my little world, I hardly realized there were people that actually had all that.

I walked nervously toward the high gate, rang the bell, and waited awhile. I heard footsteps coming out of the house and soon there she was, standing in front of me, “Welcome, Darling.” She seemed to be in her 50’s. Her curly black hair, elegantly tinged with gray, made a sunny frame around her beautiful brown face and her dark sparkling eyes. “I’m terribly sorry. I realize when I called last night that I didn’t even introduce myself. My name is Denise Arliss.”

She was dressed simply for a woman of wealth—a plain, long white dress, and no jewelry. She must have sensed my surprise, because she smiled and explained, “There are much better things a lady can do with her money than wear it around her neck and on her fingers, and I suppose we’ll be getting to that soon, once we’ve gotten to know each other a little bit.”

After a simple but delicious dinner, during which I told her a little about my home, my parents, and what I had done with my life thus far, she started her story: “I once walked the streets myself, just like those young girls who you’re trying to help. I, like your little friend Annie, met Jesus through a friend who stopped

waiting for us bad girls to come to church, and came out to find us instead. Knowing what those girls go through, I can't tell you how much I and they admire and appreciate people like you. Anyhow, after I had been saved a few months, I wanted to leave that lifestyle, but my boyfriend, who was also my pimp, would have nothing of it. I had once thought he loved me, and I even left another man to be with him, but he just wanted me for the money I made, which gave us a better lifestyle than we would have had otherwise.

"After a couple of years of that, though, he got himself in trouble for stealing from one of his pals, and he got slapped in jail. From then on, I was a free woman! My friend, who had led me to God, read me many things from the Bible, things about loving one's enemy, and doing good to those that hated you and spitefully used you. So I tried to keep being lovin' to him, even though he had beaten and abused and made a slave out of me, and God did a miracle and touched his heart. He received the Lord, asked for my forgiveness for all he had done, and by the time he came out of prison a few years later, he was a changed man. I hear he's done fairly well for himself now, come clean and all.

"I know you're wondering how I went from walking the streets to living in a place like this. Well, that friend that helped me out, he and I had a special thing right from the beginning. He knew I had no place to go, so he took me in and took care of me. I went from being a destitute girl who had nothing to live for and was selling her body, to becoming a princess, physically and spiritually. That was over 30 years ago, and since then, I've had my three babies, though they've all grown up now.

"So I've had a burden on my heart, ever since I married Stan, to help other girls that live like I used to, and others of the rougher part of society, those

who have been condemned as outcasts by everyone else. I've been thinking grand thoughts and making plans, and even saving money towards them for ... well, I'm ashamed to admit for about twenty years now. I guess I just got too comfortable and settled in my happy little life with my family and friends here, and I'd forgotten how great others' needs are—until I saw your ad. Thank you, little angel, for reviving my heart and soul again. You've got the fire, and I've got the money and the connections, and I think that together—that is, if you want to work with me—we can make a great team."

And that we did. Denise was a shrewd businesswoman and efficient organizer, and she got us set up and legal, got all her rich friends to pitch in to help us get set up, and make pledges to help us keep runnin' from then on as well. We rented a building that we chose together, right smack dab in the worst part of town. She started calling around and getting her friends and their kids to pitch in, and we cleaned up and painted the place and tried to make it as friendly and homey as an apartment block in such a dreary and dismal neighborhood could be. At first the girls and their guys, and the dopies and gangsters that lived around there, would stand around and laugh at us.

They would taunt us, saying things like, "So you're gonna save us from our sins, are you?" "Here they come, trying to convert the heathen. Don't let 'm get to you, stand strong." These got to be daily, or more like hourly, occurrences. There were threats too, but giving up was not in the blueprint. We just kept on trying to be friendly and sweet in spite of the taunts and threats, and amazingly enough, our weeks of setting up passed all but without incident.

Then we sprung into action. Everyone else basically just stuck around to help with the set-up,

and once that was done, it was me and Denise, and we set out every day to roam the streets—the highways and hedges—and try to “bring them in.” We mainly concentrated on the girls. Denise couldn’t help but turn heads walking down those streets, and nearly every one of those girls who she talked and told her story to was touched in one way or another. Not all of them were ready to drop into our laps and receive Jesus, and even fewer were willing or able to step out and start a new life, leaving all behind, but some were, like Lolita.

I’ll never forget the day we met her. She was a white girl, one of the only ones in this part of town, and the first time I saw her she was sitting in a doorway, her knees up with her arms wrapped around them, her face hidden against her knees.

“What’s the matter, Sweetheart?” Denise asked in her special motherly way as we approached.

She looked up at us for the longest time, silently and suspiciously. Her dark, hollow eyes and gaunt face were enough in themselves to make you want to cry. We sat down on either side of her, Denise put her arm around her and she just wept and wept. Finally she looked up, and stanching her own tears, proclaimed, “I’m pregnant. I never thought it would happen, but now it has. My man tells me I’ve gotta get an abortion—but I want to keep this baby.” She burst out into tears once again. “But how can I do it? How can I take care of a child? I won’t be able to do this any more, and I don’t know how to do anything else! I won’t get any help from Joe, I know that much.”

I seized the opportunity and told Lolita about our place, and that we’d be happy to take her in.

“You couldn’t be serious,” she retorted, “but if you were, I’d take you up on your offer.”

“You can come home with us now. We’ll help you get your things.”

Now we had our first “girl” living in with us. Lolita was a real darling, a bright girl really, and I spent a lot of time with her over the first few weeks, helping take care of her and making sure she was eatin’ well, and also reading the Bible with her and teaching her more about Jesus, Who she asked into her heart on that first day. I helped her get caught up and practiced in her reading and other basic skills, after finding out she’d dropped out of school at 11. She was only 17 now! I had just turned 19 myself, but I knew I was worlds ahead of her as far as knowledge and understanding of the world, and of spiritual things.

By now, and with Denise’s help, we had gotten Annie out of prison, and managed to sneak her away with us before her boyfriend caught up with her. Thankfully he hadn’t been seen or heard of in town for all this time, and we just hoped and prayed that it would stay that way.

Annie jumped right in to the ministry with both feet, going out with Denise and I every day. A wonderful girl she was, blossoming like a jewel in her new-found life of helping others. Our work grew pretty quickly at first, and within the first two months we had six girls, including Annie, who was more like part of the staff by now, and Lolita, who was looking more beautiful and healthy—and pregnant—with each passing day.

I had quite the surprise the day that Denise came over to meet my mamma and daddy. I had told them all about her, and they were very much looking forward to meeting her. They didn’t think it would be fitting to invite her over to our comparatively humble abode, but she insisted on wanting to meet my family in their own home. But none of us expected what happened next. Imagine my surprise when I walked into the living room with her, and saw my daddy looking like he was about to faint!

"Denise, it ... is it really you?"

"Is it who?" Mamma called out as she stepped out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron, as Denise lifted hers to cover her mouth, which had dropped in disbelief.

Just then Arthur came down the stairs, carrying little Janie, his baby girl, and all five of us stood there silently for what seemed like an eternity. The mystery was beginning to be made clear when I realized that Denise, my helper and companion, was Arthur's mother, and my father's first wife. How much her life had changed over the years, and how far God had brought her from the careless and irresponsible girl that she was, through many breakings and testings, to now be a bearer of His love to others.

There were apologies, tears, and hugs aplenty for the next few hours as Denise was once again accepted into, and reunited with our family; and, receiving my father's and Arthur's forgiveness and seeing what a happy new life they had found, she was relieved of the burden of guilt that had weighed upon her for so long. She and my mother became very dear friends, and we soon met her husband, as well as two sons and her daughter, who was just a few years younger than me, and who eventually ended up helping me part-time at the mission.



One day, Annie and I were walking home and it was starting to get dark. We usually tried to be back inside by dusk, to have dinner, Bible classes, etc., with the girls, and keep off the streets that were dangerous all day, but much more so at night. Today we had taken a long walk, though, to go visit a girl who was very sick, to pray for her and bring her some food and medicine.

I heard the strangely familiar sound of a motorcycle roaring up alongside us, and a man calling out, "My, my, I haven't seen two faces that

pretty in a long time, have you Jake?"

"Can't say I have, Mack," his buddy answered.

"Remember us, little missy? Oh, I'm sure you do. That was a nice dinner your mamma made for us, but I think we have some unfinished business with you. And you, Annie, oh, I think you'll be mighty happy to know that Jeffrey is back in town again. I think he's been missing you. We've been watching you girls for awhile now, you know, keeping an eye on Jeffrey's property. You know, eyes and ears of the Jackals are everywhere."

We tried to keep walking, but we would never make it to the house in time. Like last time I had encountered these two, there was no one else around. *You've done it before, Jesus, now please do something again*, I prayed with all my heart, trying to remain calm and trusting, but my heart pounding more violently with every passing second. Next thing I knew, Annie got pulled on to their bike, and as they drove off they shouted back at me, "Be seeing you again, pretty thing!"

I had lost Annie once again! This time I truly feared for her life. I knew Jeffrey was no man to contend with, though I hadn't realized that he was in cahoots with the Jackals, since hardly any colored boys were. Denise was only spending days with us now, and had already gone home. I came home alone to face Lolita and her five companions, and I could hardly bring myself to tell them what happened. They weren't safe either, and they knew that.

I was afraid, but I had to stand strong in the Lord and in the faith, for their sakes. We gathered around to pray for Annie, and to pray for the Lord to touch the hearts of Jeffrey and the two Jackal brutes who were working with him, to soften them and to bring them to Him. We read Psalms and sang hymns together, and after the rest of them had gone to bed, I fell into a restless sleep.

Annie spent that night alone, locked in a bare room with just a mat in the corner for her to lay on. She could hear the voices of Jake and Mack outside, cussing and shouting coarse jokes while they downed one six-pack after another, before they finally fell asleep. Annie was praying like she never had before, and the next thing she knew, it was morning. She heard the sound of a key turning, and looked up to see Jeffrey standing in the doorway, as fearsome as always, with a look of contempt and disdain on his face.

"You betrayed me, girl. I was kind to you. I took good care of you. I kept you out of trouble as best I could, and it was only when you started hangin' around with that Christian bitch that you got yourself landed in jail. You need me, baby, and you know it. You're comin' back with me, girl."

"I don't need you and your 'protection' any more than I need to spend my days and nights in bed with those beasts that you call 'customers.' God takes care of me now, and good care, as you can see. I've never lacked a meal, I have a solid roof over my head, and for the first time in my lonely little life, I have friends—and more than that, I have hope!"

"Hope for what, baby girl?" he asked mockingly as he ran his fingers across her face.

"Hope that no matter what happens, no matter what goes wrong, there's somebody that loves me!"

"But I love you! Don't you believe me?"

"If you love me, Jeff, let me go back to my friends. I'm happy with them."

"Oh, but you see, you're forgetting something. I said that you need me, and that's true. But I need you too, Sugar. See, I'm a little low on cash right now, I made some bad deals; so I thought that if you could kind of 'come back to business,' we can pull out of this together, and then get back to that nice cozy little life we used to have together."

"That cozy life?" Annie retorted in disgust. "I want nothing of our old life, Jeff."

Sweet talk wasn't working, so he tried some heavier persuasion. "You know you're not getting out of here alive as long as those two friends of mine are outside that door—where, by the way, they will stay until I give the order to move. I'm a big man now, you know. I've got real respect, people listen to me. I'm telling you, the only way you're ever gonna be safe is with me, because if you leave me again, well, I'll just have to kill you; because nobody dares to not pay attention to Jeffrey James, do you hear me?"

He turned and walked out, and Annie was alone again, in the dark and without food, until the evening. She came and put her head to the door, listening to Mack and Jake's foul conversation. Then when there was a pause, she called "Could one of you guys get me something to eat? Even one of those beers would do."

"Jeffrey's orders, Jake, no food, no entering, no exiting."

"But the girl's gonna do him no good if she's dead, is she?" Jake retorted. "Besides, these *nuns* were nice enough to feed us once, weren't they? And my mamma used to say that gentlemen always return favors."

Jake was obviously the more forceful and intelligent of the two, while Mack was the dumb, boorish follower. He soon yielded to Jake's insistence and brought Annie a sandwich.

"Stay here a minute, will you?" Annie asked.

Taking orders from Jake was one thing, but Mack was not going to be commanded by a little girl ... but there was something about her, and us, and he had to try to figure out himself what it was.

"Thanks very much, Mack. This means a lot to me."

These poor boys, she thought to herself; they're trying to hold up their images, but they're miserable inside. I know Jeff is. He always had such an inferiority complex about himself; that's the only reason he has to try so hard to be a big man and why his respect means so much to him. I'm sure it's the same with these boys. What they want and need is some real love and care, not all this fake stuff they have between each other. Lord, help me be kind to them, and even to Jeffrey ... besides, these two are my only hope of getting out of here alive.

Mack sat silently, staring, as it were, at Annie. "What is it with you guys?" he asked, making sure his voice was soft enough that Jake couldn't hear the conversation, "What is this thing you have of acting nice to people who try to hurt you? You know it's not going to work, don't you?"

"Whether it will make people nice to us or not doesn't really matter," Annie replied. "The fact is that Jesus loves everybody, and I have decided I will show His love to everyone, whether they accept that love and kindness or not. Nobody deserves it. None of us are good enough for God, or even for anyone else, to really love us. Love is a miracle, and God's love has no conditions, it's for everybody, with no exceptions." Annie smiled softly at Mack, who was still trying to retain his boorish expression.

"What are you doing in there, Mack? I said bring her a sandwich, that's all," Jake called. Mack, jolted back into reality, went out and once again took up his raucous* conversation with his buddy.



Denise had filed a police report, but we had heard nothing from Annie for about five days. We kept vigil, praying, hoping, yet still no sign. Again, the girls had all gone to bed, and I sat quietly in the living room, propping my feet up on the arm of the couch and starting to wonder if I was hoping in vain. A knock at

the door startled me, and I was only startled all the more when I opened it to see Jake standing there.

"Can I come in, miss?" he asked me in a surprisingly humble tone of voice.

Not knowing how to react, I followed my Christian graces and invited him in to have a seat. "Can I get you anything to drink?"

"Still at it, aren't you? Being nice to bad people—why do you take pleasure in that anyway?"

I was about to answer when he interrupted me by continuing, "I came to tell you about your friend, Annie. She's okay. Jeffrey's out of town for a few days, and he's only seen her once. He left me and Mack to watch her."

I looked at him eagerly, wondering what sort of news he had come to bring. He continued, his voice growing softer with every sentence that he spoke.

"She's like no other hostage I've ever held, and believe me, I've held plenty. There's just something about you people, all of you ... I don't quite know how to describe it, but all I know is that I like it. It's like something light, clean, pure—I haven't seen much of that in my life. I don't dare let it on to Mack, or Jeff, or they'd kill me, but I'm starting to like you people, and I'd like to get to know you more."

I couldn't help but let the tears run down my face as I told Jake how much God loved him, how much I loved him and how sorry I was for the difficult life he'd gotten himself into. That night, in the living room of my little downtown mission, I held his two rough hands—hands that no doubt had hurt and killed many another soul, but which were now folded in submission to God—in mine, having been captured by the power of His love.

We talked awhile, until Jake stood up and said, "It's getting late. I've got to get back. I'll try to come again when I can get away. But hear me good, no word of this, not ever, to another soul, you hear me?"

"You can trust me, I won't breathe a word," I assured him.

As he left, I prayed that God would continue to work in his life, and would somehow make a way for him to have an influence on others like him; and that God would protect him and give him wisdom. You've got to get mighty close to people like that to have an effect on their lives; but the closer you get, likewise the greater the danger, and for someone like Jake, who had gotten himself in mighty deep, there was usually no way out, but by a miracle.

To my joy and surprise, Jake visited again the next night, and the next, assuring me every time that Annie was doing okay, that he and Mack were trying to take good care of her. One night, three or four days after his first visit, Jake shocked me by saying, "Mack and I are going to get Annie out of there."

"How can you do that?" I questioned. "Won't Jeffrey know? Won't he come after all of you?"

"Well, we'll just have to disappear along with her. I have an idea of where we can go, but I can't tell you. I can't risk it. There's only one way to disappear and that's to do so without anyone knowing where you've gone. I'm afraid you won't be seeing your Annie again, but if you can find it within yourself to trust me at all, then believe that she'll be safe and sound, and we'll send word to you as soon as it is safe. You can't say anything about this, though, not even to your other girls, you understand?"

I started to cry a little, and Jake came and put his arms around me and held me for the longest time. He then gave me the last of his many surprises by telling me, "You might not believe this, but that first time I saw you a few years ago, you must have just been 16, I fell in love with you even then. I didn't know what it was, but now I do. You glow, you shine, with the love of God. Little Annie has the same shine, and I think my buddy Mack

has fallen for her already. The difference between us is that he's going to be able to have her around for awhile, but I have no idea if or when I'll ever see you again."

"Whether we do or not in this life, Jake, we do know now that we'll see each other in Heaven."

He gave me a gentle kiss, held me in his arms awhile, and then said softly, "Until we meet again!"

Yes, that was the last time I ever saw Jake, or Mack or Annie. But I did get a note from them about three months later, that had apparently been forwarded through various channels. He said they were all well, healthy and happy, though he missed me terribly, and that Mack and Annie, wouldn't you know it, were going to get married. None of us ever saw Jeffrey again. We later heard that, while he was out of town, the Cheetahs, a rival gang had seized their revenge on Jeffrey, and so began a new series of shootings and stabbings between the Cheetahs and the Jackals. We had managed to "infiltrate" both gangs to some degree, and I know that many of those boys knew Jesus when they died, and had hopefully been able to pass the message of God's love on to others as well.

Denise and I continued on with our work for a few more years, our numbers growing slowly but steadily as more girls joined us, and as the girls we'd been taking care of started launching out into "dealing God in the 'hood," as we'd termed it—He is the best high, don't we all know? There were many more stories like the ones I've just told you, many more changed lives, healed bodies, mended hearts and restored spirits. There were dangers, and there were threats, and many a close encounter, but He kept and protected us for as long as He needed us to do His work. By the time I was 25 years old, I was proud to be able to look my mamma and daddy in the eye and tell them, "God did it! He did it, even through a nobody like me!"

Then came the day that, while I was prepared for it to happen someday, I had no idea how soon it would come. After all these years, the Jackals were still strong, the top gang in our part of town, and somehow they had gotten word, through the rumors over the years, that I was the one responsible for Annie's disappearance, and that of Mack and Jake, and that I was the cause of Jeffrey's death.

These boys don't like to lose their own, and they don't take any flack. They won't put up with no dissin'¹, as they call it, and I was a marked woman. I didn't have a chance to talk, nothing. They found me one day when I was with one of my girls, who had been dealing drugs before she found Jesus a few months earlier, and they put a bullet through my head as they drove by! It all happened quick enough, and in the fleeting moment that I hovered between this life, and the glorious one that awaited me with my Savior, as I looked back down, the prayer of my heart was, *Jesus, help my girls to stand strong. Help them to keep the faith, and to keep up the good work.*

It's an unusual thing, you know, but nothing furthered my cause quicker than my death. Denise and all the girls spread the news far and wide, even wider than the papers and the TV, and soon there were so many more who wanted to join in and help further our mission. I didn't quite understand it at first, but now I thank God for having given me the privilege of being a martyr for His cause, and for the cause of His lost children, those who are despised and rejected by those who see only their rough exteriors and fail to look inside and see the lost and needy hearts and broken spirits.

¹ a slang term for disrespect

Going to my own funeral was an experience never to be forgotten. Mamma and Daddy were there, and Denise and all my girls, and scores of others who had decided to join us after my passing.

Lolita was the first one to read her eulogy, and her closing words will forever ring in my heart and mind. They confirmed that it had been worth it all:

"Today we commemorate the life of Cheryl LeRoy, a girl much like any other girl, but a girl who was willing to reach out to those who needed the happiness she knew she could help them find, the only happiness that could ever truly satisfy the empty and longing hearts of those she sought out. I thank you, Cheryl, because if it hadn't been for you—the fearless girl who walked into my darkened life, and led me to the light of Jesus—I would have never come to know the joy and fullness of life that He has come to give me, and many others. We love you, Cheryl, and we know that you will always be with us, in the sweet memories of your tender love and care that continues to live on in all of our hearts."



A DRIFTING BOAT

As Told by Karen Anne Stanton

My name is Karen. I lived many years ago in England, in the early part of this century. I came from a fairly well-to-do family. I had kind parents, who loved me and my other brothers and sisters very much. We had a nice, though relatively small, estate. Though we were not extremely wealthy, we lived quite comfortably and had all that we needed.

We children lived a happy life. We had many friends, went to a good school, and enjoyed the simple and happy life of being children—without cares, without worries—simply enjoying life, living, playtime and fun. My brothers and sisters and I were fairly close, and our home life was a good one. Yes, God was very good to us.

My parents were believers. We had our difficulties, but through prayer and faith in God, all things were resolved. They had a simple, beautiful faith which they passed on to us children. They read us stories from the Bible, they taught us to say our prayers, and most importantly, they related everything that we children understood in life to God and His great love for us. Somehow they made us see a connection between daily life and God.

They would take us down the streets of London, when we would visit the big city, and they would point out to us the beggars, the less fortunate, the

blind or the crippled, and they taught us that those were the people that we needed to help. God had given us so much, they said, that it was our duty and responsibility to pass it on and share our happiness and good fortune with others.

So we children grew up with the morals instilled in us of helping, giving and sharing. While we were growing up, any beggar or poor, needy person that our family passed by experienced a rush of five young children all at once bounding towards him or her, while we smiled radiantly, dropped some coins into his or her hand, whispered kind words, and let them know that God loved and cared about them.

Ah, those were the days! Such was the life of happy and carefree young children. What pleasant memories those are, and how they linger in my heart, and bring a smile to my face. Not only was I pleased then to think and to know that I was helping another, but yet now I am happy when I look back on those moments, for they were moments of helping, moments of sharing—the only moments that you never regret in life.

Childhood passed quickly and joyously for me, and before long I was entering womanhood. Nature smiled kindly upon me, and Heaven rained upon me beauty and much favor in the eyes of others. I had everything a girl could have wanted in the natural. I was attractive, my temperament was such that I had no enemies; all wanted to be my friend. I was gentle and mild-mannered, yet had within me a spark and driving motion that accomplished what I set out to do.

I must now give much credit to my parents, for truly they raised me and fashioned my life, spirit and will through their prayers and loving care of me, and my other brothers and sisters likewise. Yet at the time, in my moment of splendor, those around me did not see the years of nurturing and

tender caring that went into the making of this young and lively woman that they saw standing in front of them.

Yet within my heart, I knew there was a calling for me to give my life in service to the One Whom my parents had always spoken of. I knew that, despite what the others around me said, my life was not fashioned to follow higher roads of social living. I was not meant to be a glamorous individual. I was not meant to pursue my own happiness. I was not meant to give in to my own desires, my own fancies, my own fascinations. There was something more divine, almost mystical, that was calling me elsewhere.

I felt this call, this pull, this sensation inside my being throughout my teen years. But, these feelings were easily brushed aside as I went about my young life. I studied and was bright in my educational knowledge. My interests were many and varied, and I was indeed a promising young lady.

From time to time I thought about this call within my heart, the sense of knowing that I was to give my life to Another, in order that He might lay it down wherever He chose—to give life, breath and help to those lost, lonely and in need. Yet I did not think much of this until I was nearly at the end of my teen years, for my friends and acquaintances, studies and hobbies took up my time and energies.

