

Love's Story

By

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PROLOGUE -- CHRISTMAS EVE 1973

It was Christmas Eve. John and the children were in bed. I was sitting alone in the living room with only the flickering light of the dying fire and the warm glow of the Christmas tree lights to write by--and yet--I was not alone for there was a Presence with me that had been my constant companion since August 30. As the warmth and glory of this Presence enveloped me, my imagination soared, as it has always done at Christmas. Christmas is an enchanting time when the everyday world is invaded by creatures of another sphere, when angels sing of a special baby cradled in Bethlehem's manger.

At this season of the year I always feel the spell cast by the expectant waiting for visitors from another realm. The beautiful music ringing from all the shops, the stores, the homes and car radios enhances the wonder of it. To me Christmas Eve has always been linked with moods of magic and expectancy. As a child I hung my stocking on the mantle and hurried to bed, yearning to hear the reindeers prancing hooves on our roof yet terrified that they might not come. In my excitement, sleep would not come soon enough.

Through my own children's years of growing up, their sense of awe stimulated mine. Each year as we left our family Christmas Eve celebration at Mother and Daddy's house to begin the cold trip home, we huddled together in an icy-cold car and drove down the silent streets. A hushed excitement enveloped us as we passed down streets lined with shadowy houses, each full of mystery. All were waiting for the magic moment; festive but subdued, Christmas tree lights twinkling from the darkened windows. On these special nights the stars sparkled and quivered with anticipation of the happiness soon to be revealed. Everything together -- Heaven, nature and civilization -- proclaimed "Silent Night-Holy Night."

On this Christmas Eve, we made our usual trip to Mother's house then home through the silent expectant streets. As childhood faded from our house, the fairy tale of Santa Claus, had evaporated like the morning mist. The remembrance of the Christ child had replaced our fantasies with truth, but in Him we were free to wonder about other spheres that must be.

Prompted by my Holy Companion, I thought of another day -- one that had begun in humdrum reality when our lives were invaded by another sort of magic, a tangible glimpse into another world. It happened not at Christmas time but in the dull, dry heat of August.

It was as if another sphere overlapped the realm of earth that day. The breath of its closeness turned August dullness into Christmas magic. It happened suddenly and unexpectedly, but I know now that God had been preparing me for that moment all my life. My mind flashed back to the night that last day of August when our beautiful fifteen year old daughter, Love, walked out of the door with her date...

As Love walked out of the door, I picked up the book I was reading, and settled down in my favorite reading spot, the love seat by the living room fireplace. Somehow I couldn't get into the book. My thoughts wandered. Suddenly, I realized that I was very unhappy. Something strange gripped me. A lonesome, lost feeling consumed me. An accumulation of all the horrible and lost feelings of a lifetime fell upon me. I had never experienced anything like it. What is wrong? I wondered. Am I sick? Is this an attack of Satan? I had a great urge to run to John and ask him to protect me, but I realized he would probably think I was losing my mind. Was I? Finally, I got into bed with my Bible but found little relief from this oppression which engulfed me.

I heard a siren wail. I thought it was coming from the gangster program Peter was watching on television. The high piercing sound of the siren cut like a knife blade into my heart, and I shuddered.

I had just drifted off to sleep when the telephone rang with its awful news. I sat up as John crashed into

the bedroom. "Love's been in a wreck and she's hurt -- bad," he barked out as he began frantically throwing on his clothes. I leaped out of bed to begin dressing, wondering if, in such a situation as this, one should bother with everyday things like dressing and combing hair...

As I reflected on the intensity of the drama of the next few hours and how incredibly different it was from anything I could ever have imagined, my stimulated mind reached many years further into the past, and I understood something of the origin of the mystery in my heart...

CHAPTER II -- THE BEGINNING

During the first year of my life, as I gradually became aware of the world outside of myself and my mother and father, I learned a reverence for God and His creation.

My gentle mother let me plant the flower seeds in the spring. She taught me to watch for the first tender shoots that peeped through the soil. We watched together breathlessly as the little plants budded, and we thrilled as they bloomed. Mother taught me reverence for this miracle by showing me how to pluck the blossoms instead of snatching them off by their heads as little children tend to do. When the occasion came to bring these objects of beauty and awe into the house, we carefully, and always with a purpose, picked them with long stems so they could continue to be beautiful in a vase inside.