It must have been near my 21st birthday when I more clearly saw what the call was asking of me. I was walking down the streets of town with some of my friends, laughing, chatting and having a fine time. We stumbled into the wrong building by mistake, and there before my eyes, I saw the sight which was to change my life.

It was a decent-looking building on the outside, but within were the most pitiful wrecks of humanity that I had ever seen up until that moment of my

life. There were children abandoned; mothers who had been beaten and threatened, without a place to live; elderly men and women naked and destitute. I cannot even begin to describe the sickness, the illnesses, the horrible conditions in which these ones appeared before me.

This building was apparently a rescue center for the poor—for those unable to afford treatment, for those who were even beyond homelessness or destitution. These were the dying poor.

I had never before seen a sight such as this one, and it racked my whole body with a kind of pain I had never before felt. My head began to spin and dizziness forced me to my knees, only to see the floor of this God-forsaken place which these creatures called home. It was so dirty, so unsanitary, so infested, I could scarcely believe my eyes.

This all took place in only a matter of moments, I am sure. For shortly thereafter, one of my friends quickly grabbed my arm and pulled me off the floor and out the door, while yelling aloud, “Karen! Come now, come along! What has taken hold of you? This is no place for you, nor for us.”

Stunned and dazed, I followed him outside the door of what seemed like it must have been hell. Surely, I could have only been dreaming, or experiencing some type of nightmarish vision. But the pain still racked my body. The dizziness in my head was gone, but in its place came a pounding, impending sort of thought that repeated itself over and over again. It seemed to tell me that I was hearing my call; that I was meant to give my life as a missionary, as a healer, as a helper to those who were lost and destitute as these poor creatures I had seen a moment earlier.

My friends could not understand my behavior. I was stunned. I pulled aside from walking along the street with them, and leaned back against the wall

of the building. They said to each other, “She’s traumatized. The shock has been too great. Come, perhaps we should bring her home. She may be growing ill on us.” I could not even respond.

I was only trying at that moment to sort out in my mind whether this was truly my call, whether this was truly the answer to that lingering question I had felt in my heart all my life.

Then the answer came, as clear as a child speaking to me. I felt a tug on my skirt, and looked down to see the dirty hand of a child timidly touching my laced dress.

“Ma’am,” the young face said. “Are you the answer to my prayers?”

Stuttering and stammering to get the words out of my mouth, I replied, “Child, what do you mean? The answer to your prayers—for what?”

“Well, this morning the last nurse who works in our building told us that she was coming down ill, and was not able to come care for us anymore. There’s nobody else who is going to come. I don’t need much care myself ... but my little brother, he’s quite sick and will die if help doesn’t come soon. I don’t know what to do. We have no parents, you know.

“As the nurse left, I asked her if she would be sending more help. She said that there’s no more help left in this town, and that if I wanted help, I would have to pray for a miracle. And when you came in and knelt down on the floor, I just knew that I had seen my miracle. Are you going to come and help us?”

I could not contain my tears. The little girl smiled at that, and I could hardly understand how that young child, in a state such as she was, could find it within herself to smile. Yet how she did smile, and I will never forget it, for it was one of the most beautiful smiles I have ever seen in my life—I know it was Jesus smiling at me.

The call could not have been clearer, or more simple. It was given unto me in words that any child could have understood, for a child gave me my commission, my call, my plan and purpose in life.

I looked deep into her eyes, and as the tears ran down my face faster than I could brush them aside, I said, "Yes, my child. I will return, I will come back to you. I pray I can be your miracle."

With this, she released her grasp on my dress, and bounded happily back into the building, as though she did not have a care in the world. She carried such faith, such trust within herself, that I dared not disappoint her.

As soon as this exchange was over, my friends hurried me into a horse carriage, and I found myself on my way back to my house. They were concerned about me, and rightly so, for I had just undergone the most spiritual experience of my life, and I was not my usual self.

They left me at home, and cautioned our cook and housekeeper to watch over me, and to take care that I did not come down with an illness from my contact with the little street urchin, as they called my darling child friend.

The next days that passed were ones of thought and days of prayer. Somehow that one experience brought back to me the hours and hours of prayers I had prayed as a child, the stories, the Bible reading sessions, and all the good lectures and discussions my parents had given us children. It all pieced itself together, and I knew I was to give my life to Christ. The call was evident, apparent and ever-present before me.

I returned to my young friend, whose name was Cherenne. I spent much time and effort in providing those poor people with their needs—food, clothing, medical care, shelter and the like. This brought to me such joy and fulfillment.

Though the work was hard, and not the sort that I was used to, nevertheless, the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction was certainly felt, and this made it clear to me that I was pursuing the right career for myself. My parents were most supportive of my efforts, as they had prayed that their children would find it within their hearts to give their lives to God.

I was fast heading in this direction, and in a short time I was attending further Bible studies and classes, in order to gain a greater understanding of how to not only minister to the poor and needy in material ways, but in spiritual ways.

I found as time went on, that seeing the pitiful conditions in which I would discover people always racked my body with that certain pain which I told you of earlier, yet when I would tell them of the One Who loves them and cares for them despite all else, then the pain would disappear. This I took to mean that the sharing of God's love with them was of greater importance than attending to their every physical need, though I dedicated myself to doing both.

I felt a lightness in my heart, a certain joy and sense of knowing that I was where God intended for me to be, doing what God had intended and planned for me to do. I was fulfilling my place in life.

This does not mean, by any wild stretch of the imagination, that my labors were easy, nor even glorious. Most would say, except for my dear parents, that I had climbed down the ladder of life in devoting my time and energies in caring for the needy; for it was neither glorious nor glamorous. Yet most were tolerant of my activities, and I did not mind greatly their distance towards me, as I knew that every waking moment of my life would not be nearly enough time to do all that I felt called to do.

A couple of years passed in this fashion, and I only became more definite in my beliefs that the giving of love and the gift of salvation to these poor

individuals was the most and the greatest healing I could offer.

I began to feel that there was something more—something beyond my own home town, and even beyond the large cities to which I had been traveling to assist, to give aid, and to set up new shelters. There were local people who also volunteered their time and efforts, as they saw the need around them, and these kind people attended to the physical needs of the people, while I majored largely on the spiritual. It seemed to me that as time had gone by, I was less needed, and the works that I had begun in the vicinity surrounding me could be continued by others.

I was feeling the call to press onward, to give my life, love and the Gospel to those of another land—to ones who had never seen the light of Jesus, who had never felt the touch of His love, and who had never had someone willing to give their very life for them, that they might obtain this priceless gift of salvation.

I delved deeply into reading about great men and women of God who had lived in times past. I studied to see the patterns in which God had called other individuals to vast fields of service where none other had gone before. My faith was strengthened as I read the accounts of David Livingstone, the great missionary and pioneer of the African territories. Was this my call?

Aye, it was. The presence of spirit in my heart and the firmly settled conviction could not be shaken. I informed my parents and loved ones, and plans and preparations for my departure began in earnest.

I was certainly not the first white face to set foot on this vastly dark land; for there had been many other courageous and humble men and women of faith who had followed God's call into this country. Yet I believe for each one of us, God put the feeling

in our hearts that this was truly the first chance for many millions to hear the Gospel.—And so it was. If my life had been lived out in Africa till its dying day, still there would be such a vacuum, such a need. There is a great and compelling pull on any child of God who would dare to ask of Him where His will would take them—for their need is hardly comparable to any other need.

As I said, there were other missionaries and missions stationed in Africa, and I sought to establish contact with them, that I might join up with my fellow brothers and sisters to serve, to labor, to reap the harvest of lost souls alongside them. This did not prove to be difficult, and in no time I was acquainted with several wonderfully dedicated mission stations.

I chose to give my services to a particular mission post which called out to me from the country of what is today called Namibia. A dark land, yes, but that is where the light can be all the clearer seen. Such challenge spurred me onward. Such hardship as I found there in that land was the driving motivation that pushed my spirits and sights only higher. I thank God for that gift, for in the dire conditions and deepest straits that we found ourselves in at times, the courage that God gave me, and the will to live and fight on, undoubtedly pulled me through and kept not only my spirit, but my very body, alive.

The days to follow were not easy. Yes, the harvest was plenteous, and most surely the laborers were few. It was not hard to keep the faith, to keep the unity, for we had to stay ever so close, else we would not make it, else survival would not be possible. The strain of laboring in this field was sweet, and amidst my trials and temptations, I thanked God for allowing me such a life. I held to His promises that my reward in Heaven would be far greater than

my present reward, which at times seemed sorely lacking. But no matter for that, there was much ahead.

All men and women of God must pass through the testings of faith and spirit. Simply arriving at your field of destination does not mean you have passed the finish line. Nay, it is more as though you have just warmed up and now are about to begin to take the track on; but at first I did not understand this.

A visitor, we heard, was to come and take refuge at our outpost for some time. He was a traveler, a journalist of sorts, and was making a rather long and arduous trek through this part of the world. I thought nothing of the visitor to come. I had truly given no thought to such matters since I was much younger, for since I had met my little friend, Cherenne, such things as romantic love and marriage had been pushed to the back of my mind.

There had been no opportunities for love, for I had been so engrossed in my ministry and in my work. It was not as though thoughts of such things never crossed my mind; it was rather that the availability was not there, therefore there was not much to be done about it.

The young men about me were not taken by my calling and pursuits, and the lifestyle I had chosen to lead did not appeal to them. Besides, I had the company of many young men throughout my teenage years, for as I said, I was popular and attractive. I had been used to having so much, that when I found my calling and pursued it wholeheartedly, I found it a nice reprieve from that world I previously knew. The amount of effort and energy which I expended into my helping the poor and ministering to them spiritually, compensated for my lack of companionship and involvement.

Yet now time had gone by. A few years had come and gone, and the scenes before me were changing

with age, with the passing of time. Conditions were harder than they had been for me previously back in England, and I was, for the first time in my life, alone. I had no immediate support beside me, other than that of my fellow mission post workers. It would not be fair to not make mention of these dear souls, who while they loved and cared for me greatly, had troubles of their own and heartbreaks too numerous to speak of.

One dear couple whom I was particularly fond of lost their young daughter to malaria, and this was a great personal tragedy for them. They were not able to have many children, and this was to be their last child. Yet others—and there were not many of us—had troubles back at home, in England, to contend with. Dying relatives, lack of support and grave illnesses are but a few of the usual situations which drove us to our knees, and for which we spent many a sleepless night weeping in prayer, beseeching God for intercession and intervention—which always came, though not always in the way we requested or hoped for.

While I endured bouts of flu and illness, I was relatively whole and untouched. I was the youngest member of our mission post, and had a great deal of energy and stamina. I learned the native tongues quickly and well, and dealt much with the local village elders and the people surrounding our mission post. I did not have a family to care for, nor children to teach or watch over; though we often shared in these duties.

Yet my personal tragedy was soon to arrive at our very doorstep, and I was to be the one to greet it with a smile.—Our unsuspecting visitor, and I, the unexpecting greeting committee.

He was a pleasant young man, attractive and charming. Not mild mannered, but he knew well how to control his temper. He was a visionary, an

accomplisher, a man with his sights set high and determination deeply imbedded in him. I instantly admired his qualities, and took to him quickly.

Within hours, something inside me began to change. When he had arrived (and I will call him here Paul, though his name in full was Michael Paul Lawrence), I had not taken care to groom myself in the most careful manner. I washed my hands and face, and straightened my garments, but that was all. I did not suppose that he was any more out of the ordinary than any other visitor that would pass our way.

In our African lifestyle, we all learned to be humble and less caring of our outward appearance. My appearance was certainly a far cry from my teenage years in England, where my laced dresses and silken bonnets held such importance to me. Ah, but those days were long gone, and so far behind me now. How could we reach out to the native people if we set ourselves so high above them? We had to truly adapt their customs and dress, in order to gain their trust, and only once we proved that we could understand and appreciate their way of life would we find ourselves able to share with them the Gospel. These were joyous moments indeed, for there was much laboring, much tilling of the soil to be done (figuratively speaking, of course) before we could plant the seeds of truth in their hearts. Then more watering and nurturing, before we could hope to see a blade of green burst forth in their lives.

Paul was in his late twenties, and seemed to take an immediate fancy to me. Though I noticed an attraction towards him welling up within me, I must admit that I was somewhat taken back by his actions. He did not keep it a secret for long that he found pleasure in my company, nor did he take great care to keep his thoughts of my beauty and charming manners to himself.

Naturally, such words of admiration pulled at my heartstrings, and I found myself frequently thinking of Paul. By this time, he had been at our mission post for nearly three weeks. He toured the local villages by day, and went on a few safari expeditions to further his research, and to garner information and knowledge about this vast land, which at this point in time still presented such a mystery to the English-speaking world.

I accompanied him at various times as an interpreter and guide. We spent many hours together, and I found myself wanting to be in his company more often. Nevertheless, I still had my duties at the mission post, and these I strove to attend to as carefully and diligently as ever. Yet more and more, I found my thoughts pulling away from the betterment of the mission, and onto my personal life and interaction with Paul.

Paul's schedule and itinerary for the day became a central part of my thoughts. I began to organize and schedule my duties and efforts around what he was doing. I realized that he was becoming my focal point and the center of my world, rather than the mission post and the natives which had been all I knew since my arrival to Africa.

Paul and I spent many happy moments together. We spent many an afternoon walking through light jungle and growth to a secluded clearing of grass, stopping to have a picnic. We relished talking together, and found much to laugh about and share in common. These were happy moments, delightful moments, cherished bliss.

I had not felt feelings such as these that I was then experiencing since I could remember. My younger life, it seems, had been all bliss. Yet now, upon entering adulthood, my life had taken on a much more serious tone. This I had chosen for myself, or should I more correctly say, this had been

chosen for me by God, and I had accepted.

Mark me not wrongly, I was not unhappy or discontent. Yet now I was experiencing a most new sensation, and it brought a lightness and a feeling of happiness to my body, mind and spirit that I had not previously experienced. The tension of each day seemed lifted when I was in Paul's company. When he looked into my eyes and smiled, there seemed to be not a care in the world. Everything and anything was possible, and the world of joy was mine for the taking.

Yet in my reverie, I did not realize how this bliss and happiness was changing my life, my actions, my thought processes. If I could have only seen the vast and great changes that were being wrought daily in my life as I stepped further and further into Paul's life and away from my own. I now shudder to think of how blindly I had been taken over by this love, by this passion, by this blissful romance.

I said that daily I was stepping further into Paul's life and out of my own. What could be wrong with this? What is inherently wrong with sharing your life with another?—With loving another so completely and fervently, that your only wish and desire is to become one with their being, and to become a part of their life? The true answer is *nothing*.—Nothing is essentially wrong with that deeply strong and gripping human desire that had come over me; which comes over each person at some point of their journey through life.

That is the short answer, and it is the true answer. I speak from experience. I speak from knowledge, and now from the depths of heavenly wisdom which I have acquired since my departure from my physical life. But there is more that cannot go unsaid. There is more that must be joined together for the completion of true love.

There is much talk of love in this world. There

are varying degrees of love and attraction, which I have no time to speak of. Yet I will tell you about my experience, and I will share with you the priceless jewel which I obtained through my sorrows, sorrows which came of my own choices, which were not *His Own* choosing for me.

Value this jewel I give you, for you have no idea how costly it is to purchase it through the hard road of personal experience. You see the sparkle and the brilliance and you long after it. Yet you see not the extremely high and steep price which has been meted out in order to obtain it. How much better to receive it freely, through another's wisdom, through another's experience, through another's story. God has given you your own life. God has destined and fashioned you according to His choosing, as He has each of His children, and each one whom He wishes to bring unto Him as His children. God has not given you a life in order that you might throw it away, that you might cast it aside, that you might trade it for another which you find more fashionable, more appealing, more enticing. God has given you *your* life, and He intends for you to ask Him what He would have you do with it. He would have you live your life as He has planned for you to live it—for in doing this, He is able to fulfill your every wish and desire. He is able to bring happiness and joy into your life.

This is where I erred. I chose to enter into Paul's life and to leave my own behind. I chose my own passions and desires and the fleeting ecstasies of romance and sparkle, over the path which God had ordained my life to follow.

In my case, this was a test which God brought along my path, in order to strengthen, to teach and to instruct me. Yet I threw caution to the wind, and so easily dropped the oars of my boat, and climbed into Paul's boat, leaving my boat to drift aimlessly on the sea.

There was no one in the entire world who could have taken my place in the boat which I had abandoned. I was the only one designed and suited for my little vessel, and God only knows how many souls and drowning lives were not rescued as a result of my poor choice.

God only knows how many sinking hearts saw my boat passing along their way, and their heart leapt for joy within them, and they felt a renewed courage and strength spring up in their spirits, only to find that the boat drifted past them—for there was no one in the boat. There was no one to succor them, no one to cast out a lifejacket to them, no one to pull them from the waves. Oh, how many have been lost?

So was the case for me. Paul's stay was extended, and there seemed to be only too many reasons for him to stay on. More hours I spent with Paul, and less with the local natives. I was seen less at our Bible studies, less at our gatherings and meetings, less at the village school, less tending the fields and properties about us.

At times when I would lie in my bed at night, my heart would be struck with a conviction, with the feeling that I was letting my job be neglected for the new companionship I had found and so enjoyed in Paul. Yet I pushed the thoughts aside, for I so preferred the happiness and bliss to the pressure and desperation that I had endured for so long. I felt it was only fair that I experience the bliss that I believed God must have brought into my life.

Yet I did not ask Him about it. I did not make certain that I was following the path which He had planned for my life, for I did not wish to hear Him say that I had gone slightly off course. I did not want to have to give up so great a joy as Paul.

We had now fallen in love, and the feelings and passions were stronger than words could describe.

There was not enough time in the day to express our love for one another, and there were more aspirations to be had together than one lifetime could possibly contain. All else was steadily fading from my mind, and Paul seemed to take on all the importance which had formerly belonged to the many other duties of my life and calling as a missionary to this land.

For the time being, I hardly noticed the land about me. I was not touched and pressed by the needs of those in our village. I was not spurred on to improve local conditions, and to reach out further and beyond in territories that we had not yet set foot into. I was beginning to find myself content, complacent and satisfied.

Satisfied in what?—Satisfied in Paul, of course. I was not deriving my satisfaction from God, from my labors, from fulfilling my calling. It was a deceiving satisfaction, yet it deceived my natural senses, and so deceived me entirely, for I had chosen to follow my natural senses, and not the will of God.

Months passed by, and those about me—my dearest friends and fellow laborers—could not understand the transformation that had come over me. I was not the same person anymore. I was distant and reserved—reserved for the things of my own life, no more finding my pleasure and joy in giving my life for others. Yet what could they say to me? For I would not listen. I could not see. I did not understand.

Paul spoke to me of his travels, of the opportunities that could be had if I were to come and journey with him; if I were to be his wife. We spoke of love, we spoke of laughter, we spoke of the joys of being together. We spoke of marriage, of having a family, of raising children together, of all the joys of a blissful life. It seemed we possessed between us

every element needed to make our lives a dream-like fairy tale.

Paul's parents were wealthy, and talk began of us returning to England to be married. Surely if we were to have the ideal marriage and a perfect life ahead of us, we had to begin it right and proper. We needed to be married with our parents in attendance. We needed to be married in our own country. We needed to honeymoon together, and plan out our life together. Surely Africa was not the proper place for this.

Paul's time in Africa was nearing to a close. He had extended his trip as long as it was possible, and the time of decision was closing in upon me. I spent many a restless night pondering my future. While with Paul, I could think of no more than to be held in his arms, to kiss his sweet lips, and to talk and laugh and be with him for eternity. Yet when apart and alone in my bed inside the mission post, reality began to return to me, and my senses slowly thawed. God struck my heart with such conviction and such intensity, reminding me of His calling for my life, and asking Me to follow the course which He had planned for me.

Paul was clearly not enticed with the idea of joining me in full time missionary work. He was deeply entrenched in his career as a journalist, and intended on continuing in it. Was I going to forsake my present life as a missionary in the land God had shown me to come to? Or was I going to remain and give up the one that I loved so greatly and deeply, in order to return my love, life and heart to the One Whom I should love above all else? Such a decision at that time in my life seemed more difficult than I can now express.

But the choice was not that extreme. If the alternative to my missionary life had been so very definite and precise, as to return to England with Paul, to be married, and to live a normal life, I do

not believe that I would have been able to find it within myself to choose such a life. I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God's Own hand had led me to this land, and that it could not be His will, nor His desire for me to leave what had become my people and my country, for my own desires.

The great difficulty was in holding to the *highest* and *best* opportunity and calling which God had given me. For Paul, knowing that I would not so easily find it within myself to give up the missionary life, and the call which God had placed within my heart, told me of the many opportunities which awaited me around the world.

"In every country to which we travel, you will be able to help and to give unto the needy. We will set up shelters, we will help the poor, we will instruct and minister," Paul confidently assured me.

This is where I made my wrong choice. I chose not the highest, not the ultimate service which God had called me to. I chose my own desires, under the guise of limitless opportunities, which I so desperately wanted to believe existed, in order to escape from the conviction of the Spirit, and from the hand of truth which God was placing on my life.

I made the wrong choice. I chose to leave my all—my people, my new-found country, my fellow laborers, my mission post, my calling, my boat and my life behind, as I stepped into Paul's.

And did my life go on with the grand intentions for which I had hoped? Did I fulfill the wondrous plans which we had promised ourselves? No, for there was one empty boat drifting somewhere, and I did not return to find it. How many nights did I weep over my decision, yet it had been made.

I was not entirely useless. I made myself available to help and to serve in any capacity I could. Yet I knew from the moment I set my foot upon English soil that the wrong choice had been made

in my life. I learned that I had rejected the truth that I had been given, and I had chosen my own ways over God's plan for my life.

I did not have the trust or the faith to wait, to hope, to patiently expect that in His good time, He would give me all that I needed, even in that lone missionary outpost in Namibia. Rather, once I believed that I was in possession of what I needed to make me happy, I resigned myself to not let go of it. Never mind whether or not God had a better choice of man in mind for my life, I would not have it. I would have what I wanted and needed, and I would have it now. For if I let it go, in such a remote part of the world, perhaps I would never find it again. But it was not worth it. It brought such unhappiness, such dissatisfaction, such despair and regret.

I returned to England, as I said, and Paul and I were happily married. And what of my former partners and co-workers left behind in Namibia? They cheerfully saw me off to the boat which was to whisk me off to my new life. They wished me the best and said their prayers for me, yet I could not look in their eyes long, for I could see the tears welling up within their eyes. I could see the questioning looks on their faces, wondering what had come over me to cause such a radical change in my life. Why was I leaving them and the land I loved so dearly? Their efforts would be set back by my departure, leaving them further short-staffed.

I could not bear to look in their faces for long, so with hasty good-bye's, I made my way to the stern of the ship. My new life waited ahead and I felt anxious and unsettled inside. And so I had right to feel. For from that day on, life was unsettling.

It was not that there were no moments of joy—there were plenty of them—yet the peace was missing. The fulfillment seemed to have blown out of my life as quickly as I had waved goodbye to my

dear friends on the dock that day, as I sailed out for England.

Yet God's hand was not through working in My life, and He did not punish me. I had chosen my own path, and I reaped the consequences of my own decisions. Make no mistake in your reasoning, for this was not the hand of an unloving and unmerciful God chastising me; this was simply the due consequences of my own actions. God was loving and just to me throughout all this time.

Paul and I had a child, a darling girl, who was the light and sparkle of our lives. Yet before she was two years of age, she was taken by a nasty flu, as was not uncommon in those days, and I, heartbroken, sought refuge, in the presence of my Savior. Suddenly I found myself so in need of His reassurance, of His hand upon my life. I felt the need to speak to Him, to ask Him questions, and to hear His answers. How wonderfully He spoke to my heart.

Paul was away for long periods of time, and I endured loneliness and sorrow. The grief I felt over the loss of our child, Avonlea Karen, seemed to be eternal. I could see no end in sight. My mourning and dissatisfaction in life took its toll on my body, and before long, I was bedridden and ill much of the time.

There were other troubles between Paul and myself. We grew distant and our lives and our hearts seemed to rarely cross the others' path. *Such a shame!* I thought, *I gave up so much to be with this very one, and yet now, where can he be found? And even if I were to find him, could I reach his heart? It seems we have grown so cold toward each other. Now, here I lie, bedridden and useless.*

I began questioning the Lord in my heart. Why had He allowed me to leave Africa, if He knew the entire time my life was going to turn out like this? How could He have let it be so? I now know that it

was most certainly not His plan, and this I felt in my heart at the time also, but I brushed it aside. I left off communing with Him, and seeking His voice. The times of desperate prayer and fervent intercession before His throne that I once spent were no longer taken. How could I have expected Him to speak to me when I had ceased listening?

Through long hours of communion, and after several years of this silent, inward suffering, I finally came to terms with my Savior. I acknowledged where I had left my boat, and so longed to return to it. Yet how could I in this state? I was weak and sickly, and while I was only in my early thirties, my age bore no resemblance to my physical condition. I was in no shape to set out and travel once again. I could no longer rejoin my fellow colleagues in Namibia. Besides, I had lost contact with them and had severed all ties upon my departure, for I wished not to feel the conviction of the Spirit tugging at my heart.

There in the stillness of one cold night, I asked Jesus what I could do to regain the joys I had lost through my errors. Was there hope of forgiveness and restoration for me?

Yes. He answered inside my thoughts. His voice was soft and soothing, calm as a tranquil lake, and I felt that peace once again inside my soul. *Forgiveness has always been there for you, and I see your sins no more. Your past has been long forgiven, My child. Hope?—Why, hope is eternal. Hope never dies. I will tell you what to do.*

And so He did. He gave me a ministry of prayer. That upon my bed I could pray for the souls of the lost, for the missionaries who toiled selflessly, for those who laid down their lives in places of peril, for the salvation of the world. This I did with all my heart. The more I prayed, the more peace was restored unto me, the more happiness, the more fulfillment, the more joy. It was as though I was

once again out in the fields of the land I loved, reaping the harvest personally.

I restored contact with those I loved, and found they were still in the heartland of Africa, ministering, teaching, sharing the Gospel. They had traveled far and wide, and our little mission post had sprung up into a lighthouse of truth and salvation that could be seen throughout the land.

There were many a time when I wished that I could have been back there in person, for surely that would have been the better thing to do—to not have deserted my post in the first place. And yes, that is the truth. But nevertheless I am thankful for the life that He restored unto Me and the new ministry that He privileged me with once I turned back to Him. And more than that, I am thankful that the purpose for which He allowed me to undergo those experiences is now coming into fruition—that I may share my story with you, that I may help you to understand.

With my closing words to you, I challenge you to enjoy the toil, to love the labor, to find a thrill in your calling, to relish the struggle, to take pleasure in the sacrifice—for you know not what a great joy and blessing it is unto you. Look forward and press ahead.



**ONLY WHAT'S DONE
FOR CHRIST...**

As Told by Elizabeth Martin

My Heritage

My name is Elizabeth Martin. You've never heard of me, I'm sure—because I quit. Nobody ever hears of the quitter, the one who never makes it, the poor soul who gives up and ends up saying those sad words, "I can't." Anybody who sang this sad tune never made it, or worse yet, they never even tried.

I was born in India. My father, being a prominent doctor, had set out to make his life's work in the new territory. Father and Mother, of course, were sincere and dedicated to their work in the hospital, but it was the dear Christian teachers in the mission school I attended who instilled in me a deep love for souls and a desire to dedicate my life to God.

The older I grew, the more I longed to help others. But I felt called to serve in a different way than my father, who worked hard to mend people's broken bodies. I wanted to save their souls.

Father was a dedicated physician, and I looked up to him. Mother, she was a true saint. I admired her dedication and stamina as she worked those long hours right alongside Father, nursing the sick and tending to the poor. With her special touch of comfort and love, she tended to both their broken bodies and aching spirits. She had a good heart and a tough spirit.

I was ten when my mother became ill and my father made the decision to return to England in the hope that she would regain her health. But the best of doctors and the finest of care were of no avail. My mother was only with us for two more years. She passed away quietly on a cold November day.

Things were never the same with Mother gone, and I missed her fiercely. Her passing had deeply affected my father. Something changed inside of him. It was more than just missing a loved one. I didn't understand it at the time, but as I grew older I found out that, for the longest time, he blamed India for my mother's death. Because of this, he couldn't bring himself to return to the land and people he had once loved and served so sacrificially.

My friends and relatives urged my father to take up practice once again in England, and he eventually agreed. "Take a break, Cedric. Give Liza a proper education. She needs a little social life, to make friends here at home," they said. So I continued my schooling in the finest British academies. I studied hard and did well in school, but the desire to serve God grew in my heart. That little seed of faith that had been planted in my heart in that simple mission school in India grew and grew, and soon I felt as if my heart would burst. Time went on, and as the end of prep school neared for me, all I could think about was this burning desire, this deep burden in my heart to return to my India, and bring God's love to her precious people.

Answering the Call

I felt the call of God in my life, and wild horses couldn't keep me away. Each time I would discuss the subject with my father, a silent hush came over the room. I sensed that he did not wish to say no to my request of his blessing upon my choice, yet he also did not want to say yes, for fear of losing me, as

he had my mother. He could not fully embrace the thought of me going. My father loved India, yet memories of my mother taking sick there plagued him; he now berated himself for taking her there in the first place.

My longing grew. I could not stop it. I had to be of some service. I wanted to serve mankind, save mankind, make a difference in the world. I wanted to make that difference for God. I felt God's call in my life clear as could be—and He was calling me to the mission field of India. With every beat of my heart I lived for the day when I would be able to launch out, take the step and return to my beloved India once again. It was as if I could smell her in the air. Every time I closed my eyes, all I could see was India: her streets, her crowded towns, the mystique of her countryside, the exotic flowers that perfumed the air, the throng of the crowds and the confusion of the cities, the refreshing tropical night breeze, the little mission where I had attended school the first years of my life—and I longed to return. The need was great and the call of India was ringing in my ears. Her people cried out to me in my dreams. I lived, breathed, talked and dreamt about India. The Lord was calling me, urging me on, compelling me to go.

Words cannot explain how excited I was that day my father decided to give me his blessing. He made arrangements for the Reverend and Mrs. Caldwell to receive me in India, and soon I would be on my way. At the time I never understood exactly what it was that changed my father's heart, but I knew it was an answer to my desperate prayers. Now I know that it was my mother who had intervened on my behalf from Heaven.

Dear Father knew what was on my heart, and that I would never be satisfied until I had reached my goal. I knew it wasn't going to be easy. I knew

the opposition we would have to face, friends and well-meaning loved ones who my father would have to answer to in allowing me to go. I knew the hardship involved, but I also knew that, in life, things of true value do not come easy. And so off I went to my beloved mission field.

It's funny how things change when you get a little older. The mission looked much different now, certainly not the same as when I was a young girl, happy and carefree from the problems and worries of adult life.

But I expected it so. I knew there were going to be hardships to face, yet I was idealistic and full of fight and determination, ready to tackle this new challenge and this great call in my life. Many of the sweet Christian missionaries I had grown to love so dearly as a child had moved on to other mission posts throughout the country. Some had returned home, but the Reverend and Mrs. Caldwell were still the same, always faithful, strong pillars and servants of the Lord, and they were there to greet me with open arms.

These two saints, my precious parents in the Lord, took me in as their own daughter, as my father had entrusted me into their care. The next ten years of my life were filled with some of the most amazing experiences you could imagine. There were happy times and trying times, yet always fulfilling times, as I had peace—that perfect peace of knowing I was in the highest will of God. The long, hard hours of toiling day after day, the battles, and the struggles were made worth it all by the thrill and excitement that came from seeing even just one soul get saved, one life change.

The Missionary Life

During the first years, I was in training in this mission outpost. I grew closer to the Lord as I

diligently studied His Word, and I worked with the children, which taught me valuable lessons. How I loved the children. I loved to tell them stories—that was one of my favorite things to do when I first started out, and all through my missionary life, really. I loved to tell stories to the children. They'd come and sit on my knee or gather round me on the floor as I would tell them the stories of Jesus and His disciples.

Eventually I ventured out. I was ready for the work I loved the most: to be out among the people in the crowded cities, where the need was so great, out in the streets amongst the desperate and desolate, the sick and the dying, and those who saw no hope. As I buried myself deep in the problems of others, there never seemed to be time for problems of my own.

I saw thousands of miracles as I traveled from city to city, making a difference in those years. Deeply immersed in the lives of others, I had little time to think about myself. Still, in the times when I got my eyes on myself, loneliness attacked. But this was easily crowded out by the press and the pain of the people, day in and day out. I felt so small and weak in myself; I longed to do more, yet I felt so incapable.

I always looked forward to my next refreshing reprieve back at the main mission outpost, where I would find renewed fellowship with the Caldwells and others, and most importantly, the rest and refilling that came from those times of sweet communion with Jesus. It was during these times that I found strength to carry on. I was well aware of the great spiritual warfare we were fighting, and how fiercely the Devil fought our work, but Jesus met us every time. We lived on miracles. We experienced them day after day, and we often felt the mighty hand of God interceding on our behalf.

The battles were sometimes long and hard, but the victories were glorious!

There is no new thing under the sun—how true that is. I battled with many of the same things I see you being tested with now: feeling the weight, the pains, the burdens of the people; feeling discouraged, surrounded by insurmountable problems, and battling loneliness. Yes, this is a big one. I did have my long, lonely hours—lonely for a friend, for companionship. But as long as I kept crying out to Jesus, He never let me down. And as I continued reaching out to others, He filled my every need, soothed my every heartache. It was through those moments, those personal battles and hardships, that I rose to higher peaks and was able to peer out towards greater views. It was in these times that I found that with Christ as my Guide there was no stopping place. Through all this, I was able to see beyond the horizon to a greater joy—the joy of knowing I was fulfilling His highest and best. This joy is what sustained me through those years. Those were truly the happiest years of my life.

A Visit Home

After ten years of service on the mission field, I received word that my father had taken ill and that he had little time left to live. Torn between staying on the field so ripe and being at my father's side in his last days, I returned to England for what I insisted would be a temporary visit. Co-workers and friends saw me off and said a prayer for my strength.

I knew deep inside that what lay before me was not going to be an easy task. The Lord gave me strength for those last days with my father, and I was thankful that he went in peace. My father's parting words meant the world to me, as he softly whispered in my ear, "I'm proud of you, Liza, keep up the good work." To have my father's renewed blessing on my life was what I had hoped for.

After my father's passing, I was anxious to tie up the business at hand and return to the mission field; that is, until a strange series of events began to unfold. During all my ten years of missionary service on the foreign field I had experienced many hardships. Like a mountain climber, I seemed to thrive on difficulties. Each time I felt the burdens, when I felt weary and worn and lonely—even forsaken at times—Jesus always bent down and picked me up. The added blessing of working side by side with fellow missionaries made a difference, as we found strength in our unity. When one fell, the other would always be there to pick him up, and we upheld one another in our prayers. The tests on the mission field were great, but the grace was greater, the power stronger, and Jesus always saw us through to victory.

I know now, since coming Home to Heaven, that Satan was fighting mad because of this. He was mad at all the victories we had won, the ground we had gained, and now he saw his chance to strike a mortal blow—one that I was not prepared for.

People often are mistaken when it comes to the Devil. You know that old red-suit-and-pitchfork image that is often portrayed? Guess who designed that picture? Satan himself! He promotes that picture of himself for a reason. Folks get this picture in their minds that the Devil is ugly and obviously evil. This is true—he is evil—but he often hides behind a cloak of goodness. He is not good, but he often hides behind the good. He sneaks in and uses seemingly good things, good intentions, things that look good, even sweet things, sweet people, and concerned friends.

He is the master of disguises, and he will disguise the bad in any way he can. He'll tempt you with good things in order to cause you to fall, to give up hope, and to quit. I'm not saying all good

people are filled with the Devil, but the Devil will try his best to use anybody, to twist the things that people say and do in order to cause you to fall. Good is not always best.



After my father's passing, finalizing the business took longer than I had anticipated. Days turned into weeks, and the weeks were beginning to turn into months. Now that my father was gone, I had expected my loved ones to put pressure on me to stay in England for a time, and to consider taking up a more stable and suitable career, one that afforded the time to marry and settle down. Much to my surprise, however, it was quite different than I had expected.

"Remember, whenever you need us, we're always here for you," was the oft-expressed reassurance that I received from my aunts and uncles. Everyone was helpful and kind, which was a welcome relief.

During this time, associates, loved ones, and well-meaning friends all began reaching out to me. My dear aunt Constance took a special liking to me. Constance was my mother's sister, one of three. She was quite opposite from mother in every way, being much more drawn to the world and completely enthralled in high society. Dear Aunt Constance, well meaning as could be, took it upon herself to make sure I was on the invitation list of every important engagement of London's upper crust. She was a busybody and a meddler, and considered it her "duty" in my mother's stead to "connect" me to London's high society circle. Aunt Constance never had children of her own and this naturally contributed to her innate desire to take me, the daughter she never had, under her wing.

Then there was Lord and Lady Finchley, who also took particular interest in my welfare, and who in fact, proceeded to introduce me to every available

bachelor in town. How they loved this sport—that of the dating and mating game! I didn't understand it at first, but grew to learn later in life, it was just that. A sport of sorts, perhaps to break the boredom and the monotony of life and yes, of course, to keep the money of the upper crust all within the "family." After all, those of certain social standing do have to look out one for another!

So they all started pouring in in an endless flow. Invitations for lunches, dinners, social gatherings—you name it, I was swamped! And to my surprise, oddly enough, it felt quite good. I felt relaxed, at ease, as if a load had been lifted from my shoulders. Those first twinges of feeling condemned and uneasy about the fact that I felt so good when I wasn't on the mission field and was doing so little to help others, seemed to quickly be swallowed up in all that was going on around me.

Of course, I had lots to tell and share with everyone about my experiences in a foreign land, and my wealth of knowledge of many and varied subjects intrigued those with whom I kept company. I did feel concern within myself for my lack of vision to make a difference in my new surroundings, but this was easily brushed aside as the engagements continued almost non-stop and I was swept along in the social whirlwind of London's high society. I began to enjoy not having so much responsibility. With so much activity all around, I hardly had time to think. I felt relaxed and I was having fun!

Then, at a point in time, one prevailing thought entered my mind: *Maybe it's time to take a little break. Maybe I could use a little time for me, for myself. I have been working long and hard, and after all, don't I deserve it?* But how could I think such a thought, when I had been called to serve God? I felt torn between two worlds and I didn't understand. My emotions were topsy-turvy. I felt confused.

Anthony

Then it happened. Out of the blue, Anthony walked into my life—as if out of nowhere. I had often hoped that one day I would marry, and I longed for a partner and co-worker on the mission field. Of course, I knew Anthony hardly fit the role of a missionary, but there he stood: tall and handsome, gentle and polite; those blue-green eyes and that dashing smile swept me off my feet. Anthony was chivalry incarnate—my knight in shining armor! Brave, gentle, courteous and kind.

What is happening to me? I thought. Feelings of confusion and anguish plagued me from within. How could I have such strong feelings for a man who was so immersed in the world, so far removed from everything that I had fought and lived for? Yet, here he was—so thoughtful, so loving. Surely this could not be bad. A torrent of emotions caught me up and tossed me about like a ship on a troubled sea.

One thing led to another, and Anthony and I were wed. I justified this decision in several ways. I was madly in love for one, and if I felt so in love, how could it be wrong? *Besides*, I thought, *I'm due for this break, this time to get to know loved ones back home, all these dear folks who were so kind.* I knew that this would have been my father's wish, I told myself—forgetting his last words to me, to keep up the good work. I rationalized that it wouldn't hurt to gain a little more knowledge in other areas, to help round out my life; and where was a better place to do that than England? *Besides*, somewhere down the line, I would be able to see how I could fit in serving the Lord in some other capacity. It was so easy to come up with excuses to stay in England.

I began to feel challenged at the prospect of integrating into this new and interesting world of British high society. I also told myself that surely there

was a lot of good I could do in England. My moments of missing India, my moments of feeling I lacked a vision, were clouded by the strong emotions now bursting inside of me. It wasn't that familiar red-suit-horns-and-pitchfork guy that came around to tempt me. This attack was in the form of reasonable, legitimate, logical and acceptable excuses—and I swallowed them all.

And so, I forsook my calling on the mission field to become Mrs. Anthony Martin. I gave up serving Jesus for romantic love. Now most folks might think nothing of my story so far; after all, ten years of missionary service on a foreign field is to be commended—that's true. But had I known then what I know now, nothing in all the world would have driven me to the decision to end my missionary career.



Anthony was a banker and owned many properties. We were well-off, and I integrated quite smoothly into British high society. I made new friends and re-established old ones. Loved ones were always at my beck and call to help me feel loved and wanted. I was like a child discovering a new world. Anthony and I enjoyed riding horses together, and when I was not busy organizing dinners and social events for my husband's interests, my days were filled with ladies' clubs, teas, and visiting a few sick ones within our circle. I was an active member at our local church, and helped out at every bazaar, picnic and fund-raiser. I led the ladies' choir.

It's still painful for me to admit this now; to think that I gave up helping millions of lost souls to help entertain a handful of self-satisfied, once-a-week church-goers; that I gave up bringing the light and the truth of God's love to the lost, desperate and destitute ones, only to sing in the comfortable church choir of London's West Side. They were sweet and sincere people, yes, but I gave up the biggest need. I

failed the multitudes for a mere handful.

It wasn't long before Anthony Junior came along, and just a year-and-a-half later, Carrie came into this world. There we were: Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Martin, a charming couple: a smart banker, a lovely wife, and two adorable children.

Missing the Mark

You might wonder how after ten long years of missionary service, one so fervently dedicated to her mission in life could have had such a turnaround in such a short time. One might think that maybe it wasn't so bad after all; maybe I had done enough, and this was my destiny. Maybe this turn of events in my life was God's new plan for me; after all, it looked good. I married well and became a charming and accepted member of society—but that was not the case.

When looking only at outward appearances one might say I did well in life. But the truth is, outward appearance aside, the day I said “no” to Jesus was the day I began to die spiritually. Outward appearance doesn't carry much weight up Here in Heaven, and the day I quit on Jesus was the day my fire started to die. That was the day I lost the deep satisfaction of knowing I was fulfilling God's perfect plan and highest will for my life. Worse yet, that was the day I lost His full power in my life.

To others, it seemed I was doing well. But this was only a false front, a role I played in the hope that if I played it long enough, I would eventually blend into the world around me. Inside, I began to crumble.

Marrying Anthony and raising the children was a good thing, but the point is that, for me, it wasn't the *best* thing. It wasn't God's highest will for me, and so I terribly missed the mark. From the day I forsook my calling, my life started on a downward spiral. Much like dominoes, one fall led to another,

then another, and on and on it went.

I didn't understand how far-reaching my decision had been as long as I lived on Earth, because I didn't *want* to understand. I didn't want to see clearly; it was too painful for me. To cover up that pain that began to set in, I had to pretend—pretend I was happy, pretend I was fulfilled. In reality, I felt like an empty shell. I was gifted, lively, charming on the outside. I was a perfect hostess—the lovely, intelligent, experienced Mrs. Anthony Martin—but I was withering and dying spiritually. I had traded not only great riches in Heaven, but my inner peace, satisfaction, and true happiness on Earth, for a mess of pottage.

The Sad Ending

It wasn't so much that I was enjoying the pleasures of sin, but I was enjoying the pleasures of selfishly living for myself. The Devil didn't tempt me with outright evil things, nor did he try to lure me with a string of vices—the pleasures of sin as such. He knew I wouldn't fall for those in the beginning when I was fresh off the field.

Satan hit me with good things. This was his fatal attack on my soul. He hit me with good feelings, relaxed feelings, feelings of relief, feelings of surcease from the battle that I had fought for so long, and feelings of love. If you're wondering how the Devil can hit you with good things, believe me when I say he'll use anything he can. Satan will take anything he can and use it against you if you are ignorant of his devices. He can take all the good things in the world, twist and distort them, and turn them around for his gain if you are not on guard.

The Lord says to think on good things; everything that is lovely and pure and good, think on these things. There is nothing wrong with good things, unless you're enjoying good things for the wrong reason. Anything that keeps you from God's highest

and His best is not good.

God gives man the majesty of choice, and the way you choose to go is up to you; that is your divine right. But God Himself decides what is good, better, and best for each individual. This is His divine right that He has set forth for each and every human soul the moment they were created. Should you decide to follow any other way, believe me, you will never be happy, you will never be truly satisfied.

I knew what God's highest will for my life was, but I forsook it for my own selfish pleasure. I loved Anthony and Anthony loved me—surely this could not be bad, I thought. It wouldn't have been, except for the fact that God had something *better* for me. He had called me. He had chosen me. He had asked me to go the extra step, the extra mile, to live for others so that they, too, could be free. I belonged to Jesus, and He had asked me to give a life that I could not keep, to gain riches and glory that no man would ever be able to take away. He had called me to a life of service, to follow in His footsteps and to reap the harvest. He was counting on me, depending on me, and I let Him down, because I chose instead to live for myself.

Satan lured me with good things. He hit me with the soft loving hands of well-meaning loved ones who were concerned for my welfare. He hit me with caring ones around me and the man of my dreams who wanted to protect and provide for me. This became my downfall. Their love became my bondage.

Little by little, I lost my fervor and my conviction, and slowly but steadily I was overtaken. As a dying candle begins to smoke and stink, I was soon to flicker out, smothered by the very hands of good intention and the actions of those who loved me. My life was no longer my own, nor my Savior's. I had to fit into their mold, and as it was a mold that

I was not created for, I did not fit. My fire began to die. It grew dimmer and dimmer until it was completely quenched and went out all together.

It didn't take long; just a few short years, for the glamour to wear off. Regardless of how in love Anthony and I had been in the beginning, no matter what fires of emotion we had felt, it was not enough to keep our marriage going. In spite of outward appearances, our relationship never could fully prosper for one simple reason—it was not God's highest will.

Anthony grew distant and our love grew cold. We kept up a pretty good front, and nobody could tell what was happening between us. Remaining congenial and civil toward one another, we went through the motions day after day. We stayed together for the children's sake, but, sad to say, my sorry spiritual state deeply affected little Anthony Junior, who grew up to be a fearful, introverted young man. The flu claimed Carrie's life when she was just three. Refusing to acknowledge that this was the hand of God working in my life, I grew bitter inside.

The good social life, and all the seeming success that the world had to offer brought me no peace. Ironically, although surrounded by supposed friends and loved ones, I lived out my years in loneliness. Endless hours of frivolous talk, town gossip, and fruitless and pointless hours of social gatherings haunted me. I was a prisoner of broken hopes and shattered dreams, endlessly lost without any purpose in life.

Because I had stopped obeying the truth, I lived with this confusion deep inside. And it became like a poison eating away at me day after day, year after year. It was like a long, slow and painful death.