The birth and blooming of a flower to the tender heart of a child called forth the most natural of questions: Who made the flower? Where did it come from? Mother told me about the Creator who made beautiful flowers and animals and me. She told me how He loved and watched over the flower and caused it to grow. She began for me a tremendous awareness and love of God who had created a vacuum in me only He could fill.

As Mother nurtured my love for God, I became aware of another vacuum in my heart. Although God had placed it there, I'm sure it was not "God shaped." This one was in the shape of a horse. From the first time I saw the work mules plod past our house, I was enslaved to the love of horses. I can't pin down what drew me so strongly to these creatures. There was no grace or beauty in their coarse bodies in any ways comparable to the refinement of form and movement of the horses I later knew. There was something about the mules' warm sweet breath that awakened an excitement slumbering deep within. The sagging bottom lip and the velvet spot between their large loose nostrils drew me like a bee to a flower.

When I was still very small, someone tied a horse to our back-yard fence and laid the saddle on the ground beside him. The first fire of excitement I ever felt almost consumed me as, unattended, I smelled the solid bulk of leather saddle, which weighed more than I did. The flinty hooves and legs of the animal, which seemed as big as trees to me, aroused no trace of fear, only splendid admiration. The giant creature lowered its head to investigate me. When I first put my hand on the bridle of a horse and, small as I was, felt it respond to me, I was captured for life.

Horse lovers, such as I, are born that way and are incurable. Many are snared by the fun of riding, the sport of showing, or the art of breeding. These people often spend many hours and dollars under the equine spell until fancy or circumstances pull their attention elsewhere. For the "congenital" kind, as I, something to do with a horse is as necessary for their well-being as are healthy eating habits or good digestion.

By the time I was six years old, I had identified the flutterings and murmurings deep within me at the sight or smell of anything pertaining to a horse. They were symptoms of "horse fever." I collected every

picture I saw of one, read over and over any horse book I could comprehend, and hoarded those books beyond my understanding. My family began to take my affliction seriously, and I was given riding lessons. Those days so long ago are still clear to me. The horses we rode - their names, colors and personality, even the details of their tack - I can recall perfectly.

My captivation was so complete that I began to daydream about horses, often imagining myself one. In my dreams I collected stables full of horses. Each had a name. They became so real to me that in my first and second grade years, I told other people all about them as if they were indeed flesh and blood. I don't think I was really lying. Rather, faith had become sight in my mind. The shadow had become substance.

An intense love of horses and a deep sense of the reality of God blended with a desire for adventure apart from the ordinary, and a dream was born. It was fanned by my imagination so cultivated by Mother during childhood and built on by the experience of youth maturing. Then it appeared to die and be buried by the cares and responsibilities of marriage and motherhood.

I got my first horse, Sox, as a gift when I was nine years old. I trained him to jump, to count, to say yes, to lie down, and to stand on his hind legs. I owned Sox during World War II when my father was stationed in Pearl Harbor. Mother, my two sisters and I had moved to California to be near Daddy when he came and went. When we returned to Alabama after the War, I desperately tried to thwart my mother's plans to sell Sox by signaling him to stand on his hind legs every time a prospective buyer mounted him. I succeeded, but was still unable to take Sox back to Alabama. I left him in California unsold.

When I was in the eighth grade, Mama and Daddy gave me my dream horse. It was a beautiful American Saddle-bred mare named Madame Stark, whose picture I had cut from the society page of the Birmingham News and nearly worshipped for months. My generous parents surprised me with her for my thirteenth birthday.

Mother and Daddy, who knew nothing about horses, were unaware that my dream horse was fractious to a fault. Both my sister, Brownie, and I ended up in the hospital seriously hurt as a result of Madame's bad manners. Brownie had broken ribs and a concussion. I had a broken pelvis, which caused me to miss the whole semester of the eighth grade. When I recovered, I finally succeeded in "breaking" Madame of her ugly trick of rearing and falling over backwards whenever she didn't get her way. Age mellowed the mare, and I kept her till I got married. Years later I finally gave her away.