As the years rolled by, I became deeply lodged in society's mold, the community around me, and the

web of selfish living. The spark was gone. I didn't have much "spice" in my life. I didn't have the excitement and the fun activity that I could have had had I not forsaken my call to Jesus. Keeping up with tradition and the norms of society provided for me a life of boredom! Having known a life of giving, having known the satisfaction that living your life for Jesus gives, and yet going back on that call, nothing could satisfy.

In our later years, our love having grown cold, Anthony sought out the company of other women, to supply his need for the sex and emotion that I no longer had the desire to give him. Naturally it was all hush hush. We never spoke of this. He never let on to me, and I never let on to him that I knew, but I did. Dreadfully fearful of being left alone with no financial security, I played the game. I chose to not rock the boat. I shut my eyes and ears to the reality around me and Anthony played along.

I know that Anthony did care for me in his own way, but lacking in true spirituality and with little real knowledge of our Lord and Savior, he didn't know how to help me. So our lives continued on. Day after day we went through the motions living in our little world; Anthony, engaged in his business, the men's clubs and sport, and I in women's engagements, teas, socials, as well as tending to the house and servants. No spice there! No real excitement, just day after day existence and sliding by, more nonsensical talk, more gossip, more endless hours of vanity.

As the years moved on, I withdrew from the social life more and more, spending many long, lonely hours sipping tea in my parlor, tending to my rose garden, or talking to and grooming the one who was closest to me in those latter years, Sigmund, my faithful terrier.

I died of a broken heart. I died of boredom. The

doctors said I died of heart failure. How true. My heart had failed because I had no real reason to carry on. I was lonely. I was depressed. I had no fight left in me. I had left my plow and had listened for so long to the lies of Satan when he told me it was no use to leave this all behind and set out for the mission field again. Though I eventually recognized the error of my way, I believed that there was no way back to the Lord's service, for I was too old, too deeply engrossed in a new life; it was too late to repent and get back to where I had gotten off. Defeated by these lies, through my own disbelief, I simply grew weak and tired.

If only I had listened to Jesus all those times, even after I fell, when He was gently and tenderly calling me to return to where I had left His will. He was there all the time, waiting patiently, ready to receive me with open arms. I could have asked His forgiveness even then—but I would not.

What I Missed

When I arrived in Heaven, though Jesus in His wonderful love did reward me for my years of service to Him and for the souls I had led to Heaven, still all I could do was fall to my knees and beg for forgiveness for failing the rest. Tears flowed from my eyes as I cried out to the Lord, "How, how, dear Jesus, could I have been so blind?"

Lovingly, tenderly, ever so patiently Jesus showed me where I had fallen, where I had gotten off, where I had been duped by Satan himself.

Can you imagine? Where would you be—where would mankind be—if the first Missionary had gone back on His call? The first Missionary, God's Own Son, Jesus, took up His cross and set out to the mission field of Earth that He was called to. Can you imagine what your life would be like today had He not stayed true to His call? Can you imagine a

world ruled by Satan, with no hope of salvation?

And where would the world be today without others who followed in His footsteps; without the missionary journeys of the early apostles, the Peters and the Pauls, the Livingstones, the William Careys, the St. Francises and St. Claires, the Florence Nightingales, and countless other great men and women of God?

Sweet Jesus wonderfully met me with open arms when I arrived in Heaven. He knew how painful those first moments in Heaven would be, when I would have to face the true reality of what I traded for those measly years, that bat-of-an-eye in which I chose to enjoy selfish pleasures rather than suffer affliction with the people of God—His needy ones on the mission field where I had been called.

What He has in store for those who serve Him, who give their all on the mission fields of life, is far greater, more stupendous, and incomprehensible to the human mind. His missionaries are the cream of the crop Here in Heaven. His faithful ones who serve daily, unselfishly on the mission fields of the world are His most honored. His missionaries are the elite of Heaven! And I gave it all up for a moment of fun that was here one day, and gone the next. That fun didn't last; it was short-lived and it all crumbled into dust.

Instead of being able to greet all the souls I could have helped to win to Jesus, up Here in Heaven—to give them a warm embrace, to tell them I'm so glad they made it—I have had to watch their suffering, their pain, and their agony, all because I failed to do my part. I failed to do my job. I forsook them and closed my ears to their cries. You cannot imagine the tears I've cried.

Some of the ones I failed made it to Heaven anyway, because God did not fail them. But their lives were much harder, and their salvation delayed

because of my failure. I have had to look many of them in the eye and say, "I'm sorry I failed you, but I wanted to have fun. I preferred my personal pleasure to helping you out. I'm sorry, I wanted to live for myself. I'm sorry, I wanted a break. I just didn't want to fight. I'm sorry."

Conclusion

If you think your times of testing and trials serving the Lord are too hard to endure, they are nothing compared to what it is like when you say no to Jesus. For each lonely hour you pass in service to Jesus, you'll be rewarded Here in Heaven. The hours you pass pursuing your own selfish interests out in the world are lost forever. You will never have anything to show for them.

I've learned a lot since coming Home to Heaven, but things are different than they could have been. I have since come to see a great truth, a wonderful and magnificent reality that I had failed to see while on Earth. Sometimes, out there on the mission field, I was tempted to think I was doing so little, making hardly any difference in the world, and I sometimes wondered if it was really worth it all. But now I can see how the life of each missionary is multiplied—hundreds, thousands, millions and even more times over. I can see it now. Even though in the end I threw my crown away, and gave away the opportunity to have received greater rewards by continuing to serve the Lord and give my life to Him, still, I was richly rewarded and blessed for the ten years in which I did give my life and heart to others. I received great satisfaction and fulfillment from my years of service, on Earth and in Heaven. But it was so short of what it could have been.

It pays to keep your eyes on Heaven, to set your affections on things above, to keep on forsaking every day, to keep on loving every day, to keep on

CRY OF THE HARVEST

fighting every day, and to not quit. You'll never be sorry. It's the only way you will ever be happy and satisfied. You know the truth, and you'll never be truly happy with anything less.

Don't fall for the "fun" temptations of Satan, because I can tell you from personal experience, they won't last. Keep fighting. Keep presenting your body a living sacrifice—like Jesus did for you. Keep setting your face like flint, and look straight on. Keep climbing those steep slopes, and before you know it, you'll look down on creation. The view will be worth every rocky step you had to take. It's worth it all—every single bit.

Don't be discouraged, don't ever give up, keep on believing, and most of all, whatever you do, don't quit! Just think, all the great missionaries that ever lived are counting on each and every one of you to finish the job. Every one is watching from the Heavens. That's a pretty good reason to not quit, isn't it? We're all praying and shouting, and rooting for you!—We're counting on you to finish the job!



**THE TREASURE VAULTS
OF HEAVEN**

The persistent morning light pierced the wooden shutters of Don Alejandro's bedroom. Turning once more on his satin sheets and feather pillows, he opened one eye, then the other. Pausing a moment, he crossed his arms, looking up at the vaulted ceiling as the light played on the immense tapestries on the walls. Bathing himself in the sensations of the new day, he felt nothing but happiness and gratitude for the life he had. He arose, put on his new silk robe, a treasure from the mysterious East, and walked to the window.

He threw open the shutters, drew his breath and marveled at the beauty around him. He observed the hard-working peasants carrying their loads, the neat rows of stone houses, the magnificent cathedral rearing its head above all other buildings, and beyond the city walls, gardens, fields and woodlands.

As he eyed the country road twisting off into the distance, the realization fell upon him fully: this was the day he had been looking forward to for so long. He rang the butler's bell, and with his assistance, carefully chose his clothing, topping his outfit with his newest, most distinguished coat. He ran his carefully manicured fingers across the fabric and

gently coaxed his hair into place. At last, prepared for this day of days, he descended the staircase, greeting the servants with a condescending nod.

After a hasty breakfast, Don Alejandro motioned to his horseman. "Is everything prepared?" he queried. Upon being assured that it was, he stepped outside and signaled his approval. His fine carriage was ready, and sixteen horsemen were to accompany him. His butler was directing the placement of two large leather trunks. Don Alejandro grasped his personal satchel at his side. *If anyone knew its contents, he thought, I should be in fear of my life.*

He pursed his lips and motioned to his servants, who stepped back in silent obedience. He tapped the doorframe of the carriage and they were off. As they rolled swiftly through the narrow streets, he bowed superciliously at the many men who bowed or tipped their hats to him. Passing the grand cathedral which lifted its twin towers to the heavenlies, he thought of the place he had bought in the heart of the bishop and in Heaven. He thought of the expensive mahogany pews he had reserved, waiting to be filled with his progeny.

As they passed through the town gates, Don Alejandro resituated himself in the commodious carriage. He relaxed and allowed himself the luxury of ruminating on the reason for his journey. *Ah! Sweet Maria Teresa!* How blessed was the man who would take her in his arms and call her his own! She was a vision of beauty, worth the fifteen-year wait. Her bloodline was impeccable, and though still so youthful, she had the regal bearing of a queen.

After years of bachelorhood, Don Alejandro was to visit the home of Maria Teresa's parents and formally petition her hand in marriage. There would be no hesitation, for it had all been arranged years ago. Of course, his future relatives were anxious to give the hand of their precious only daughter to such

a one as Don Alejandro. His generous gifts to their household had assured him a place in their hearts. How lovely she would look at his side. He thought of the children she would bear, and how handsome or beautiful they should be. What to name them? Alejandro snapped back to reality; it was certainly too early to pick names.

Presently they entered deeper into the forest. Don Alejandro crossed himself and shooed the first fearful thought from his mind. Checking once more the location of his satchel, safely tucked beneath his seat, he reassured himself with the thought of the sixteen armed men surrounding him. The clicking of the horses on the stony path, the regular thumping of the wheels, the occasional sound of the whip whistling through the air—all this brought peace to his mind and slumber to his eyelids, and he returned to his rest and reflection. It was to be a long journey.

The morning wore on and Don Alejandro felt the first pangs of hunger. He opened the curtain, peered out at the greenery and saw to his delight a small clearing, a perfect spot to lunch. He ordered a halt, to give himself, as well as his men and horses, ample time for rest and provisions. A servant brought a comfortable low stool for Don Alejandro to sit on, as the others relaxed beneath the trees. The light reaching down through the trees dappled the layers of leaves with the appearance of diamonds and emeralds. The simple lunch of dark bread, cheese, apples, and full-bodied wine never tasted so good. Crossing his legs and petitioning a light for his pipe, Don Alejandro studied his surroundings.

Then he saw it... What was it there, beyond the trees? He cocked his head and squinted his eyes trying to make out the form on the ground. After a few moments of contemplation, he could contain his curiosity no longer. Trying to maintain his

appearance of being dignified and nonchalant, he sauntered past the small brook, past the rows of saplings to the foot of a gigantic oak. There, lying nestled in a coarse brown blanket lay the figure of a man.

Don Alejandro studied his ruddy cheeks, the thin line of hair forming a low wreath around his head, and noted on his finger a filigreed gold ring of extraordinary beauty. With his boot he nudged the sandaled foot.

“Are you alive, my man?” he called.

Again he tapped the foot, and once more a bit harder, calling again, “Are you alive?”

Hermanito Daniel sputtered, wiping the sweat from his face and the sleep from his eyes. Looking up, he saw a tall slender man with long black boots towering over him, with a sword glistening at his side. The sun shone directly in Daniel's eyes and he could see little else. He grabbed hold of Don Alejandro's hand and helped himself to his feet. He looked around, and was obviously surprised that the sun stood as high in the sky as it did.

“Why thank you, my good sir, for waking me. How time does fly. I stopped for only a moment to rest my weary feet and here it is high noon. I have miles to go. I must be off. God be with you.”

And so, without any further introduction, but with a smile which carried the innocence of a child, Daniel trudged off down the road, through the trees, out of sight.

Don Alejandro shrugged off the odd, perplexing feeling that overcame him. He sharply called his men together and within moments they were on their way again. Don Alejandro was comforted once more by the serene clatter of the wheels and the horses. He felt the carriage slow down, presumably for a passer-by. He peered through the curtain slyly, to see a sturdy broad-shouldered figure, whom he

recognized as the same man from just a short while ago. Just as he passed the man, he let the curtain drop, uneager to face this man's contented smile once more. *Contented*, he thought with disgust, *contented with next to nothing*.

He returned to his thoughts of the beautiful Maria Teresa. Numerous scenarios passed through his mind as he went over and over their introduction, and imagined their first embrace.

The day stretched on and the afternoon began to fade. Don Alejandro regretted their rather long stop for lunch. The horses' heavy panting indicated their need for rest, but Don Alejandro fought the urge to signal to the horsemen to stop. *We must pass through the woods before darkness is upon us. We must be close to the forest's edge*, he thought.

Suddenly he stiffened in his seat sensing something. He heard no sound, saw no movement, but a sinister stillness filled the air. There was an uncanny presentiment that danger was near. The horses whinnied, falling back in their steps, brushing one against another, desiring to turn aside with nowhere to go. The driver's whip urged them on.

Suddenly a scream tore through the forest. Then another. Then another. Then the sound of metal on metal, the clashing of swords. A thud! Don Alejandro was thrown to the ground as the carriage lurched to the side and tipped over. He didn't hear the robbers' cries as they overcame his men. Though good soldiers, they were heavily outnumbered by the well-armed thieves who had the advantage of surprise and knew the forest well. He didn't hear the unloosing of the horses. He didn't hear the unloading of the large leather trunks. He didn't feel the hands groping beneath the seat for his satchel. He knew only the sharp pain in his head, followed by what seemed to be a long, deep dreamless sleep.



Hermanito Daniel walked along the rocky road, smiling at the birds singing overhead. Though no longer in his youth, he walked at a brisk pace, humming to himself. He thanked God for the sunlight drifting down through the treetops. He thanked God for this path, tiring as it was to walk along, through the forest. He praised the Lord for his simple but practical sandals. He remembered the humble cobbler who had presented them to him.

He remembered the dark night, the terrifying thunder, the desperate look on the face of a man whose beloved wife was dying in childbirth.

“Come pray for us, Brother!” was all he had said. Daniel recalled the prayer, the familiar verses: “Let them call for the elders of the church and let them anoint him with oil in the Name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up.”

He had had no holy oil, but with a fervent prayer and a gentle kiss on the feverish brow, the woman’s pain had ceased, and a beautiful, perfect little boy was born. They called him Danielito. *How old must he be now?* The last time Daniel had seen the child he was a curly-headed tot who hid in the skirts of his mother when his parents, in reverent tones, introduced Daniel to their miracle child, his namesake.

There were so many more stories. Daniel praised the Lord again for his simple life of faith. Like the disciples of Jesus, he had been called to go out and preach the Kingdom of God, to heal the sick, to cast out devils. Freely he had received and freely he had given of all that had come into his hand. He had no money, nor purse to hold it in. He had only the clothes he wore, the simple blanket folded over his shoulders, the sandals on his feet, the treasured, hand-copied manuscript that contained the Words of his Lord, and his one gold ring. But he knew that

wherever he was led, the Lord would supply. He had never failed to give him a place to lay his head. Sometimes it was in the shade of an oak tree. Sometimes it was on the soft grass shared with the sheep of the field. Sometimes it was a generous bed in an inn. Sometimes, like baby Jesus, he slept in the warm hay of a stable.

Daniel knew well the road he was traveling, as he had passed this way many times. He knew each bend, each overhanging branch. The forest creatures had no fear of him and gathered around him like old friends. He was not alone. He had no fear of nightfall, for as much as he enjoyed the warm sunlight he also enjoyed the twinkling stars and the crickets’ song. He walked quickly, but unhurried.

He did not know where he would be at day’s end or where the next morning would take him. At each turn or fork in the path he prayed for direction, always carrying in his heart the desire to be of service. That night he was led to a mossy glade by the side of the road, which he made his resting place. He luxuriated in his velvety green bed, warmed by a doe who lay beside him nestling her fawn.

The next morning, as he read the familiar story of the Good Samaritan from his worn manuscript, he was particularly touched by the Lord’s command: “Go thou, and do likewise.” Praying that the Lord would guide his feet and help him minister in the way He saw fit, he humbly requested his daily bread. In his deep pockets he felt the last crumbs of the coarse biscuits given him by a woman whose twisted arthritic fingers had been straightened. He raised his eyes heavenward. “Jesus, You were in all points tempted like me, and surely You must remember the pangs of hunger in the wilderness. I have no doubt You will supply.”

Daniel threw his blanket over his shoulders, placed his sandals on his feet, and carefully wrapped his precious manuscript in a cloth. He passed a stream of cool crystal water and drank deeply. Ignoring the growls in his stomach, he walked on. Soon, a dazzling brown pheasant crossed his path. She seemed to be beckoning him to come where she walked. Daniel followed, careful to avoid stepping on any low nests. Within a few moments he found a bush laden with blackberries, dark and succulent*. There were more than enough to fill his hunger. Then a honeybee landed on his hand and led him to her hive. Fearlessly he reached deep within, grasping a section of the comb, filled with luscious sticky nectar. The birds joined him in his song of thanksgiving as he continued on the road.

Daniel recognized the last bend before the forest's end. He quickened his pace, hoping to reach the village before nightfall. He looked forward to seeing his many friends there. The Lord had done numerous miracles in this place, and helped Daniel to win many souls and touch many hearts. This was one of his favorite stops. He busied his mind praying for each of the Lord's dear followers here.

As he turned the curve in the path, he caught his breath at the sight of the overturned carriage. He ran to the side of man after man, examining their grievous wounds. He was almost weeping, praying over the souls of the men who had died such violent deaths, and for the souls of those who had committed such a heinous crime. When he at last came to the carriage, he recognized the tall, slender man inside. He remembered the boots, the impeccable clothes. He took his blanket and wrapped it around Don Alejandro's head.

Feeling the faint pulse, and hearing the shallow, labored breathing of this stately man, Daniel knew he was still alive. He felt the surety of faith, and

summoned to mind the many healing miracles God had performed through him. He knew that the Lord could heal this man, whatever his injuries.

He claimed the Words, "Greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father." Though there was no one around to hear, Daniel uttered aloud a prayer of power and eloquence, claiming verse after verse of God's promises.

There is a moment when the plea of man reaches the heart of God, when the Word claimed in faith demands the answer. God sent His messenger to Daniel's heart saying, "It is done. Your prayers have been answered."

As thrilling as the battle is the flush of peace and victory. Daniel felt the quickening pulse, heard the deeper, relieved breathing, and watched his fluttering eyelids opening. Daniel raised his arms to thank the Lord for another answered prayer. Thus motionless they remained, the impeccably dressed man gazing upon the face of his "savior," and the humble itinerant* reaching his arms up to his God.



Don Alejandro awoke from his coma to see an angelic face, bathed in the glory of the morning sunshine. He had never seen such a face—a face enraptured by such peace, such glorious victory. He thought perhaps he had passed on into the heavenly realm and was seeing the face of Christ Himself, but as he studied the features he began to recollect having seen this fellow before. He lay there trying desperately to remember when or where, but he could not think clearly. Even his own name eluded him at this moment.

Where was he? Who was he? How was it that he lay like a child in the arms of this stranger? Then he looked around. He studied the crushed form of the carriage, and a short ways beyond, he saw one

of his footmen lying on the bloodstained ground. He looked at his own once-fine coat, now muddied and torn.

Daniel looked into Don Alejandro's eyes.

"You've had quite a shock, my dear sir. Do you know how long you have been here? Do you feel all right now?"

Don Alejandro did not answer because he did not know how to answer. Thoughts crossed his mind, but they seemed to find no passage to his lips. He lay there stunned, too weak to move, seemingly hanging between life and death. Not knowing what to do, and wondering if the man might again succumb to his pain and leave this weary world, Daniel began to softly quote his favorite scriptures.

"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

Don Alejandro had never heard these words before, yet now he felt their soothing, loving touch deep within his soul. A warm glow filled his body. A rush of life and hope filled his being, cutting through the bonds of fear.

After some time, he looked around once again, and the memories of what had happened began to come back ... *the coach, the sound of horses' hooves, the rattle of the wheels on the rough stones, the whip, the screams.* Slowly he remembered the nightmare which had befallen him.

"Oh no, my treasures. They have taken my all. I am lost!" he called out at length.

Tears began to fall as he thought of how his journey, which had begun so joyfully, had now turned to such terrible tragedy and loss. A cloud of immense despair descended over him, and the

momentary ecstasy he had felt at surviving the ordeal faded as he faced his problems.

Daniel watched the emotions surge across Don Alejandro's face, and sensed his need for encouragement and comfort. There was a deep gash across his forehead, though the flow of blood had now abated. Daniel carefully removed Don Alejandro's stained jacket and tore a long piece of fabric from it, which he wrapped turban-like around the wounded man's head. He helped him rise to his feet, carefully supporting him, to test his strength.

The physical pain Alejandro felt was nothing compared to the sorrow that now engulfed him. The belongings he had carried with him on this journey represented all that was dear to his heart: golden candlesticks which had been passed down in his family for many generations, a diamond tiara of priceless value, a ring of rubies and diamonds. They were gone, never to be retrieved. He remembered his mother passing these family heirlooms into his hands, and the joy and pride he had felt. How could he face his fiancée now?

For the first time in his life Alejandro didn't know what to do. As a child, he had carefully studied the courtesies needed in his day. He had applied himself diligently to his studies, and acquired much knowledge and learning, and had always been able to direct his steps and decide what he would do or where he would go. Now he found himself in another man's care, an inferior by visible appearance, though he also knew he was indebted to this one who had saved his life. He realized that his first impression of Daniel as Jesus was a fantasy, and yet he knew he was in the presence of someone who did not fit into his concept of the common man. He felt that he must stay close to his rescuer, and that if he followed him, he would somehow regain his treasures.

Darkness began to descend upon the forest, and Daniel did what he could to help Don Alejandro pass the night as comfortably as possible. The village wasn't a great distance away, but Don Alejandro was in no condition to walk, and Daniel was in no condition to carry him such a distance. He looked through the overturned carriage and found some blankets, which he arranged within the cabin to accommodate his friend for the night. He then found a few small provisions, a bit of bread and cheese, and half a bottle of wine. Ignoring his own needs, he generously offered them to Don Alejandro. Daniel blessed the bread, praying for this poor man's continued healing, and thanked the Lord for the most precious gift—His mercy.

After Alejandro had taken what he wanted, Daniel placed the bottle to his own lips. Then he sank back on the dark earth outside the carriage, opening the door to a corner of his heart where he seldom ventured, remembering a life that was no more, before drifting off to a calm and peaceful sleep.



Daniel awakened with the morning's first light and the birds' song. There was something so beautiful about the forest mornings, a freshness that existed nowhere else. He looked through the latticed ceiling of the trees to the clear blue above and longed to fly upward to his heavenly home. He always put on a cheerful smile and blessed the God of Heaven for the simple, but unusual life he led.

He knew that when he was with others he was called to lead them ever upward into the heavenly light, but he had moments like this morning, when he found himself empty and longing. It wasn't a physical hunger, but a feeling of loss or mourning for all that he had laid aside and given up in his service for the Lord. He knew that each day would be as a field of battle spread out before him. He knew

that without the strength he drew from the Word and prayer, he could not take a single step.

He presented his soul, like a beggar's empty basket, to the Lord. Always faithful, always caring for His lone messenger, the Lord poured peace into Daniel's heart. He took the feelings of emptiness and loss and replaced them with a heart full of joy. It was not a quick process. Daniel lay silent for several hours, praying and being filled with strength from on High as the sun gained strength in the morning sky.



A stream of light passed through the carriage door to light up the face of Don Alejandro. He remembered previous mornings, rising in comfort in his elegant room. But it was now noon, and he awoke with a start, feeling so different. Never had the sunlight seemed so golden. Never had the green of the trees been so glorious. He touched his bandaged head, and wondered why he felt no pain. He looked out to see Daniel digging trenches in the forest floor. Not even giving a second thought to where Daniel would have gotten a spade in such a remote area as this, Don Alejandro rose slowly and leaned cautiously out the door, expecting at any moment to fall.

He was urged on by some intangible presence, like a babe searches out the presence of its mother. He wanted to look deep into the eyes of the man who had brought him back from such depths. He stood a moment watching as Daniel gently dragged the last of the bodies and placed it in the ground, covering it with soil. Then Daniel kneeled to place the last of the hastily-constructed wooden crosses on the mounds.

"So, you are up at last, my friend," said Daniel, "and in good time too, for we must pay our respects to these poor men who gave their lives defending you."

He took Don Alejandro's hand and asked the Lord's mercy on the men who had died. He prayed that the Lord would take them as His Own even if they had never received Him during their brief lives.

"What do you say, my friend? Do you feel well enough to walk? The village isn't far, and I have friends there who will be more than happy to offer us a hearty meal. Then we can send a message for someone to come for you. Does that sound good?"

"I haven't even thanked you for all you have done for me," said Don Alejandro weakly. "It all seems so unreal now. I don't even know how long I lay there before you came along. It must have been an entire day. I thought I had died, or would soon enough, but somehow this morning I feel fine, stronger and without pain. I am just a little bewildered."

"Shall we walk as we talk?" asked Daniel. As the two men started toward the village, he continued. "I haven't introduced myself. I am called Daniel. I remember seeing you the day before yesterday in the forest where I was resting. You awakened me."

"Ah, yes. My name is Don Alejandro. I was riding to the next town with my horsemen, carrying with me some precious, irreplaceable treasures to give to my future bride. We were attacked and robbed. It truly is a miracle I survived, though I almost wished I had died. I have never felt at such a loss."

Changing the subject, he asked, "Are you a monk? Where did you receive your Holy Orders?"

Daniel smiled to himself, "I am not of any particular order really. I was called; it was a little irregular. I was given a commission, and though I would prefer to have the company of others, I spend much of my life alone with my Lord, traveling as He leads me, and ministering to those as I am led. I have no home to call my own. Like the Son of Man, I have not where to lay my head. Surely it was He who led me to you in your moment of need.

"I prayed for you, and I humbly ask you to understand that you were healed by God. It was a miracle. I surely thought you dead, but it was the Lord Who touched you, my friend. He has His reasons for sparing your life, so don't despair and wish He hadn't done so. It was part of His plan for both your life and mine that we met as we did and participated in His blessing."

"You speak eloquently," Don Alejandro noted, "and not as the humble man you appear. I discern that you have some unique background; somehow you are not like other holy men I have met. There is something special about you. I go often to the Cathedral of Saint John, but there is something different about you that is disconcerting me. Tell me more. I need to know more of this power of healing that you speak of. I have heard of the black arts, but surely this must be somewhat different."

Daniel chuckled softly as he pondered where to begin. First, he assured Don Alejandro that the gift of healing was a gift of the Spirit of God. He bit his tongue at the thought of all he wanted to say about the holy men, the monstrous cathedrals, the opulence and decadence of a church that presumed to spread the Christian faith. *Better to stick with my own personal experience and let the Lord sort out the rest in His Own good time.* He proceeded to witness to Don Alejandro about the experience of finding Jesus and receiving the gift of salvation by faith. He quoted, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

"There is one thing that puzzles me," said Don Alejandro. "You dress so simply and appear to be the poorest of the poor, and yet you wear a very fine ring of obvious value. I don't mean to be presumptuous, but I am curious as to where it came from."

"It was a gift from my father. He asked me to keep it always, and I have kept it as he asked. Several times I feared that, living as I do, I would lose it to robbers, and various thieves have attempted to take it from me. But each time, as I begin to witness to these men and tell them of my faith, they fall to their knees in the fear of God and penitence. Therefore I have it with me still, and have fulfilled my father's desire."

"Then he must be a man of some substance?"

Daniel hesitated. The Lord had prepared Daniel's heart for this moment. He knew that all that he had passed through in his life was to benefit others. He knew that he was being called to comfort others with the same comfort wherewith he had been comforted.

"Yes, of a truth he is. I was born Daniel de Vasco, son of a nobleman. I lived on my father's estate and as I grew up, my lifestyle was much as I presume your own to be. I feel I should tell you a story that I rarely share, much less think about. Would you like to hear the story of my calling?"

"Yes, of course."

The two men were walking at a slow, comfortable pace, but Daniel still took a deep breath before he began his story.

"As a child I often liked to be alone. I wandered through the fields of my father's estate and observed the men who served him. I longed to give them more than what was their lot in life. I longed to help them, to in some way become one of them. I felt the call of God as a child. I heard His voice at ten years of age, calling me to give them the love of their Savior. I went to the cathedral and saw the extreme wealth and aloofness of a church that was supposed to give them eternal life. I knew there must be a deeper truth somewhere.

"Then one day I walked through the village square and witnessed the burning of a heretic. I

watched in awe, along with the railing crowd, and looked into the eyes of this man who was supposedly leading others astray. Our eyes met as the flames engulfed him, and I knew, as surely as I knew anything in my life, that he had the truth I was searching for.

"Beside me stood an old man silently weeping. I followed him after the execution, as he weaved his way through the city streets. I watched as he knocked three times on the door of a simple house. I watched as with whispers he was let in. I saw the door close. Making my way home, I knew I must go back and knock three times on that door. I was desperate for answers. One night, wearing the clothes of a servant, I slipped out of the estate unnoticed and made my way to that house again. I knocked, held my breath and waited. Someone whispered softly, 'Who is it?' 'It is Hermanito Daniel,' I replied. I was twelve years old.

"I was let into a garden where there was a small gathering. They looked at me, puzzled, wondering who I was and what I was doing there. I told them I had heard the voice of God. I told them what I had felt at seeing the burning of the heretic, and how I sought to know the truth. I said simply, 'I have come to give my life to God.'

"I had never met such loving people. They spent the night sharing God's Word with me. They shared with me the simple joy of salvation and prayed with me. They laid hands on me and asked God to give me gifts of the Spirit. Suddenly all that I had been seeking found me, and I felt God's love and peace in a very clear way. I felt I was floating on air as I made my way home in the predawn light.

"When I awoke the next morning, I saw my father, austere and proud as always, at the breakfast table. I looked upon my life, destined as I was from birth to take over my father's estates and be a

member of the ruling class. I was changed in my heart, but I was afraid to let others know what had transpired. I continued to wear my clothes of nobility. I attended the cathedral. I wept myself to sleep and lived in two worlds at once, wondering what I would become if I were to totally give my life to God. More and more I held back in my heart.

“As I grew up, I continued going through the motions of my aristocratic life. I was known as a quiet, introspective young man. My parents sought me a wife, and a wonderful young woman came to share my life with me. For the first time I had someone I could share my innermost feelings with. Evelina was my darling. There was nothing more precious in my life. She was God’s gift to me, and I could share with her all that had happened to me, and she understood. We were blessed with a beautiful baby boy and named him Manuel. Then shortly after, we had a little baby daughter.

“My wife often asked me what we were going to do, and she was eager to find God’s will for our lives. She was ready to make any sacrifice for the Lord. But as I looked at her and at our two beautiful children, I found myself thinking like my father did. I wanted them to have the best of everything. Little by little I lost the desire to share my faith with others and I feared the sacrifices I would have to make. She questioned me as to why I continued to attend the cathedral. She wondered why I never talked with my father about what I truly believed.

“One day she heard there was a sickness at the home of one of our workers. I asked her not to go, to let it pass, but she was determined to go and deliver some food to those who were ill. I think it was our first argument. I told her to stay and she insisted on going. I watched from the window as she walked down the lane, feeling as if I had a premonition and knew what was going to happen. Several weeks

later I saw her suddenly slump over a chair while looking after the little ones. I carried her to bed, from which she never rose again. I wiped her feverish brow and called out defiantly to the God of Heaven, beseeching Him to leave her with me, but she passed away in my arms. I never wept so much in my life. Then during the next nights I lay distraught and helpless as both of my precious little ones also died in my arms.

“As my house filled with mourners, I had to run away and be alone with my grief. I felt such confusion and anger. I knew God was unhappy with the life I had been leading, yet I also knew that He was not the fierce, angry God I had heard of as a child. I found my way to a spot deep in the woods and lay on the ground distraught and weeping. Finally, I called out to the Lord, asking Him to show me the purpose for all of this in my life.

“It was late, and darkness had descended, but suddenly I saw a light moving towards me through the trees. I wasn’t sure if I was awake or asleep. I felt like I was dreaming, but my eyes were open and I touched my flesh to see if I was awake. The vision came closer and closer, and within the circle of light I saw the form of a man. He grasped my hand and drew me upwards. The light was clear and golden, and my heart longed to stay in this beautiful place. The angel told me he had a special job guarding the treasure vaults of Heaven; he had come to show me the treasure house of God.

“I followed, imagining how great and how mighty this place must be. Surely God has more riches than could be imaginable on Earth. I was excited as we neared the throne room. I could not see the face of God or stand in His presence, because I was still in my mortal body; yet simply by being so near to Him, I felt His love and was bathed in the light of His presence.

"I asked the angel why the treasure vaults were so close to the throne room, and he said it is because in the vaults are the things that are most dear to the heart of God. These are precious treasures that He himself guards and preserves beside His throne room. Of all things in Heaven and in Earth, these are considered by God to be most valuable.

"The angel pulled a golden key from beneath his robe and placed it in the lock. I held my breath in anticipation at what I would see. I expected to see piles of gold pieces, jewels and precious stones. Imagine my shock when I looked within to find instead a garden with birds, cats, dogs, a tiny child sitting on the grass smiling at the angels hovering over him. There were lovely young women, handsome young men and dancing children. There were even rough-hewn toys and dolls. I saw old people there too. I turned to the angel in surprise and questioned him: 'Is this the right place? I thought you said that this was the treasure vault. Why are all these people and animals here?'

"He smiled knowingly and said simply: 'These are God's treasures.—They are the things and people which have been given up by His servants because of their love for Him. He guards them here in this special place close to His heart until they will be given back eternally. Everything in Heaven is beautiful and everyone is happy, but these are given a special place of honor, because to God they are the most precious treasures that can be given, laid upon His altar and kept there safely until the day of their loved ones' arrival.

"They are kept here, and not just kept, but lovingly cared for and greatly honored. God knows they are gifts of the heart, and the most difficult possessions to relinquish.' With that the angel took my hand and led me out, past the glorious, thrilling presence of God, down through the celestial tiers,

back to my place lying on the ground among the trees near my home.

"The silent forest still shimmered from the angel's presence. I sat up and looked around me. My mourning ceased. I felt a calmness deep in my soul. The anger I had felt was no more. I knew what I must do. I mounted my horse and rode past my father's home. They had gathered there to comfort me, but I was no longer in need of comfort.

"I remembered the way to the believers' gathering place, through the winding streets, and I rode there speedily, as if driven by some invisible yet undeniable presence. 'It is Hermanito Daniel,' I called. As before, someone opened the gate, and then quietly beckoned the others. I tried to begin to explain, but simply fell before them weeping. I once again felt the hands laid gently upon me. I heard the prayers, the words fitly spoken, and my soul and spirit were revived. At last I explained what had happened in the years since I had met them. There was no condemnation, only loving pardon and acceptance.

"What they gave me cannot be measured in monetary terms. They filled me with the Word of God, and gave me a carefully-copied manuscript which I still carry with me as my dearest possession. I stayed some days with them before returning to my house.

"Like the story of the prodigal son, my father ran to embrace me as he saw me coming down the road. He prepared the fatted calf and gave me this ring from off his hand. He asked me never to remove it, to always keep it with me as a token of his unending love. It was as if he knew what had happened to me, and what I was about to do. Before I began to explain about my calling, he said he was ready to let me go. I think I never loved him as deeply as I did in those moments, when I said good-bye and told him what I must do, what I had been called to do.

"That was many years ago, and I still remember his face, holding back the tears as he gave me to God. He is in Heaven now, along with my beloved wife and little ones, in the treasure vault dear to the heart of God. He is not lost, and I know, as surely as I know anything, that I will see him again and, as the Bible says, regain one hundredfold the time that we have been apart. As I live, it seems that more and more of my life and heart is in Heaven and my faith becomes more real to me. Each step I take draws me closer to eternal glory and I never fail to give thanks, not only for all that I have, but also for all I have given up for my King."

The two men walked in silence for some moments before Don Alejandro began to speak.

"Never in my life have I heard such a story. I am deeply touched that you would share such a personal part of your life with me. I have lived a selfish life. I have never known the meaning of the word "sacrifice." I have sat in the cathedral week after week paying homage to a God I didn't know. At this moment I think I know Him better than I have ever known Him in my life. I thank Him for bringing you into my life, Hermanito Daniel. You have made my pain at losing some of my belongings seem almost foolish. I feel ashamed, but more than just that, I feel like I need to do something with my life, as you have."

At that moment they came upon the village. As they entered, Daniel smiled warmly at and hugged various passersby. A small boy ran to him and clung to his hand as they walked.

More and more children gathered around, calling "Hermanito Daniel is here! Come everyone! See, he is coming!"

A woman ran out of one of the houses with a basket of freshly baked rolls, offering them to Daniel and his friend. Don Alejandro marveled as he found himself seated on the stone seat of the village

square, with people scurrying around him offering breads, cheeses, and fresh milk.

Someone wishing to help tend to his wounds unwrapped the bandage from his head and said, "There is blood upon the wrap, but no mark!"

Daniel looked, not surprised by the inexplicable. There was no sign of injury on Don Alejandro's head. The wound had not only been healed, but had totally disappeared.

Alejandro ran his fingers through his hair, suddenly feeling uncomfortable and quite out of place. His once fine clothes looked tattered, and his boots were dusty and mud-streaked. He felt awkward as the eyes of the village were on him, and everyone wanted to hear about what had befallen this man. He begged Daniel to come to his rescue and help him tell what had happened.

Word of their arrival had spread quickly, and most of the villagers were now huddled around as Daniel began. He raised his arms and asked God's blessing on this informal meeting. Then he recounted how he had been walking to the village and had encountered Don Alejandro lying beside his overturned carriage, surrounded by his slain guards. He described Don Alejandro's grievous wound and how he had been led to pray and ask for God's healing touch upon him, and how the nobleman slowly regained consciousness shortly thereafter.

Then he appealed to those present who did not know Jesus as Savior, the Creator of the Universe and mighty Healer, to ask Him into their hearts. His simplicity of speech reached the hearts of these farmers, shopkeepers, women and children. Those who had not previously met Daniel and been touched by his words now humbly repeated the sinner's prayer with him, and Don Alejandro found himself joining them upon his knees.

Such happiness filled his being that he was no longer ashamed of his disheveled appearance. He gladly showed the spot where he had had the head wound and held out his bloodstained jacket. He had been the center of attention at many a time in his life, but never had it been such a thrill. He was proud, and at the same time humbled to be used in this way. Most of all, he knew his life would never be the same.



(Fourteen years later:)

The ever-beautiful Maria Teresa adjusted the silver brooch on her black silk dress. The thick braids of her raven hair were carefully secured atop her head. A bell rang and announced the arrival of one of her maids.

"The carriage awaits you, Milady," she said reverently.

Maria gave her a hug and ran to knock on the doors of the children's rooms. Carlos and Miguel came, dressed in their very best jackets and trousers. They ran to their mother's arms and fought back the tears welling up in their eyes.

"This is a moment to be proud and strong," she said. "Papa is in the arms of the One he loved most in this world."

The carriages were arranged. In front was the horse-drawn coffin draped with a black cloth. Maria, with her sons, sat serenely within the following carriage. A small crowd gathered as they began to move slowly through the streets.

"He was a wonderful man," called one.

"He fed my family when we had nothing!" called another.

A woman ran to kiss Maria's hand. "God bless you as you have blessed us," she whispered softly with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Some children came running by throwing flowers. "Mama, are they the children from the orphanage?" asked Carlos.

"Yes, my son. They have come to pay their respects to your father for all he did to help them."

As they moved slowly through the streets, common men took off their hats and stood in silence as they passed. Joining the procession they began to raise their voices in song.

As they walked past the cathedral, a sour-faced priest stood in the doorway. "Look at the honor and respect given this infidel," he muttered, his eyes darting back and forth angrily. "If it was not my solemn duty to say a few words, I would have nothing to do with this man who purposefully defied my power and won the hearts of the people." Casting a look at the guard behind him, he added, "And if you see the heretic who is known to be his friend, wait until it is over and follow him. This may be our moment."

The mass was said in a monotone of Latin. Then, in the cemetery beside the cathedral, the casket softly dropped into the ground. When it was over, a slight rain began to fall, and the well-wishers began to disperse. Maria Teresa, thankful that this ordeal was at last over, asked the driver to take her home quickly. After lovingly tucking the children into their beds, she stood at the window watching for several hours.

"He must know," she whispered quietly to herself. "I sent messages. I know he will come."

Daniel wrapped his brown blanket more tightly around his shoulders as he watched the town from the shadows of the trees. He had seen the light of the mansion ahead, but heeded the Lord's clear voice telling him to wait until midnight. He knew she needed him now, but the Lord had indicated that the priest would be on the lookout for him, and

he must come discreetly. *It makes little difference, he thought. We are not to mourn but to rejoice that this precious one has graduated to his heavenly reward.* Daniel thanked the Lord over and over.

He remembered his dear friend with joy and a touch of sadness. With a smile he recalled their first meeting, the miraculous beginning of their many years of friendship and devotion to the Lord's work. He had continued as the itinerant minister, but Don Alejandro had been used to reach many in a different way. The Lord had used his position in the community to protect and aid the Lord's work and workers. He had single-handedly stopped the persecution of those dedicated to the Lord and seeking to practice their religious freedom. He had dedicated himself to ministering to the poor and needy. *Truly, he has entered into the joy of his Lord.* It was the moment to move forward.

Daniel walked more slowly these days. He knew it would not be long until he would join his friend forever. To ease the ache in his legs, he praised the Lord softly, a practice he exercised more and more now. He breathed heavily as he lumbered past the garden wall. Although he looked forward to a warm meal and the soft bed in the room that had been prepared for him, he looked forward even more to the sweet fellowship he would have in this household of faith. He looked forward to recalling together the events of the past and thanking God for the miraculous way He had worked in all of their lives.

The light shone brilliantly through the windows of the mansion before him. Like the heavenly light that had guided his life, it lighted his face as he drew near. Heaven beckoned him forward, longing to free him from the darkness of this world. As his body had grown weaker through the years of following his calling, his faith and his love for the Lord had grown stronger. Each step drew him closer

to his destination and to the arms of the ones who awaited him there. Placing more and more of his life and love in the treasure vaults of his dear Lord, he thanked the God of Heaven once again for giving him the true riches of life.



UNTO THEM THAT SAT IN DARKNESS...

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As Told by Martha

It was a cold and stormy winter night in the mid-1800s. The snow was packed high and deep. During these long winter evenings I would stay snuggled up in blankets on a chair by the fireplace, to keep warm while I read. Reading was my hobby, and that night, there in that quiet place, while everything was dark and peaceful, I was to hear the call that would change my life forever!

My name is Martha, and I was the eldest in a family of five. My mother and father were God-fearing parents, and they raised me and my brothers and sisters in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Together, we lived a happy and a peaceful life.

I grew up in a small village, in the midst of the beautiful countryside. A peaceful river gently babbled through the village, and all around there was vast open country, dotted by farm houses, traversed by horses and carriages. My peaceful world was so different then, as this was some hundred years ago when life was much slower. I never thought I would leave this little haven; I was sure that I would marry, have a family, grow old and die there. Yet this night, as I read stories of countries and peoples far away, I felt God calling me to be a missionary.

I loved helping people, I loved children, and I had a desire to do good for others. I was young and energetic. I had read such stories many times before—stories of others who had gone to distant lands to help people—but I never thought that I would one day be one of them. I felt incapable of doing something so great—of leaving the country of my birth to go to a land I knew nothing about.

As I felt the burden that God had pressed upon my heart that night, I fought it. How could He use me? I knew Jesus and I loved Him and was content in my worship of Him, but I didn't ever think that I would be able to serve Him in such a capacity. But the conviction in my heart only grew stronger, and as He spoke to me, this burden became like a fire burning within me.

And so it was that, at the age of eighteen, I told God that I was willing to do what I felt He was asking of me. But I had to be sure. After all, I didn't even know where He wanted me to go. So I asked God, "Where do You want me to go? I am willing, because I believe You have called me to Your service, but I need to know where You want me to go. Please show me."

Then it was that I saw the pictures—dark pictures of suffering: of children lost and lonely, of heathens worshipping idols, of poverty, misery and a multitude of hopeless and lost souls. I knew from the pictures that God was calling me to the great dark continent of Africa. He told me to start preparing, and that He would make the path He had chosen for me clearer as time went on.

So I prepared. I started by borrowing books, atlases, encyclopedias and anything I could find that talked about that great continent. To do this I had to travel to a nearby town, larger than the one we lived in, where I could have access to a central library. As I studied these books and maps, I felt

that the Lord was leading me to the very heart of the dark continent—the lands of the Congo.

I made an appointment to see the founder of a missionary school. This school was sending missionaries to Africa and Asia, and already had various missions set up in these places.

After stating my case, and explaining how I had felt a call from the Lord, the man—a professional minister, who had studied both the ministry and medicine, and had once been a missionary himself—looked on me somewhat surprised, and quietly replied, "Why don't you wait a couple more years to be sure that this is what you want to do. Life in these countries is very hard. There are many dangers. You will be leaving your family and loved ones, and you may not be able to see them again for years. Perhaps this is all just a fantasy, a childlike passion of your heart. Let me give you some advice: Wait a few more years and study if you like. Who knows, maybe you will find some young man eager to take your hand in marriage, to start a family, and then your passion will change with the years."

All I could do was look at him with tears in my eyes. "But, sir, I have found my passion: this burning desire in my heart to go and help! I cannot go on living life selfishly as I have been, for if I do, I will be failing God. Please, if God truly wants me there, then what difference does it make if I am young and inexperienced?"

When he saw that I was sincere and convinced of my calling and would not be dissuaded, he let me know of some missionaries already in Africa, and of their different missions across the continent. One couple in particular, a man and his wife by the names of Hans and Olga, drew my attention. They had both gone to Africa when they were younger, and had been there for many years. I immediately

felt a certain bond with them, and determined that I would write them that very day.

I traveled back to my little village, armed with yet more books and study material. I hadn't, as of yet, told my family about this desire in my heart and what I was preparing for, for I felt that I would have to be confident of my destination—and I had also needed some time to count the cost, so that I could be fully persuaded in my own mind before trying to convince them that I was indeed making the right choice. I knew it would be hard on my parents to hear that I was planning to leave, as we were a close family. I also dearly loved my brothers and sisters, and I knew that leaving them would come at a great personal cost for myself as well. Only God would know whether I would ever see them again.

Finally the day came, when I felt the time had come to make my decision known. That night, around the dinner table, as we were enjoying a pleasant conversation about the happenings of that day, I told everyone that I had an announcement to make. My heart was pounding with excitement as I prepared to break the news to them. "I know you won't believe me," I began hesitatingly. "I know you may not understand, but I feel I should tell you now that I have decided to become a missionary—to Africa—and I have already made preparations to go there."