CHAPTER III -- LOVELACE, SUSU AND BIBLE CLASS

I'll never forget the first time I came to know my friend Lovelace. We had returned to our home in Birmingham after Daddy's service in the Navy. On my first day in school, my seventh-grade teacher introduced me to the class. Speaking specifically to Lovelace, she asked her to be my "big sister. I remember so well her oval face framed by long, curly blonde hair as she looked up from the book she was reading. From that very first meeting, my spiritual growth really began.

Lovelace was a popular girl. She was brilliant and charming and always the beauty and sweetheart picked by the boys for year-books and dances. She was the recognized leader of the girls, the president of our high school sorority, and my dearest friend.

The "abundant life" that she personified had a tremendous effect on my young life, although it was many more years before I reached her spiritual maturity. I realized even then that I wanted to drink deeply of

the “living water” that flowed through her in such a joyous, purposeful and confident stream.

Susu and I had met taking riding lessons as six-year-olds. I remembered her quite well when I met her again in the seventh grade, because in our first horse show she had won first place and I third. From the seventh grade on, Lovelace, Susu, and I were an inseparable trio. Lovelace was our spiritual leader, and my friendship with Susu was doubly assured by our mutual love of horses. We always dreamed that someday we would have daughters to grow up together loving horses and the out-of-doors as we did. Our dream came true when her daughter Debbie, though a year older, and our daughter, Love became fast friends and spent many hours together with their horses, as their mothers had.

Lovelace and Susu introduced me to the study of the Bible, and every week for five years they ushered me to Mrs. Jones’ Bible Class.

Mrs. Jones was a quiet, seemingly ageless lady who lived in an apartment house within walking distance of our school. She had no children of her own, but taught several children’s Bible classes in her home. When I came to Mrs. Jones, my only theology was what my mother had taught me during my earliest childhood: “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” That was the extent of Mothers theology, but it was enough to cause me to love this Jesus immensely. I was always intensely fascinated by anything concerning Him, so that I was, as a child, forever playing “Mary and Joseph,” making my favorite male playmate, Walter Bouldin, be “Joseph”, I was “Mary” and my Charley McCarthy doll, “Baby Jesus.” I always yearned to be a boy because I thought since Jesus was a boy, He would be closer to boys than to girls.

It was Mrs. Jones who finally opened up to me the wonder of the whole Bible story when we were in the seventh grade. She enrolled us all in Bible Memory Association which gave us generous rewards of books and other things for memorizing Scripture. Her sweet, angel-like face never showed annoyance or impatience as she listened to each of us in turn recite and sometimes tumble over our many verses.

I’m sure that she seldom saw much hope for us--a handful of scraggly adolescent girls. Many of our paths meandered far from the straight and narrow before our days of youth were over. But God was faithful to her and to the girls she had committed to His care. We all returned to seeking the goals she held before our childish eyes.

The ripples in the seas of eternity that began in Mrs. Jones’ heart and touched our sisterhood through her Bible class will come in as tidal waves on the shores of Heaven when all things here are over.

CHAPTER IV-- JOHN

During my teens another yearning arose in my heart. I wanted to get married and raise a family of sons. My dream husband had to be very “manly”, braver and tougher than me, and not afraid of horses. My cousin, Jim Brown, spent one summer with us, and my joy and delight was getting up early to fix his breakfast and get him off to work. I really wanted to take care of a family, although I wouldn’t dare admit it to my parents.

My dream man came into my life the summer after my junior year in high school, although at first I didn’t think he was the one. In fact I was sure he would never do! He was one of the rowdy football players for Shades Valley High School its first year in existence. He played end and caught the ball to make most of the touchdowns. He was also catcher on the baseball team. Because of his achievements in sports, he managed to clown his way through his senior year. The summer of my senior year, after John Cowart had graduated the year before, circumstances threw us together. I discovered a gentle person who shared my love of animals and the out-of-doors. He, also, met my stiff requirements of being tougher than I. He was

not afraid of anything and as strong as a bull.

During the summer, our friendship grew until I could call him one of my dearest friends. He respected me as a person and a friend, and I told him about the Lord Jesus, whom he, too, grew to love. Before long our love had blossomed, and we knew we would always be together. John transferred from Auburn, where he had spent a year, to be with me at the University of Alabama where family loyalties placed me.