You should have seen the looks on their faces! My younger brothers and sisters simply sat there stunned and quiet.

My father was the first to speak. "Martha, Martha, come now! You're only eighteen! We wouldn't think of letting you go so far away, even to be a missionary. It is simply foolish. Why, you'd be risking your life for people you don't even know. Come to your senses!"

My mother remained quiet. She didn't know what to say or how to react, though I could tell she could see my desire and burden, and that she had a flicker of trust that God was calling me.

I was young, yes, but I was no longer a child. I had hoped that my father would see this, and that he would not try to stop me from fulfilling what I knew was God's purpose for my life. I proceeded to tell them of the research I had already done, how I would be able to travel there by boat and join one of the established mission outposts there.

By now my younger brothers and sisters were quite excited about the idea; they wanted to come along, and started asking me all sorts of questions about Africa, and about the things I had come to know through the research and study I had done.

Over the next few weeks, we had many conversations, and my father slowly began to accept the idea, although I could tell that it was not easy for him to do so; it would be a tremendous sacrifice for him, for he loved me dearly. But our faith in God helped both my father and my mother to know that He would take care of me somehow. And so they both began helping me in my venture. Things did not, however, go as swiftly as I had hoped, and it was some months before the time finally came for me to begin my great adventure.

As the day of my departure drew ever nearer, the excitement and anticipation began to wear thin, and I was besieged with doubts. I heard voices in my mind, "Oh, you'll never make it." "You'll die of disease as soon as you get there." "You're wasting your life on a foolish whim." But I knew these thoughts had not come from the Lord, for they only made me feel fearful, worried and depressed. It was a constant struggle to push these thoughts aside and to continue with my preparations, without trying to analyze my

decision, because, from a purely practical viewpoint, it was a pretty crazy thing to do.

Finally the long-awaited day arrived. It was on a beautiful spring day that I said goodbye to my family and to my friends, and to most of the village, who had come to see me off. By now, everyone had heard of my decision, and they had all helped me get together everything that I had needed for the journey, many of them even pledging to send funds whenever they could.

The entire voyage was to take about two months. First by carriage to the capital city, then by train to the port town where I was to take the boat, and then a month or so would pass at sea before I would arrive on the African coast. How I was to travel on from there to my final destination in Congo, I didn't know. I couldn't believe that I was actually on my way. Every emotion welled up within me—excitement, anticipation, fear, worry, gladness, joy, then sorrow and pain.

Thankfully, I was to travel with another person—a man in his early thirties—who was on his way to the same mission in Congo. His name was John, and he was a doctor who had also been called by God to be a missionary. As the slow days of our long, and in some ways uneventful, voyage by boat passed, we got to know each other quite well, and it wasn't long before a special friendship grew between us. We had so much to talk about—of how we had felt God's call, of the preparations we had had to make, and how finally, after having been through many ups and downs, we were now both on our way. Then our friendship slowly began turning to love, though we were too shy to make this known to each other. But we enjoyed our times together and got to know one another well.

Setting foot on land was a joy for me, as I was not much for boats, and was often very seasick on

that trip. On the other hand, as soon as I stepped into this strange new world, I felt like getting back on the boat again. I was suddenly struck with a fear, a realization of, "My God, what have I done? Am I prepared for this?" This was so different from anything I was used to or knew. But the dark, beautiful faces all around me compelled me to go forward. Just as suddenly, I remembered why I had come here, and such a strong feeling of love for these people welled up in my breast that I knew there would be no turning back.

Upon arriving at our destination in Congo, we were met by Hans and Olga, the couple who took care of the mission outpost, and whom I had been communicating with. They put us up, helped us get settled, and taught us the customs of the land, how to speak to the people, how to approach them, how to live this new and unfamiliar style of life, and how to keep on the lookout for harm and danger.

In time, it was decided that we would establish a small branch of our mission in one of the distant villages, further out in the country.

As John and I set off to our new location along with our guides and a trail of natives carrying our belongings, as well as goods and medical supplies for the village, little did we know all that the Lord would have in store for us there.

We were happy and excited, and looked forward to starting our lives in this new mission. As we traveled deeper into the wilderness, I had my first chance to see much of the African wildlife in their natural habitat. It was beautiful and fascinating. On one side we saw a herd of zebras; on the other, giraffes were calmly nibbling on the high trees. Further down, a small herd of elephants lumbered across the plain, while gazelles and monkeys looked on. The land was still wild back then, and we saw

almost every animal you could imagine—we even saw lions, though from quite a distance.

As exciting as it was, the journey was also tiresome and perilous, as we had to travel much of the way on foot. We were hot, and it was unpleasant at times. But the determination in our hearts to do our best for Jesus kept us going, and His promises of protection kept our hearts at peace. All we wanted to do was give our lives for Him and for the people of this nation. Many of them sat in spiritual darkness, worshipping their own gods; they didn't have the light and love that we knew Jesus had for them. Our prayer was to help them to see it.

We knew we would have to proceed slowly. We couldn't rush things or try to push God on them. It could be dangerous to be too forceful, as many here had come to know the white man as an invader, an aggressor who captured and sold their people into slavery. We knew that the only way we could help them and win them over to the love of Christ was to go slow, sowing the seeds of His Words in love, and showing them this love in our deeds and actions.

The little village where we set up our work became our next base, from where we often went into the surrounding villages, towns, and tribes, to teach the people about God's love. We didn't have big results all at once. It was hard work, slow work—plodding along day after day, caring for the children, the elderly, the sick, doing whatever we could to help these people and show them our love, and the Lord's love for them—and it was the Lord's love that sustained us.

In time we had many friends, and the local people came to love and accept us. We set up a little school, as well as a chapel and a small clinic, and many would come from all around this remote area to receive medical help, and to hear stories of the

great and wonderful God of the universe—the One Who had created them and wished to help them.

John and I married, and we began having children. We lost our first child to disease at a very early age, but the Lord gave us three others. We had a little girl, Carol, a little boy, Fredrick, and our youngest, Samuel. They were the joy of our lives, and together we lived a truly happy life. Although there were many times that we had to battle with difficulties and struggle with disease—sometimes even being near death ourselves—Jesus always raised us up to continue the work that He had given us. We were later joined by another missionary couple, who came to help us in our mission. We worked well together, and quickly became best of friends.

One morning, as I was going about my chores in the house and caring for the little ones, we heard the sound of a large crowd coming towards the mission house. I could hear people in the village running and screaming. My husband had set off early that morning to another village to tend to some of their sick. As I looked out of the window, I saw that a large band of warriors had come and surrounded our house. By their looks and the war paints they were wearing, I knew that they were from one of the more aggressive tribes that we had not been able to reach yet.

These people had become angry because one of their members who had been wounded had been found by my husband, and had been brought to our camp for medical treatment. He had stayed with us from that time on, not wishing to return to his warlike tribe.

I told everyone in the room, including my children and the other two missionaries who were with me, to get down on the floor and pray. All we could do at that moment was to beseech the Lord for His help. Tears streamed down my face as my

little daughter bravely prayed, "Jesus, please help us! Please protect us! You're bigger and stronger than all of those people put together. Please don't let them do anything to harm us. And please keep Daddy safe, wherever he is right now!" I knew that the Lord would honor that prayer—the sincere faith of a little child. How I wished I had that much faith, but at that moment, I have to admit that I was pretty scared. Yet I knew that I had to remain calm and peaceful, so that my children would not become fearful.

As the hostile crowd did some kind of warlike dance around our house, the Lord showed me to step out and speak to them. So together with our translator—the man from their tribe who had come to live with us—I stepped outside, my children and several other missionaries behind me.

"Oh God," I whispered my prayer, "help me to have the boldness of a lion, yet to speak meekly, and without fear."

We slowly came forward onto the porch of our little house. The cries and stomps abated somewhat as the warriors curiously watched us, wondering what we would do. Then I stepped down off the porch, the translator next to me, and walked into the circle that was forming around us, and then up to the man who appeared to be the leader of this raiding party.

As I silently stood before him, wondering what to do next, the shouts and rants and raves resumed and became even louder, especially when the others saw the man from their tribe with me, who had converted to Christianity. It was easy to see that they were ready to kill us on the spot. Looking into their eyes I could see the hatred, anger and violent spirit that inhabited these people. But then I looked deeper, and saw the fear, anguish and torment of their darkened spirits. In this moment of truth, my heart broke for these savage people, and I was overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit. I began to

speak with such boldness, and a tenderness and brokenness that I'd never felt before. It was as though the Holy Spirit was speaking through me, directly to them, only using me as a channel.

"Wait, my friends, good men! Let me speak before you lay your hands on us! We are not afraid to die! For if we die, we know that we will go to a better world, one where the great Spirit and God of the Universe will receive us into His arms and into His everlasting Kingdom. You can take away our lives, but you can't take away our God—not from me, or from any of the people here who have come to love Him. His power will live on long and strong even after we're gone. The love that He has for you is unchanging. He loves you so much that He gave His only Son to come to Earth and to live as a mortal man among us, and then, in the end, to die for us—taking the punishment for our sins upon His Own body, which was nailed to a cross.

"Yes, He loves you, just as a father loves his children, for we are all His children. Though you worship other gods, He is the only One Who can truly make you free. I look at you, and I see fear. But Jesus can take that fear from you, and replace it with love. He told us, 'Perfect love casts out all fear.' Won't you accept His love? Won't you let Him set you free? Won't you put aside your hatred, your anger, and make a place for Him to change you, to come into your life, and to make you happy?"

By the time I finished speaking, the crowd had grown quiet and seemed awestruck at the authority with which I spoke—or I should say, the Lord spoke through me. Then the leader of the band came closer to the translator. "Tell this woman that any God Who can replace fear with love, Who can give boldness, as I have just seen, in the face of death; any God Who can give peace in the face of destruction, and give one such love and tenderness,

must be great. I can see that light—that light shining all about you and your people. We were ready to destroy you and burn your village, but the words she has spoken have saved your lives.”

As the translator finished interpreting these words, we all lifted up our arms with tears of thankfulness to Jesus, Who had kept us once more in the face of destruction. The man then stepped forward. “Come,” he said. “Come with me to my village, to my tribe, to my people, and speak the words you have spoken here today.”

It was the most amazing experience I’d ever had—to see a man’s life change so drastically before us in a matter of seconds. I knew that it was a supernatural working of the Spirit, for only the Lord could have touched this man’s heart in that way, to change not only him, but his entire tribe.

The husband of the other missionary couple and myself went with them right then, as we knew that we had to seize this golden opportunity immediately. We spent a few days at their village, and were able to share the message of Jesus’ love with all the people of their tribe, which became another extension of our little community of villages and tribes who had accepted the Lord’s love.

During our years in Africa, we had many more beautiful experiences of the Lord’s supernatural power, working miracle after miracle for us and through us.

Although it never seemed to us that we were accomplishing much in the face of the overwhelming need of this great continent, after coming Up Here, to Heaven, we’ve been able to see just how many lives were touched—and changed—because of our willingness to sacrifice and give our lives, to do what little we could to fill the place that God had called us to fill. It has truly been worth it all. We never became famous on

Earth, but the Lord sure thanked us and rewarded us Here, beyond our wildest dreams.

If there’s anything I can say to all you missionaries out there, it is to keep plodding along, doing the little things day after day. Those little deeds of love and kindness go such a long way. And children, you are also very important! My children grew up with the sweet natives, playing with the other children, learning the language and customs of their land—they truly became one with them. Everywhere we went they were able to communicate with the natives even better than we could. By my children’s happy shining faces and their wonderful sample of love, they drew many to the Lord and played an important and key role in our work there.

So many are dying without the love of Jesus, but you can give it to them through your smiles, your words of kindness and love, and your actions. I’m very proud of you, and Jesus is proud of you. It’s so exciting to see all of you being faithful missionaries out there! I know how tough it can be at times, so I really admire you—and the Lord, oh, He really admires you. And all the hosts of Heaven, they jump for joy when they see you giving your lives faithfully for Him, and doing what you can to help others and to bring them the light of salvation. So whether you are on the poor mission fields or in your home country, make sure you’re doing what you can to change the world, even if it only seems to be a little bit. Someday you will see that it has been worth it all!



DREAM OF CALABAR

As Told by Mary Slessor

I knew what hard work meant, for from the time I was a wee lass, I was always caring for my siblings, while my dad was out getting drunk and my mother was out working to make up for my father's drunkenness. We didn't have much in those days, to be sure. But the Lord knows that all those years living with my family in a one-room house, with no running water, lights or a toilet, were the best preparation I could've had for the work He was preparing me for.

My name is Mary Slessor. I worked from the age of ten—like most children from poor families in Scotland in those days—putting in long hours at the looms, trying to keep up with my school at the same time. I wasn't a smart girl, but I had plenty of common sense. Like any teenager, I had my dreams. I had no money, no higher education, and nothing extraordinary was expected of me, a poor young Scottish girl living in Dundee, during the late 1800s.—But I still had dreams.

I can remember taking the laundry down to the communal washing place of the slums I called home, chatting with my girlfriends as we scrubbed the mountains of sheets and clothes from our large families. Most of the girls my age just gossiped about “handsome George” or “bonny Scot” and giggled

among themselves as they dreamed of the day when they would be married and have a little house of their own.—Not me! I would boldly proclaim, as their eyes widened and they gasped, that I intended to travel the world, or some such claim. I loved to shock people.

Of course, at home I made no such claims. My mother had hoped that my eldest brother, Robert, would become a missionary, but he died at the age of sixteen. I was only ten at the time. Due to the poverty we lived in, and the constant hunger that was to us such a common thing, my next eldest brother, John, died when I was twelve years old.

With my two elder brothers gone, I was now the eldest. I dreamed of being a missionary to foreign lands, but alas, home-life being what it was, it seemed as if such dreams would never be realized. My father also passed away within a few years after my brothers, and my precious mother, the one who had taught me the most about Jesus, soon found herself in failing health. It was left to me to be the father, mother, older sister, and provider to the rest of my family, who were all too young to work.

So with a sigh, I placed my dreams on the shelf. Yet often at night, when all were asleep, I would read through my Bible and pray on my knees that God would grant my heart's desire. I knew exactly the place I wanted to go—to the same continent where my beloved hero, Livingstone, was burning his candle brightly at both ends.

More specifically, I wanted to go to the country in Africa from which an obscure but fiery-eyed missionary had come to us. The man had come to speak at our church about the work in Calabar¹, where wild animals and wild men ran rampant, and

where superstitious, barbaric practices were common. His story of how the mission was founded fascinated me, and everything he described about this place had an allure that beckoned my daring nature. He didn't know that his words were piercing my heart, for he was calling *men* to come join him on the mission field. Women were not expected to join the ranks, unless they happened to be married to missionaries.

I carried on in my work at the mill and cared for my mother and brothers and sisters for several more years, with the fire of Calabar still burning brightly in my heart. In order to be accepted I knew I would need some education, and so I borrowed books from a library and taught myself, propping the books on my loom while I worked. I helped at the Sunday school, and practiced on the children the stories that I dreamed of one day sharing with heathens.

But a year passed ... and another ... and another. My hope was dampened by the climate of pessimism and poverty that surrounded me. The fire inside me was dying. I felt that I would never leave my little home in Dundee. It seemed as though my life was passing me by, and every year that passed I felt a thousand miles further from my dream. My friends all got married and, one by one, started families of their own. I was now in my early twenties, and the less-than-kind ones would drop hints that if I didn't think of my future soon, I would become an old maid.

I tried to put Calabar out of my mind, but I couldn't. Without a vision the people perish, and I felt that I would be swallowed up in the black hole of a meaningless existence.

News came one day that was to change what had been my life up until then. My hero, Livingstone, was dead. He had died in his beloved Africa, and had left a legacy of changed lives and renewed public

¹Calabar, city and seaport, southeastern Nigeria, capital of Cross River State, on an estuary of the Gulf of Guinea.

awareness of the need in that dark country. I mourned the loss of a great man and felt as though it was a personal loss as well. Now whenever I would pray, the word Calabar flashed in my mind, and I could not rid myself of it. My remaining siblings were old enough to work now, as well as care for our mother, and, with the agreement of my ailing mother, I applied for Calabar.

Meanwhile, the Lord had been working behind the scenes during those dry years I spent waiting and watching, making others aware of the need and important role that women could also fill as missionaries. My application was accepted, and I found myself sailing at last to Calabar on a steamship named *Ethiopia*. I was 26 years old.

The years that followed are down in the history books—not that I was all that famous, mind you, but I did my bit. Calabar was a dark place all right, and there were a number of obstacles to be overcome. My first obstacle was the Efik language¹, which I worked on mastering for three years. Then there were the other missionaries, some of whom were pretty stuffy, though bless them, they did their best.

I wanted to live like the natives, and if you can imagine the days I lived in, that was harder than it sounded. The white people lived in their little mission compound, ate their imported food, drank their imported tea and gossiped about imported news! The fashions of the day were much too restrictive for me and I preferred to walk in bare feet and a simple cotton dress. I wanted the local people to relate to me and understand me.

After three years I got sick and was sent home to Scotland on furlough to recover. Oh, how my heart ached to be back in Calabar! I questioned Jesus

over and over why He let me get sick, and why I was back in Scotland trying to recover. But that time away brought me even closer to Him, as I realized I had to depend on Him for my strength and health to do the work He would have me to do. When I recovered and returned to Calabar, I was more determined than ever to be a yielded vessel and follow the Lord's leadings.

I started my own little family when I helped to deliver a set of twin girls who were then abandoned by their superstitious mother. I took them home and reared them as my own. Though I never bore a child myself, God granted me the opportunity to be a mother to six abandoned children who brightened my life, as well as kept me very busy.

There were many adventures throughout those years, and enough work for a hundred women like myself. I plodded along, day after day, walking to this village and then another, rising each morning to ask the Lord for the strength and the wisdom for the events of that day, and ending each day in prayer under the star-filled sky. There were so many dark ways to change, and it took the wisdom of God to change them.

I thanked the Lord so often for those years which I spent caring for my siblings and my sick mother, and for all the situations where we had to make do with what we had. In time, I understood how the Lord had not delayed His plan for me, but rather, that all those years of waiting and hoping and praying and learning were put to good use later in my life. The lessons of patience, perseverance, determination and stick-to-itiveness weren't lost; they proved so valuable to me during each new difficult encounter or situation.

There were so many times when I would cry in my hut for the people of Calabar. It seemed that they would never realize the value of a human life,

¹Efik language, the Niger-Congo language of the Efik people, closely related to Ibibio. It is spoken by over six million people.

or the benefits of cleanliness and kindness and all those things we take for granted. They had so many strange, bizarre and cruel practices that had to be cleaned away with the love of Jesus.

Well, you can read about the more outstanding part of my story from the history books, but the main point I wanted to emphasize to you, my friends, are those years I had to endure, wondering if I would ever see my dreams become a reality.

Do you feel stuck at home, too young or somehow unable to see your dreams of serving the Lord become a reality so far? God knows, He understands, He has not forgotten you. It's all part of His plan—His school of preparation for you. Just imagine if I *had* been able to take off to Calabar the minute the idea popped into my head! I never would have had the experience of persevering, nor the patience to make it; I would've been back home to Scotland within a year, convinced that the language was too hard to learn, and the people too far gone. But no! All those years of waiting held precious, valuable lessons.

You who are privileged to live in the Last Days do not have as many years to learn these lessons as I did; time is short and there is much to be done. But don't chafe at the Lord's ways with you. Determine that you will keep the vision of serving Him fresh in your mind, and meanwhile prepare yourself for the work that He has for each of you.

A wise man learns from his mistakes, but a wiser man learns from the mistakes of others. I and other servants of Jesus are ready and waiting to share the jewels of experience that we garnered through the years, and are so happy to help you in this era.

It is history in the making: What will the history books say about *you*?



Mary Slessor (1848-1915) came from an Aberdeen slum in Scotland. When Mary was ten, her father was sacked from the shoe factory and they decided to move to Dundee.

When Mary became a missionary, she chose Calabar, now part of south-east Nigeria, in West Africa. At age 26, she sailed on the Ethiopia of the African Steamship Line in 1876.

Upon arrival in Duke Town, young Miss Slessor shocked everyone. She laughed, she sang, she ran races with the natives—and, horror of horrors, she climbed trees! Mary would go on long walks, often alone, finding out what she could about the savages. She noted with disapproval the absurd European clothes of the Mission ladies, their hats, their veils, their long, wide skirts. She resolved, just as soon as she dared, to abandon the more cumbersome items of clothing and instead wore a simple cotton dress; she also got rid of her ringlets and wore her hair short. Gradually she gave up eating imported food in favor of the local produce, which saved her both time and money, keeping tea as her only luxury.

By 1880, after one home leave, she was back and in charge of Old Town, at her own request. She lived alone in Old Town, which, despite its name, was a small stinking village on the river bank, a few miles away from Duke Town and the Mission. Her adopted family began here with a pair of twin girls abandoned by their mother.

In 1886 Mary Slessor heard news that her mother and the last surviving sister, Janie, had died. She was now 38, and alone. There was no reason for not going up-country, to the dangerous, forbidden areas. The Mission allowed her to go to the Okoyong district on condition that she did not involve the Mission in any expense.

And so she moved north, by canoe, with her

six adopted children. An interesting side-light on the character of Mary Slessor is that she was throughout her life terrified of canoes, snakes and wild beasts. But it never hindered her in anything which she knew was her duty.

She proceeded, on her own, to work among the fiercest tribes of west Africa, and witness the Lord's transforming power among them. The tribes had been notorious for raiding, plundering, the stealing of slaves, and even human sacrifice. Mary worked quietly among the tribes establishing schools, providing medical care, holding Sunday services, and giving counsel and advice to the people. Her influence extended to an area over 2000 square miles, and she came to be affectionately known as "the good white Ma who lived alone."

This little, short-haired, barefoot woman with the flashing eyes—eyes that sometimes smoldered, often laughed—had an uncanny insight into the African mind. In 1905 the British government, recognizing her authority, invested her with the powers of a magistrate.

She died in 1915 and, upon hearing of her death, the government Gazette of Nigeria printed this black-bordered notice:

It is with the deepest regret that His Excellency the Governor-General has to announce the death at Itu, on the 13th of January, of Miss Mary Mitchell Slessor...

For thirty-nine years, with brief and infrequent visits to England, Miss Slessor has laboured among the Eastern Provinces in the south of Nigeria. By her enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and greatness of character she has earned the devotion of thousands of the natives among whom she worked, and the love and esteem of all Europeans, irrespective of class or creed, with whom she came in contact.

She has died, as she herself wished, on the scene of her labors, but her memory will live long in the hearts of her friends, Native and Europeans, in Nigeria.

**IN THE MIDST OF
THE SEAS**

As Told by Robert Louis Stevenson

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me” (Jonah 2:3).

It was a peaceful day—a quiet day, a day like so many others that had come and gone before it. The clouds rested softly in the sky over the hills that formed a semi-circle around a small fishing village, facing a peaceful sea that glimmered as it reflected, like a mirror of rippled glass, the brilliant glow of the late afternoon sun. Waves splashed on the green, slimy rocks that separated this quaint-looking Scottish hamlet from the sea. Tiny fishing boats bobbed up and down, as if dancing with the foaming waters, near a sun-faded wooden pier.

The calm of the quiet of the sleepy afternoon was broken only by the calls of the sea birds, as they noisily sped above the water looking for food. As the sun hung in the sky, its burning rays shone hot on the red, moss-covered tiles neatly arranged on the roofs of the huddled houses. The only relief from the blazing sun was the salty wind that blew wildly through the village, shuddering as it moved through the loose tiles on the roofs, and whistling as it playfully lifted the women’s simple dresses.

The villagers lived happy, yet unsophisticated lives. Everything revolved around the village's main industry: fishing. Children sold fish at the market, while the women, with swift and dexterous hands would mend the strong, hand-knotted nets they once had made. Most of the men spent the evenings on their boats. First they would clean off the rotten residue from their last catch, then after making sure everything was ship-shape they would set sail to begin the arduous task of hauling heavy nets filled with fish and other sea creatures into their wooden sailboats. Not until the holds were full, which often took into the late hours of the night, would they return.



Nicholas was a strong handsome lad of 17 years, with dirty blonde hair that touched his broad shoulders, eyes as blue as a summer sky and a physique that was near angelic. His parents had died while he was a young child, and he had been left in the care of his aunt Beth. He had enjoyed a happy childhood. His aunt was a husky woman who always wore her dark hair, now lined with white streaks, in a tight bun. Her face emanated a mother's kindness. She did her best to teach her young nephew of the faith in God she held so firmly.

He was a carefree lad. Wild as the wind, and with his future bright before him, he didn't need any help from an invisible and untouchable God—or so he thought.

His aunt often told him, "God is like a thick, strong rope suspended from on high that is always beside you. When life is easy you don't always realize the need for the rope and you ignore it. But when the waves of this life toss you about angrily, trying to drown you, you can grab ahold of the rope and it will save you. After that, you will never again ignore its existence."

Nicholas would laugh at her simple illustration, and say, "Come on! I'm a tough guy! I know how to care for myself. Besides the waves of the sea can never drown me!" He had grown up by the sea and knew all about it. He worked on a small fishing boat called the *Anglo*, which belonged to his best friend's father. His muscular appearance was due in large part to the anchors and the heavy nets he handled day in and day out. He and his best friend, Sam, took good care of the boat and knew everything about its workings. Nick was a hard-working, dependable lad, and proud of his accomplishments. He felt he was capable of helping himself in every aspect of his young life.



On this particular day, this day that seemed no different from any other, he awoke rather late from his afternoon nap. The smell of supper instantly caught his attention, and he hastily hoisted himself out of bed. After eating the hearty serving his aunt had made for him, he kissed her good-bye and bounded out the door as he hollered, "See ya' soon," over his shoulder. His aunt paused for a moment and silently prayed the prayer she always prayed after Nicholas had left: "Dear God, be with Nick today. Keep him safe, and may he come to know You in a special way. Amen."

As Nicholas made his way through the village toward the tiny port where the *Anglo* was anchored, he paused for a moment and caught his breath.

"Hello, Susan," he said in a gentlemanly tone as a lovely girl with light brown hair and honey-colored eyes passed by.

"Hello, Nick," she said with a coy smile.

"You look as beautiful as a fresh white lily, beset with dew drops that shine like jewels on its soft petals." Nick never considered himself a poet, but seeing Susan struck a chord inside of him that always produced an unusual eloquence.

She looked at him in an amused sort of way. "You're quite a poet," she said.

Nick looked down, feeling rather embarrassed, as the proffered attention suddenly seemed to put his well-collected poise to flight. "Uh, well ... I must be off," he blurted. "Farewell!"

Susan stood there and watched for a moment as he walked off. *He is a nice fellow ... and funny!* she thought, laughing to herself. Then she turned, and went merrily on her way.

By this time, the worn dirt path that Nick was following had led him out of the village and toward the port; as he walked he kept Susan in his mind's eye. His thoughts were abruptly halted when he arrived at the port. A puzzled look crossed his normally composed face. Not a soul was in sight! The boats, bouncing lazily along with the waves, were empty! The wind whistled among the empty crags and rocks, adding a mysterious touch to the still picture. Nicholas had an eerie feeling he couldn't quite explain.

I wonder what's the matter? he thought to himself as he walked around the port. *It's so strange. It's a regular day, and everybody should be getting ready for an evening of fishing ... why isn't anybody here? I suppose they could be sleeping.* Nick knew that idea was nonsense, as none of the others were as much into afternoon naps as he was. They were all generally up and about long before Nick showed up, and he was usually the last one to arrive at the port.

"Hi there, Nick!"

Nick jumped with fright and turned around. It was Sam, Nick's best friend.

"Hey, you almost scared the wits out of me!" Nick said, still trying to compose himself.

"Me? Scare you? Why, that's weird! What were you doing?"

"I'm trying to figure out where everyone is!"

"Oh, is *that* why you were standing there looking like the world had ended without you?" Sam smiled broadly, feeling a certain sense of importance as he was about to solve his friend's mystery. "You didn't hear? We have a special visitor."

"Oh?" replied Nick.

The town barely ever had visitors, as the rocky terrain and the hills that surrounded it made it very difficult for people from neighboring towns to visit, because a great part of the journey had to be made on foot. Thus, even the few visitors that did occasionally stop by this small and indigenous town never came from very far.

"He's a missionary who is visiting this part of Scotland, and he speaks of some insatiable urge he had to visit our village. He, along with two other men, made the rugged journey on foot, and they arrived earlier this afternoon. He's going to preach in the chapel this evening, and will be telling of the fascinating journeys he made as a missionary. Isn't that exciting?" Sam finished off with exuberance.

Nick looked at him with disdain. "You mean nobody's here today just because they're going to listen to some preacher?"

"He's a missionary, Nick. He lives what the preacher preaches." Sam replied, disappointed that his friend didn't share his enthusiasm. "Besides, he's a fun guy, he tells great stories and is very kind. I expect you'll think he's swell too, when you meet him!"

"I won't think anything because I'm not going to be meeting him," said Nick, as he hopped aboard the *Anglo* and readied her sails.

"What in the world...? What are you doing, Nick?"

"I'm setting sail!" said Nick, confidently.

"By yourself?"

"Unless you plan to go with me."

"Go where?"

"Fishing, what else?" Nick said, in a matter-of-fact way.

"You're crazy! We can't man this boat ourselves. I'm staying!" Sam heaved a sigh of relief as Nick jumped back onto the dock. But his relief was short-lived.

"Fine with me," Nick muttered as he bent down to undo the ropes that held the boat to the docks. "So long, Sam!" Nick retorted as he pushed off the *Anglo*, jumped back in, and headed out for the open sea.

Sam stayed on the pier shouting over the waves. "Nick, come on back! You'll never catch half as much alone!"

But Nick gave no thought to his friend's pleas. He simply waved back and continued on, until the sound of the waves had drowned out his friend's voice.

Nicholas and the *Anglo* sped over the water toward *Fishermen's Haven*, the village's favorite fishing site. A favorable wind blew across the waves, making it smooth sailing for Nicholas. The lowering sun shone kindly on this small boat, dwarfed by the immensity of ocean that stretched out before it, and its busy master.

"Whew! It sure is hot," Nick said. He was working up quite a sweat trying to keep the boat on course, and he was already starting to agree with the age-old proverb that two are better than one!

"And several are better than two," he added, as he knew it usually took at least three people to properly work the boat. Though the *Anglo* was one of the smaller boats in their flotilla, there were sails to put up and bring down, nets to position in place, a helm to be steered and a host of other details to be attended to.

It was stupid to have left by myself ... but ... what am I saying? Of course, I can do this! After all, I am a veteran of this boat. Nick tried to suppress that weird

feeling that was beginning to well up inside, telling him that he had made an unwise decision and might be heading for trouble. But as his vessel neared the fishing spot, he brushed away any such thoughts, and whistling, continued his labors on the ship.

Arriving at *Fisherman's Haven*, a large cove not too far from the village, where the inbound currents provided a steady and varied harvest of fish, he shoved the heavy anchor overboard to find its rest at the bottom of the sea, and then threw out a net. Usually several nets would be used for fishing, but Nick decided he would be modest and not overestimate his strength. He knew all the fishing techniques there were, and was confident of the outcome of his daring venture. He pictured himself coming back to the village with a boat full of delicious fresh fish. Enough for all!—And everything done single-handedly! As he waited, he imagined the net filling with all kinds of great fish. He smiled as he thought of Susan and how proud she would be of him, and his aunt...

"Oh, my aunt!" Nick suddenly remembered. "She'll probably be very angry when she finds out what I've done, but maybe if I catch some of her favorite black bass, I can bring it back to her as a present."

Satisfied with his plan, he proceeded to lift the net from the salty Atlantic waters. The net was ... "Empty?! Why, it should be filled to the brim with fish and yet—nothing!" Nicolas couldn't keep from expressing his shock out loud. The strong cords of the net had only collected a few strands of seaweed and other little creatures of little comestible importance. But, not one to be discouraged on the first try, he threw out the net again, and again, and again. But each try was met with the same results.

What shall I do? He thought after a while. *I cannot go back empty handed!* He then decided to go farther out into the open sea, where perhaps there would be more fish. "There'll be more wind and currents to contend with out there, but I can handle them. I'm sure I can!" he said aloud as he strained to pull the anchor from its nestled spot between the ocean sands. He struggled awhile with this task till at last the anchor was up and on the boat.

As he pulled out of the protective cove of *Fishermen's Haven*, he found the winds growing in strength, and the sea becoming much fiercer than he had anticipated. The sun soon hid itself behind ominous dark clouds that were now swiftly approaching along the horizon.

Within minutes, the winds began to blow stronger. Nick soon found himself in the midst of a wild and ruthless gale that began to fiercely pound against his vessel, threatening to rip the sails and overpower the boat. It played mercilessly with this hapless vessel, tossing it about as if it was a feather in the wind. Instead of rolling crystal-blue waves that cheerfully sang as they buoyed the ship upon their rippling shoulders, he now encountered roaring billows that beat hard upon the wooden boat with a thunderous noise.

With the wind and waves already so strong, I wonder what is to befall me when the tempest hits in all its fury?

As the angry-looking clouds crept slowly closer, Nick wondered what his fate would be.



Back at the village Sam had already spread the news of Nick's departure. Sam's father, Ben, looked warily up at the sky and noted, "There is a fierce storm brewing at sea. Look at those dark clouds on the distant horizon."

"The wind is blowing harder as well," commented

one of the worried villagers.

"Will Nick be alright?" questioned a soft voice.

Ben turned to see Susan. Her lovely face was overcast with a shadow of concern; she too knew of the danger of storms at sea. Though the mountainous terrain afforded the village a shield of protection against the fierce northern winds, there was not much chance for a little fishing boat out on the open sea.

Ben's strong, rough hands clasped Susan's slender ones as he reassured her, "Don't worry. We'll go after him. Everything will be fine!"

Though Ben's reassuring voice gave her a small sense of comfort, somehow she felt things weren't going to be all right. Wishing to be alone in her despair, she slipped out of the gathering and headed to her favorite spot—a rock elevated a few meters from the ground that gave a wide view of the rocky shore, an as yet still peaceful sea, and the ever graying horizon.

As she sat staring into the distance she cried, "Oh God, keep Nick safe!" Unlike Nick, she believed in God, yet at the same time she often buried Him under her many busy thoughts about her studies, work, friends and hobbies. She pondered on how, all too often, she only remembered God when she had need of His help and assistance. She felt awful and let out a moan, "Forgive me, God! I'm sorry for being such an unfaithful friend to You. Help me to draw nearer to You!"

Susan then continued her silent stare at the ocean spray that splashed against the crag-ridden rock formations that lined the coast. She watched as the water rolled back and forth in endless monotony.

"Hi, there!"

The voice behind her startled her and she spun around to see the missionary. His kind face wore a

broad smile. His eyes shone with a light so bright. His presence radiated peacefulness and love—love for God and others. Susan was awed by his happy spirit; though she herself was a cheerful soul, she felt she did not have the happiness that this missionary seemed to possess.

Realizing she had not yet answered the salutation, she quickly stammered, “Um... Hi!”

“You seem to be in a pensive mood! Did I interrupt you? Forgive me, if I did!”

“Oh, no! It’s of no concern! I was just watching the waves! I wasn’t doing anything that important, sir.... What is your name again?” An embarrassed look flushed across her face. Susan had been briefly introduced to the village’s most recent visitor earlier that day, but time had not permitted them to converse at length.

“My name is John Wallace,” he said, grinning, “and yours is Susanna?”

“Yes,” she answered quietly. “But you can call me Susan.”

“Well, Susan, I see you are much like me. I also love to sit outdoors and marvel at the wondrous beauty that surrounds us. God’s creation is so perfect, isn’t it?”

Susan nodded and looked out at the sea as the missionary drew near, and sat down next to her. For a moment she looked up and glanced into his eyes, kind eyes that seemed to peer straight into her very soul. She quickly turned her gaze back towards the sea.

“And yet it seems that something does weigh on your mind. What is it, my dear?” queried Wallace gently.

He had barely uttered his question when Susan burst into tears. She covered her face and sobbed quietly as Wallace put his comforting arm around her. She then wiped her eyes as she said, “My friend,

Nick, has gone out to sea—alone. Now there’s a storm coming, and there is no sign of him anywhere...” her voice broke. She cleared her throat and continued, “I’m so worried about him!” More tears began to flow down her soft blushed cheeks and she hoarsely whispered, “I prayed, but I can find no peace in my heart.”

Wallace kept his arm about her securely and said, “Susan, you must have faith in God. If you have committed Nick into God’s hands, you must trust that God will keep him safe. You did your part by praying for Nick. Now you must trust that God will do His part as He has promised to in His Word time and time again!”

“But,” she said softly, “it’s so difficult to trust. How can I stop from worrying? He’s my very dear friend and he could die out there ... I can’t trust under these circumstances.”

“Tell me, Susan, how will your worries help Nick?”

She sat up straight and looked at him as she pondered his words, and then looked down glumly. “I don’t know...”

“That’s because they can’t! Your worrying only makes *you* suffer, you see?”

A glimmer of a smile played on her face as she realized that the man was right.

“I see. I suppose I should trust God. He calmed the waters of the Sea of Galilee once, right? So then He should be capable of calming these waters too, and of keeping Nick safe.”

“He’s more than capable,” Wallace said confidently. “He is *willing*. Come now, let me tell you an exciting experience that strengthened my faith in God and that might encourage your faith as well.”

Susan’s eyes sparkled like those of a little girl beholding a special treat. She loved stories. “Oh yes, please!”

Just then a manly voice interrupted: "Reverend Wallace?"

Susan and Wallace turned to see a villager.

"I'm sorry, Reverend, for interrupting you and Susan, but a rescue fleet is being readied to search out one of our vessels lost at sea. Ben asked me to ask if you would say a prayer for us before we set out."

"Most certainly I will." Wallace got down carefully from the rock and started to walk with the villager. Susan quickly jumped down and ran to catch up with them.

"Reverend Wallace," she said breathlessly, "when will you tell me your story?"

"So I have aroused your curiosity?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"Very much so! I am eager to hear it."

"Okay. I shall tell you after the prayer," he promised.

With that, the three of them headed to the port where the rescue team was waiting. As they approached, Susan could see some boats ready for sail. Their lines held them securely to the moorage on the dock as they swayed from side to side with the sea rolling in under them. Wallace gathered the men together and all bowed their heads as he committed their expedition to the Lord.

After a quick farewell and "Godspeed," they loosened the moorings and rowed the little fleet till the wind caught their sails.

Susan watched from the boards of the dock as they sailed away. The sun was now beginning to set, and the magnificent array of colors that danced over the sparse clouds around it seemed to permeate all of creation, spilling onto the water until Susan could barely distinguish between the sky and the sea. Wallace also stood gazing at the little fleet as they disappeared into the haze that was approaching from the north.

Susan's watchful eye caught someone else gazing blankly at the scene.—It was Beth, Nick's aunt. She stood there motionless. Susan moved toward her and then said quietly, "Aunt Beth (out of respect the village youths referred to their elders as "uncle" and "aunt"), I know God is taking care of Nick."

Beth stood there a while longer as if she had not heard those comforting words. She then slowly turned around as tears welled up in her eyes. "I know," she managed to utter.

Susan could feel her pain; she knew how hard it must be, for Nick was like a son to Beth and she loved him dearly. In a sudden impulse of empathy, Susan forgot her own grief and gave Beth a warm hug. How she wished she could find a way to comfort and soothe her hurting heart.

Arm in arm they again cast their gaze towards the colorful horizon, contrasted by the dark clouds that loomed all the more ominously towards the north, until their silent vigil was suddenly broken by the sound of footsteps behind them. The old wooden boards squeaked beneath the approaching figure. Beth and Susan turned to find Wallace, with an embarrassed smile.

"I wanted to surprise you ladies, but I guess the wooden planks gave me away."

Susan giggled at his sense of humor, and even the corner of Beth's mouth seemed to have lifted a little, resembling a hint of a smile.

"Oh!" Susan suddenly remembered. "The story! Please, do tell us the story!"

"Story? What story?" asked Beth, displaying a startled look on her face at this sudden outburst of her youthful companion.

"Well, Beth," Wallace explained, "I promised Susan a story. I think you may also enjoy it."

"Is that an invitation?" Beth asked, this time with a more definite smile.

Wallace cleared his throat and, with the trace of a blush on his face, answered, "Susan and I would like to share your company."

Susan agreed with a nod and a smile.

Beth sat down on the edge of the pier. Susan joined her and, removing her shoes, slipped her feet into the cold waters. Susan was not one to be daunted by the cold, and sometimes she and her friends would even swim in the clean, yet icy waters. Beth looked at Susan in an amused sort of way but said nothing.

By this time Wallace had also situated himself on the pier, and facing the sea he began:

"Some years ago I was in Central Africa, building a mission outpost there with some of my fellow missionaries. We also had the help of Samson, our only native convert at the time. I was a young man of about 30..." He paused, seeing Susan's smile. "Well, I was a *fairly* young man, with, sad to say, a strong independent streak in my character. But, thank God, with the help of my fellow missionaries, I was learning to keep it in check.

"On one burning hot day as we strapped bamboo sticks together with ropes for the main body of the mission, I felt like I was going to melt away for the heat. It was a rather tedious procedure, and not one that we could all work on at the same time. As the other missionaries worked to complete our bamboo structure, I decided to make myself useful and go into the surrounding jungle to cut some high grass."

"Why did you want to cut grass?" asked Susan.

"We would cut high grass and dry it in the sun. It would become a type of hay, which we then placed on top of the house as a roof."

"Very original!" commented Beth. Being a handy sort of woman herself, this point seemed to arouse her keen interest.

"So I took this ... um ... how can I explain it? It was a large piece of metal sharpened with a stone, and it had a blunt part to it so that you could hold it."

Beth's face scrunched up as she stretched her imagination to picture what Wallace was speaking about.

"A long knife is probably about the closest thing I could compare it to. We used it to cut and hack the wood and grass for our mission."

This seemed to satisfy Beth, who now felt she understood the object he was describing.

"So," Wallace continued, "I took that primitive scythe with me and headed towards the jungle. One of my missionary brothers saw me and asked where I was going on my own, as it was our custom to go two by two. I told him of my quest and confidently reassured him that I had been in the African continent for two years and had acquired a sufficient amount of knowledge to get myself around. 'Besides,' I added, 'you folks are all busy enough.'

"My friend did not look so relieved with my assurances. In fact, I think my self-confidence worried him all the more. He urged me to wait until he or one of the others had finished so that they could accompany me, but being unable to convince me otherwise, he wearily shook his head and continued with his work.

"I turned and began my trek towards the thick jungle. Having entered it, I crept through the bushes and on through the forest. A sharp clear whistle from a multi-colored bird welcomed me into this surreal domain. It was like stepping into another world. The rays of the sun struggled to peer through the jungle's dense foliage and wild vegetation, but still managed to provide the scenery with enough light by which I could find my way.

"I walked on in silence, attentive to all the sights and sounds around me. It was important to listen,

for any strange sound could be the warning of certain danger. Hearing laughter-like noises and shuddering branches above me, I stopped to see white-faced monkeys flash from tree to tree. Their incredible agility impressed me as they moved from one tree to the next with effortless ease.

“Here, by a small lake—green in color as it reflected the surrounding scenery—grew an abundance of the kind of tall grass I was looking for. Irrigated by the water supply, and rarely touched by animal or man, the healthy, lush grass flourished freely. Arriving at the spot I began to root out the long, green strands and busily arrange them into small bundles.

“After a while, as I bent down to tie a strand around another bundle of grass, I became aware of a strange silence that had stolen over the forestry around me. The absence of the tranquil symphony of nature, which had surrounded me only moments before, filled me with a sense of impending danger. I slowly rose back up to my feet. Looking about curiously, I found myself eyeing a lioness who had just emerged from the thick jungle growth opposite me. All that lay between us was the small pool of nearly stagnant water, which suddenly seemed much smaller to me than it had before! I must have been standing upwind, because the lioness didn’t seem to have picked up my scent or even noticed me. Instead, she went about calmly positioning herself for a cool drink. I froze in the desperate hope that I wouldn’t draw any attention to myself. My heart pounded furiously, and droplets of sweat rolled down my face as I strained to remain in my half-crouched, half-standing position.

“Too scared to blink, I watched the lioness majestically lap up the water. Her golden coat glimmered slightly as a lonesome ray of light illumined her form of sheer and ravenous strength.

Ironic as it seems, I couldn’t help but admire the beauty of this dangerous creature. As she licked her mouth, I caught a clear glimpse of her sharp, yellow teeth. I felt my blood racing as I imagined the horror of having them sink into my flesh.”

Beth and Susan’s eyes looked wider than saucers, as they relived the missionary’s story in their minds. Wallace paused for a moment and looked at the girls. Their suspended silence begged him to continue.

“The lioness then slowly lifted her proud head—and looked straight at me. Her piercing eyes examining every part of my body. In a single moment, my entire life flashed before my eyes, as for the first time I came face to face with the distinct possibility that in a few moments it could all be over. I didn’t know what to do, though my first impulse was to turn and run. But the fright of that moment had so overtaken me that I could not have moved even if I had wanted to.

After a few moments, however, she turned and trotted off into the darkness of the jungle. I remained fixed in my position for a few seconds longer, just in case she decided to come back for some reason or another.

Once I had assured myself of her complete disappearance, I heaved a long sigh of relief. My muscles ached from having been in such an awkward position for what seemed to me to be an eternity. I wiped the sweat off my face and decided I had enough grass—and tension—for a while. I quickly gathered up my bundles and hurried off in the direction of the mission, congratulating myself that I had managed not to end up as lunch for a litter of hungry cubs.

Walking over the fallen leaves and dried ferns that lay scattered across the forest floor, I hurried along, still in a state of shock from my close encounter with

the lioness. My self-confidence had been shattered for a moment but, sadly, as I trudged on it was beginning to rebuild itself. *See, I was able to take care of myself.—I came face to face with a lioness and have lived to tell the tale!* I complimented myself.”

Shaking his head, Wallace pensively added, “I should have been giving praise to God for protecting me instead of patting myself on the back, thinking it was my knowledge that saved me. In fact, my near acquaintance with that lioness was the Lord’s warning to me, but instead of heeding it, I foolishly shrugged it off. I was a pretty tough nut and God had to use something heavy to crack me.”

“You mean, there’s more to your story?” Susan expectantly asked.

“The next part is not for the faint-hearted,” joked Wallace. Neither Beth nor Susan laughed; their concentration was focused entirely on hearing the rest of the story.

“Should I continue? Or am I stretching this out too long? Maybe I should continue later.”

“Oh, please continue now!”

“No, it’s not too long!”

“Yes, keep going!” Beth and Susan hastily responded, trying to answer all his questions at the same time.