The only way Daddy could get me off to college was to let me take Madame Stark with me. The horse breeding bug had bitten me by then and Daddy had financed her first breeding. It was almost as exciting as the birth of my first child when the stable called the Alpha Gam house to announce that Madame had a filly! I knew that I could not keep asking Daddy to support a constantly growing herd of horses, so I managed to get the trainer to breed Madame to one of the Tennessee Walking Horse stallions in his charge for free.

I knew that spring would bring a startling addition to our horse family, so I managed to keep from going back to school and got a job at the Telephone company preparing to support Madame, Bama and the unborn filly. When we later named her "Southern Belle" for my employer.

John had gotten his first horse while we were students at the University. He sold his blood to the Red Cross and various odds and ends to raise enough money to buy "Mike" an old rodeo calf-roping horse.

In those days it was a major offense to be on campus in jeans without a raincoat over them. John used to ride up to the art department to bring me my jeans. I would change in the restroom, jump off the porch on to Mike's back behind John. We would ride off across the Quadrangle and back to the stable.

John was a good writer. The English teachers were impressed by his themes written about horses. So John used to ride Madame to the English department and let her stick her head in the window to see his English class.

When I left school to work for my horses, John and I rented fifteen acres from a large company for fifteen dollars a year. We built a little barn and moved our little herd there. I fed them before and after work each day. By then John had another horse - a black Saddle bred gelding that had begun as a five-gaited horse, then a three-gaited horse, next a jumper and now a cow horse. His name was "Denmark's Artistic Peavine."

The year after I left school, John decided to leave also and volunteer for the draft to get his military service out of the way. This crystallized our plans to get married. We then faced the small problem of disbursing our small herd. Over several months we found homes for the two old horses, sold Denmark and farmed out the two colts with an aunt in Fairhope, Alabama.

We were married June nineteenth, 1953.

CHAPTER V -- THE MEANING OF A NAME

We began married life at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where John supplemented his private's income by jumping out of airplanes with the Eleventh Airborne Division. He refused to go to officer's training school because we wanted to return to school as soon as his two-year hitch was over. His hard work soon

pulled his rank to Sergeant.

Our first son, John Michael, Jr., was born in the army hospital only seven days before John was discharged. We felt proud of enduring the “rigors” of childbirth “the army way.” The total cost of bringing “Mike” into the world was seven dollars.

We returned to the little college town of Auburn, Alabama where John continued his education on the GI Bill and supported us by working in a butcher shop. I stayed home in our little country cottage and raised Mike, two dogs, fifteen chickens and a Jersey bull calf. When I took Mike for a walk in his stroller, the dogs and the calf always tagged along.

Before a year was up, John was called back to Birmingham where he went to work for a local freight line. He stayed there for nineteen years.

The next years were devoted to producing our family. We bought a house in Mountain Brook, and I tried becoming the lady and housewife my mother expected me to be. John was engrossed in his job and being a father. We were convinced that our horse folly was long since over.

Seventeen months after Mike was born, blond blue eyed Richard arrived. We named him for my adored Daddy, Richard Hail Brown. Daddy was a “reformed” lawyer as he called himself who became a successful business man. He was a fearless fighter who did not know the meaning of “quit.” He was also a humble and very grateful Christian. His greatest earthly love was Mama. She was his queen. When Daddy died, many years after Richard was born, a host of friends gathered at his funeral and all agreed, even business “enemies,” that he was one of the finest characters they had ever known. It was for this “Richard the Lion Hearted” we named our second son. Years later, on the football field our sons, too, displayed a gallant “lionheartedness.”

Love was our third baby in less than three years. On the morning of June 25, 1958, I awakened from the anesthetic to the announcement, “You have a little girl.” I demanded a confirmation from John. After two sons this was the first girl born into my side of the family for two generations. I had already accepted my destiny to be the mother of boys only. The amazement and joy I felt at this strange interruption of my supposed predetermined role, on looking back, was something of a prophecy. Truly this tiny baby girl was squeezed into all of our lives to teach each of us the sweet mystery of what life is really all about.

I think now of the prophecy given to another mother two thousand years ago at the birth of her child, a Son - A sword shall pierce your soul...But He will be the greatest joy of many others. And the deepest thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed.” (Luke 2:35, Living Bible).