“Very well, then!” Wallace smiled. “I was nearly out of the jungle when I heard something rustling in the tree above me. Before I could gather what it was, it hit me! I must have blacked out for a moment, because the next thing I remember is that a thick, long python was wrapping itself around my body!”

“Python?” The ladies looked at each other. “What is a python?”

“Pythons are some of the largest snakes in the world. They kill their prey by constricting and squeezing them.”

Horror spread across the listeners’ faces.

“Don’t be alarmed, they’re not found in this part of the world and they rarely attack humans. But I think that God let this python get ahold of me to teach me a lesson. I needed something of that force to straighten me out and get me to depend on the Lord instead of myself.

“Anyhow, the python was twirling itself tightly around my body, and my hands were stuck to my sides as his thick body, rough and scaly, moved slowly around and round. It was a grotesque experience! I yelled for help at the top of my voice. Since I was near the edge of the jungle I had hopes that some of the missionaries could hear me. In the back of my mind I thought how humbling it would be for my missionary brothers to find me in such a sorry state, but in that moment my personal pride meant nothing to me anymore.

“The python’s ugly face was nearing mine. His pitchforked tongue slithered in and out as his yellow eyes stared at me. Never before had I seen such a horrendous creature! As my body groaned with pain, I began to see the folly of my adventure. I began to see how stupid I was to have gone alone, thinking I was so smart.

“In the pitiful position that I was in—being strangled by a python—I poured out my heart in prayer before God. I asked Him to please help me and deliver me from the grip of this reptile. I also pled for His forgiveness for my proud attitudes and promised Him I would try to do better and listen to the counsel of my teamworkers. As soon as I did, the grip of the python loosened and he slumped beside me in a coiled mass. I watched as he writhed about, appearing to be in pain. I didn’t have the slightest clue as to what was the matter with him, but I knew that God had done a miracle in answer to my desperate prayers.

“My body ached and was ringed with red marks due to the python’s tight constriction—but I was alive!

God had protected me and had done a great miracle! He had saved me from the grip of a python!"

The girls looked at Wallace, their mouths gaping. Never before had they heard such an awesome story of the wonder-working power of God!

"Amazing!" said Beth, shaking her head slowly. Susan, astonished, questioned, "Did that really happen?"

"It's all true! That was the most incredible experience I ever went through, and I assure you that it is one I would never like to go through again," he said, chuckling under his breath.

Susan looked out at the darkening sea and again a pang of sadness pierced her. *Nicholas!* she thought. *Oh God, please be with him. Please deliver him from the grip of the storm as you delivered Reverend Wallace from the grip of the python. Help the rescue team to find him, or if not, keep him safe through the storm.*

Beth closed her eyes tightly and sincerely prayed the prayer she always prayed: *God be with Nick today ... help him to get to know You in a special way....* She paused. *Maybe this is what God had to do to show Himself to Nick in a special way.*

By this time the sun had gone down and the air took on a freezing chill. The three of them trudged back to the village. In the town hall, a prayer meeting was now being held for Nicholas. The villagers' hearts, souls and minds rose up in prayer before God, pleading for the life of Nicholas. Though unseen to those gathered, their prayers rose as beautiful incense, swirling majestically as they went, past the gathering gloomy clouds, and towards the throne of Heaven.



Dark ocean waves crashed about Nick's boat, swirling in a rage of commotion. Nick was getting desperate. He looked at the blackened sky, its dark clouds glowering furiously at him. He looked

at the waves that were growing higher by the minute, and all around him. There was no land in sight! The clouds obscured the stars, which were his only compass.

He was now starting to get worried. *What am I to do?* he thought, running his hand through his long hair. He held the helm steadfast and tried to keep the boat steady, while at the same time trying to maneuver it back to where he thought land would be, but it seemed futile. The storm had caught up with him and soon he was engulfed in the raging tempest.

Lightning flashed across the sky! The wind moaned and howled as a wolf in the night. The storm clouds flushed out the heavy waters they held and the pelting drops of rain beat upon the boat and whipped Nick's face with their stinging lashes. The thunder rumbled about and the ocean became as a wild beast loosed from its cage, rampaging angrily and roaring loudly. Everything was thrown into a wild fury!

Nick hastily brought down the sails, letting the winds and currents drive the ship where they pleased. Nick held on tight to the helm, clinging for his life, as the boat thrashed aimlessly about the high waves. He felt so small, so powerless compared to the great powerful waves and winds of the sea.

There was nothing Nick could do! He searched his mind hoping to find a plan, a solution, something that could help his situation, but found nothing. He was beginning to realize that he wasn't as smart as he thought, and that he needed help!

Then suddenly he heard a voice in his mind so loudly that for a moment he thought the storm had carried it his way. *"When the waves of this life toss you about angrily, trying to drown you, you can grab ahold of God's rope and it will save you. After that, you will never again ignore its existence."*

The words rang through his head, and he felt them echoing back with every rumble of thunder, every streak of lightning that flashed across the dark sky. His thoughts were torn in two. Should he grab the rope, or should he cling to his misery?

But, his carnal thoughts retaliated, the rope isn't even here. It's all a fib'. My poor aunt doesn't know what she believes in.

Just then something jolted him. He looked up to see a tremendous wave climbing, preparing to crash down on him. Higher and higher it towered, with dark green and blue shades lining it. Never had he seen such an ominous sight. He watched in terror as time seemed to slow every moment of this ominous scene, and the wave crashed down, shattering the boat into pieces.

The next thing he knew, he was under the murky waves gulping the sickeningly salty water. He swam to the surface and, choking, managed to repel some of the salty water that had gotten inside his lungs. He coughed and sputtered but couldn't quite manage to get enough air, since the waves kept rolling over him mercilessly.

He had no strength left. He managed to find a scrap of wood, a remnant of his boat, and he clung to it for dear life.

There were miles of water beneath him, pelting rain above, no land in sight, yet still he could not bring himself to grab ahold of this "imaginary" rope. He could hear his aunt's voice repeating that phrase again and again in his mind.

I know she was talking about God, but is He really there? I know old people seem to think so, but I've never seen Him, or even felt anything, so how can I be sure He even exists? Yet, almost in spite of his own skepticism, he began to ponder his life, thinking about what he had been doing with it. He had lived for himself, fished for himself, done his own thing,

lived his own way.... *But, he thought, what else was there to do with my life?*

The main fury of the storm soon passed, yet the waves held another surprise for him. They hurled a large piece of wood toward Nick from the destroyed vessel. Nick successfully avoided it ramming into him, and then realized how useful the large piece of wood could be, as it was large enough to lie on. With his last bit of strength, he swam towards the wood. He caught hold of a length of rope that was attached to it, and proceeded to tie himself to that broken piece of boat to prevent himself from falling off of it. He lay on it wearily, thankful for at least some sort of rest. He was suffering badly from the cold, and the waves endlessly splashed their icy waters across him as he tried to recuperate somewhat from his ordeal, which was as yet far from over.



The boats returned later that evening in an invisible mist of silence. It was obvious that they had not found Nick. Susan and Reverend Wallace watched sadly as the men tied their boats securely back to the docks.

Night had now overtaken the village, shrouding the land in its dark cloak; not a single star could be seen.

The villagers despaired, knowing what this meant: Nick was lost at sea! Susan looked at Wallace with a face reflecting despair, but Wallace, smiling tenderly, uttered just one word: "Trust!"

Ben trudged wearily up the pier and, meeting Susan's eyes, and noting Beth standing anxiously behind her awaiting news, he spoke sadly, "I'm so sorry! We looked everywhere! We couldn't find Nick, and with the fierceness of the storm we were in danger of sinking or getting lost ourselves. We searched *Fishermen's Haven* but it looks like Nick may have been driven out to open sea by the storm or..."

“Or what?” Susan asked.

He heaved uneasily, “Or ... well .. we just couldn’t find him.” Ben answered simply.

Susan knew Ben was considering the possibility of Nick’s death, and the thought of it was almost too much to bear. She turned and ran away from the docks, heading to the comfort and solitude of her own room. She had never gone through such a big test! It was so hard to trust under these circumstances, but she was determined to put all her faith in God!

God, I know that Nick is alive, she prayed in the inner recesses of her heart, and I know You’re going to take care of him.

The villagers quickly made a bonfire for the freezing fishermen to huddle about. The fishermen then began to recount stories, a favorite pastime of the villagers, about storms and waves and the sea. Many of the older men had encountered a bad storm or two in their days—and survived them—and recounting some of these tales seemed to place hope in the minds and hearts of the anxious villagers that Nick would indeed return. After warming up around the fire, the entire village prayed again for Nick. Then they retired to their homes to try to get some rest.



Nick was tossed along, tied securely to the piece of wood. He felt as if the waves were playing with him, as a cat plays with a caught mouse before ending his life.

Then something bumped him, and instantly a pain shot up his arm! He turned to see an array of sharp teeth, bathed in blood, belonging to some large creature! He screamed as blood splattered everywhere! Again the teeth sunk into his flesh, biting angrily and trying to rip his hand from the ropes that held him down!

“Ahhh!” he screamed. “God, help me!”

Just then he awoke, finding himself gently bobbing on that same bit of wreckage. It had been a nightmare! He looked and felt his right arm and, with relief, found it to be whole! He was drenched in hot sweat, contrasting the cold salty water that had drenched him through the restless night he had endured. He looked up to see the sun rising upon a brand new day and a bright blue sky. As he watched the sunrise tinge the clouds with a violet pink, he thought about his dream and wondered what impulse had caused him to cry out to God. The sight of those sharp teeth beside him in his dream sure got him to ask for God’s help—a God he thought did not exist—but his thoughts led him deeper. *Just the fact that I’m alive ... I wonder if God really has been with me all this time! But if He was, I never paid any attention to Him. So why would He help me now? Could it have been Aunt Beth’s prayers for me?*

He began to feel a Presence near him and, as he continued to ponder the events of his wretched adventure, he began to see just how supernatural and miraculous it was that he had even survived. The wave that crushed his boat didn’t kill him. He didn’t drown. The waves swelling about him and crashing about him, raging savagely did not snuff out his life. The cold waters didn’t bring him to a frozen death as they could have, and then on top of it all, he had found a piece of wood large enough to securely lie down on. As he thought of all this, the sun’s rays began to warm his body—and his heart. He knew that something special had happened that night!

I should be dead, so it was God that helped me! He IS real—and He cares! were the words that now rung through his head as he floated on a once-again tranquil sea.

He looked at the glowing horizon. This wasn't just the dawn of a new day for Nick, it was the beginning of a new life. That morning, enveloped in the warm sunshine, Nick acknowledged God, thanking Him for rescuing him from the fury of the storm, and asking Him to come into his life and into his heart. Everything was beautiful! Everything was calm! Nick felt good. For the first time in his life he felt really, really good!

God, You're really something! You make people feel real good! Tears ran down his face as he promised God that he would give his life to Him in His service, somewhere ... somehow!

Now that all was calm, Nick took out his pocket-knife and cut the ropes that bound him to the piece of wreckage. He lifted his arms to the sunny sky. He was free—free from the chains that had bound his life so far, free from his carnal mind, free to love God. He looked up and saw a bird soaring over the ocean, gliding on the wings of the wind. He felt like the bird—his soul soaring above his problems.

What peace! What a beautiful scene: The blue sparkling ocean, the clear azure sky that always returns after the storm, and Nick with his arms outstretched towards the sun, bathing himself in its golden glow.

He felt his body. It was spotted with plenty of bruises, but no broken bones, no effects of hypothermia ... nothing! He was fine! He knew that he owed his life to God—it was God, and God alone, Who had spared him!

He looked up at the sky, and even though he had no idea of what to do, he smiled and absorbed the sun's rays as he continued thanking God for his life. Then he stretched out, washed his face and tried to squeeze the water out from the scraps of clothes that had clung to him in some orderly fashion. He looked all around but still didn't see a spot of land. Yet he remained

peaceful and calm. He now knew that God was with him, and that He was going to help him as He had during the night.



Susan jumped out of bed. She undid her braids and let her wavy hair flow down. She was happy. She could not explain it, but last night God had shown her that Nick was safe. She knew it in her heart. She ran across the dusty, early morning streets that led to Aunt Beth's house.

"Aunt Beth! Aunt Beth!" she said as she knocked on the heavy wooden door. "Aunt Beth, open up!" Beth opened the door with her braids still curled around her head.

"Good morning!"

"Beth, Nick is safe!" Susan bubbled enthusiastically. "I know it! God showed it to me. He's happy, he's free, he's safe."

Beth looked at her and smiled, "I know, God gave me peace in my heart last night too. Even though the boats didn't find him, I know he is safe."

They both hugged each other tight, thankful and encouraged that God had comforted their hearts.

The villagers rose early that morning, as they had decided to set out once again, as soon as the sun was up, to continue their search for Nick. Beth looked up to see Ben dressed and ready to take the fleet out.

"Well, let's hope our prayers have been answered and that we'll find Nick."

Susan, almost surprised at her own conviction, said, "I know you're in a hurry to go, but why don't we ask God first to show us the exact spot where Nick is? That way we'll be able to find him quickly."

Ben looked at her flabbergasted. "Do you mean to say that God Himself is supposed to tell us exactly where Nick is? I believe in God, but that is quite a feat you're proposing!"

Reverend Wallace interrupted from behind, “No, it isn’t! God is God and He can do anything. I believe it! Susan, why don’t we do it now?”

Susan smiled and beamed with such radiance that all the others followed along, so as not to hurt such a pure and innocent faith. They all entered Beth’s house, knelt down and prayed, asking God to show them the exact position where Nick would be.

After a passionate and heartfelt prayer from Reverend Wallace, the room was filled with silence. No one moved, everyone seemed transfixed. Not far away, the waves could be heard splashing up on the shore. Then they all slowly opened their eyes.

Susan spoke first. “I saw the number twenty, and a picture of a map with a compass. The arrow pointed to the northwest. Twenty miles northwest?”

“Twenty miles northwest! Well, that’s specific enough. We could start heading in that direction and see if we find him,” offered out one of the men.

“I had a feeling that it was 20 miles northwest from *Fishermen’s Haven*. Start reckoning from there!” Susan continued, as she remembered more.

“Boy, he would have been blown far, then!” noted Ben.

“In the vision, I also saw him on a piece of wreckage. His boat was gone, but he was alive. He’s fine.”

“The boat was gone?” cried Ben. “My boat!”

“But he’s alive. You must go quickly,” said Susan.

Reverend Wallace looked up and smiled. He began to thank God for how He answers prayers—even the most specific request.

All the villagers were in awe at the specific directions received. They watched the boats leave with a twinge of anticipation, yet a shadow of doubt in their hearts, wondering if what had been received was really from God. They would soon find out!

The small fleet of boats swiftly made its way, first towards *Fisherman’s Haven*, and then northwest. As they neared the spot, excitement mounted in each of their hearts as they wondered, expectantly, if Nick was really going to be there. They all kept their eyes wide open, searching the scope for any sign of Nick. There was total silence in all the boats.

Then the silence was pierced! “I see him! There he is!” Everyone scrambled to see. There it was, a piece of wreckage peacefully bobbing upon the waves. Nick saw the boats, too. He sat up and began waving his arms to draw their attention.

“He’s fine! He’s alive! Just like Susan said!” Sam yelled.

Sounds of cheer burst out from the boats. They neared him, and were soon close enough for Nick to climb aboard. Several strong hands reached over to help Nick safely up.

“Nick, you’re alive! It’s so great to see you!” were words Nick heard over and over in the moments that followed.

“Nick,” Sam finally said, “We received exact instructions from God about where to find you.”

Nick smiled broadly. “And God assured me this morning that I would be found today!” They both looked at each other, their eyes filled with gratefulness for the miracle-working power of God!

They gave each other a firm hug, holding each other tightly, smiling and laughing!

They quickly set sail back to the village, where everyone was at the docks waiting expectantly. Soon the sails of the small fleet were spotted. The sounds of rejoicing reached the ears of the villagers even before the boats did, and they knew Nick had been found!

Susan jumped for joy! Beth clapped her hands and began praising God. Dr. Wallace knelt down and, lifting his face to Heaven, thanked God. Finally, the

boats anchored. Nick—his clothes torn, his body bruised, but with a big huge smile on his face—walked up the pier.

“These old wooden boards never felt so good!” he quipped.

Aunt Beth was the first to greet him, and he was soon clasped in her strong, loving arms.

“Aunt Beth, remember what you told me about God? Well, it happened! Never have I felt Him so close as I did when I was out there! I know now that He is with me. Thank you!”

With tears of joy, Beth held him like the son he was to her! “I love you, Nick!” she said, holding him tight in her motherly embrace.

Nick turned to face the large crowd of fellow villagers who were all shaking his hands, patting his back and hugging him. Nick never felt happier! He looked up and thanked God! Then the crowd parted and he saw ...

“Susan!” Nick exclaimed. He made his way towards her as she patiently waited with a radiant and peaceful smile on her face. Never before had she looked so beautiful!

“Susan!” Nick cried, “I’m so glad to see you!”

Susan rushed towards him and gave him a big hug. Their embrace was tight and tender. Then they held each other close and laughed for joy.

Wallace greeted him. “So Nick, I finally get to meet you. You seem to be pretty famous around here now!”

Susan’s face glowed with joy, and Nick cracked an embarrassed smile as he thought of the circumstances that had made him so.

“Sir,” Nick said, in a humble tone of voice, “I have heard that you are a missionary. I would like to talk to you about something...”

Nick was unable to finish his sentence, as the crowd was pulling him toward the center of the village to celebrate his safe return.

“Sure, Nick, anytime!” Wallace said calmly, as he followed along, himself now drawn into the celebration.

That night there was a grand old party. The villagers danced to happy tunes that were played on their organ pipes. The children danced and played around the fire. It seemed that the flames also danced and leapt to the rhythm, throwing off their bright and lively sparks. The glow from the fire gleamed in everyone’s eyes as they sat around it, laughing and enjoying the time together.

Not only had Nick learned a lesson that he would carry with him for the rest of his life, but the faith of all those in the village had been strengthened by this miraculous manifestation of God’s hand at work. Everyone praised God, and then listened to the tales and testimonies from Reverend Wallace, who seemed to be enjoying himself very much.

Nick ate the delicious food with great enthusiasm and obvious pleasure.

“Aunt Beth, your pie tastes the best ever!”

“Thanks, Nick,” she replied with a smile, “but I think that after what happened to you, almost anything would taste good!”

Nick laughed and nodded his head as he continued to feast on the food before him. Nick thanked everyone for their prayers and told everyone of what had happened, and of how he found God. There was not a dry eye in the crowd by the time Nick had finished. He told his testimony with such sincerity that none could doubt his newfound faith in God.

Beth remembered her prayer and gave a silent prayer of thanks in her heart. *Thank You, God, for answering my prayers, though in a way I would have never expected!* She smiled. Her greatest desire had been fulfilled—Nick had come to know God!



The moon had made its presence known, and most of the villagers had retired to their houses and beds for the night. As the night stole over the village, the white moon bathed everything in its serene and silver glow.

But as tired as Nick was, he couldn't sleep. He crept out of his bed and the house, and wandered back out to the docks. As he walked, he relived, scene by scene, all that had happened to him, and praised God. He watched as the moon lent its silver rays to the ocean, and it became a shimmering pool of silver.

"You couldn't sleep either?" Nick was startled from his quiet reverie and turned around to see Susan standing in her long nightgown, her beautiful hair cascading over her shoulders.

"Oh, hi!... No. After all that's happened out there ... I keep thinking about my promise."

"What promise?"

"Well, when I awoke out there at sea—on the waters God had calmed, and bathing in the sun's golden light—I promised God I would serve Him, that I would do something meaningful with my life."

"You know what? I've felt God's calling in my life, too!"

"You have?" Nick asked, looked intently into her lovely eyes. "You felt God calling?"

"Yes!" she continued. "You see, Reverend Wallace has come from Africa. He's told us many stories about that land, and I feel that God has called me to be a missionary too; perhaps I am to travel to Africa or to some heathen land where they would need me. After what God has done for us, showing Himself so powerfully, I feel that I need to share His power and love with others also."

Nick looked at her, loving her now not only for her physical beauty, but also for the lovely spirit that dwelt inside her—so trusting, so pure, so helpful.

"Susan, then I will go with you. I want to share my experience with others too, and help them to find God in their lives like I did!"

Susan looked at him and smiled. "We'll go together!"

Nick looked at her and then raised his head toward the moon. "I'm almost 18! I'm a man now. I must put away childish things. I must do something with my life, and I have decided to give it to God—and I will!" he finished determinedly.

Susan was at once struck with a sense of admiration for his dedication to God, and overwhelmed by the mutual feelings that seemed to be driving them together. "I love you, Nick!" she finally said.

Nick looked at her surprised, and then said, "I love you, too, Susan—very much!"

They melted into a warm embrace under the soft moonlight and, as the sound of the splashing waves serenaded them, they made a solemn promise that they would work together to find a way to be of service to God—no matter what the cost.

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple. I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:7,9).



GLOSSARY

- *air raid: attack by military aircraft, usually with bombs and rockets*
- *benevolent: kindly; prone to do good*
- *black arts: black magic*
- *chapel: a small church*
- *comestible: fit to be eaten; edible*
- *commodious: spacious; roomy*
- *congenial: friendly, sociable*
- *cooperating: working or acting together*
- *crow's-nest: a small lookout platform located near the top of a ship's mast*
- *decadence: deterioration or decline, as in morals*
- *devised: formed; designed*
- *dialect: a variety of a language, differing by pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary*
- *disconcert: to ruffle; throw into disorder; disarrange*
- *disheveled: unkempt; untidy*
- *estuary: an arm of the sea that extends inland to meet the mouth of a river*
- *fib: a childish lie*
- *filigree: delicate and intricate ornamental work made from gold, silver, or other fine twisted wire*
- *flotilla: a small fleet*
- *hallucination: an illusion—something that appears real, but is not*
- *homage: special honor or respect shown or expressed publicly*
- *hostility: feelings of hate or dislike*
- *imbecile: a fool, one who is mentally weak or unstable*
- *incarnate: embodied in human form; personified*
- *inexplicable: difficult or impossible to explain or account for*
- *itinerant: one who travels from place to place*
- *laboring: straining; using great effort*
- *lurking: sneakily lying in wait*
- *monotone: chant in a single tone*
- *monsoon: a wind from the southwest or south that brings heavy rainfall to southern Asia in the summer*
- *nurtured: nourished; fed*
- *ominous: threatening*
- *opulence: wealth; affluence; great abundance*

CRY OF THE HARVEST

***perilous**: dangerous

***physique**: appearance, especially in reference to the body

***progeny**: offspring or descendants

***purse**: to gather or contract (the lips or brow) into wrinkles or folds;
pucker

***raucous**: boisterous and disorderly

***refinish**: to restore a surface, such as of furniture

***ritual**: a ceremony or act usually repeated in the same way

***schemes**: secret or devious plans

***serene**: calm, unaffected by disturbances

***spent**: worn out; depleted of energy and strength

***squalid**: dirty and wretched, usually due to poverty

***stanch**: to stop the flow of

***succulent**: full of juice or sap; juicy

***supercilious**: feeling or showing superiority; proud

***tiara**: ornamental, often jeweled, crown-like semicircle worn on the
head by women on formal occasions

***to cross oneself**: to make the sign of the cross as a gesture of
prayer to, or dependence upon God

***vault**: an arched structure forming the supporting structure of a
ceiling or roof

***whinny**: to neigh, especially in a gentle tone