So we began our journey with a lovely daughter, who, unknown to us, was sent on a special mission, an unexpected answer to the longing to know God better, which had begun many years before. Now John and I were faced with the problem of giving a name to this tiny girl with her rosebud mouth. Psychologists tell us we tend to live up to our names. In the Bible, the names of people correspond to the roll they are to play. Unaware of all this, we chose the combination of the names of my sister Barbara and Lovelace, my dearest friend.

Barbara has been a great blessing to me. Always so different from me, she has qualities I admire that are totally lacking in me. I am an introvert, but Barbara is the beautiful blonde who in her youth left behind a trail of broken hearts because she could marry only one man. Besides her enchanting personality and beauty, she has a very bright intellect. She graduated from North Western University in three years, during which she also learned to fly an airplane and did professional dancing. Then she began an exciting career in the advertising world. Tasting fully of the world’s brightest glitter and finding it wanting,

Barbara turned her back on it. She chose the better way. As Moses did, she preferred to suffer “the reproach of Christ” than to own all the “treasures of Egypt.” She, as he, was looking forward to the great reward that God would give when all these visible things had vanished away.

Lovelace, like Barbara, refused the bright rewards the world desired to give her. At sixteen she made a courageous decision. She pulled out of the light hearted social life completely, as it, beckoning her to be its queen, crowded too closely her quest for the Pearl of Great Price.

One of the amazing things about Lovelace is that she never imposed upon others the social standards she felt necessary for herself. Her graciousness, understanding and ability to enjoy vicariously the old life with those not called apart from it must have flowed from the Vine to which she was united.

And so the prophecy of a name was fulfilled. Our Lovelace, so like her namesakes - beautiful and intelligent, able to have all the world had to offer - chose a far better way. There was still much more prophecy in her lovely name, for we called her “Little Love,” this small bundle of wiggling flesh so newly created.

In her teenage years she realized the uniqueness of her name “My name is Love,” she wrote, “Everyone remembers it because it’s different. So I must learn to live up to my name.” With special emphasis she marked in her Bible the description of what she hoped she would be like - “Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude...All these special gifts and powers from God will someday come to an end, but Love goes on forever’ (I Corinthians 13:4-8).

CHAPTER VI -- OUR FAMILY GROWS

As much as John and I loved our family we both agreed that three children were enough. We had Mike and Richard and Love - the last one, we thought. They had come so close together that all my time was committed to feeding them and caring for their physical needs. As John said, “Our cup surely did run over.”

But God had other plans for us, and Love had barely learned to talk before the three children began praying for a little brother. We tried to convince them that we had enough babies, but they prayed right on. When Mike was five, Richard four and Love not quite three, our little Peter was born.

He was a beautiful baby with curly black hair, big black eyes and rosy cheeks and lips. I knew he would be a special blessing because he had been literally “prayed up.” The many calamities he survived in the coming years proved God’s special watchfulness over him. He was indeed the “little rock” which the storm of life would have to polish until the Master’s reflection could be seen in him.

When we brought Peter home from the hospital, Richard listened to his new brother cry for awhile and made the first of his many classic statements: “Mother, why don’t we just send him back to God?”

When he saw me nursing Peter he leaned his chubby body on the door frame and cocked his blond head as he considered the situation carefully before making the statement, “He eats people, doesn’t he?”

Blond, blue eyed Richard was given to these unhurried contemplations of things, later making profound statements. Before I took him to visit the new stone chapel with beautiful stained glass windows our church had built, I impressed on him that he must be quiet and respectful while we were there. As we stood inside the chapel, out of the corner of my eye I saw him pressing his stomach hard with his hands. He was wearing a solemn expression. Bewildered, I asked him what he was doing. “I’m feeling the Holy Spirit,” he answered. “When I push in, He pushes back out.” After all, we had told Richard the Spirit

lived within him.

Mike, our oldest, was growing to be a tall, thin, but broad shouldered boy. He had light brown hair just like Love's. He didn't need friends and preferred to be left alone with his own creative imagination. If he needed companions he conscripted his brothers and sister into his service and assigned them their roles, for he was always boss.

Richard and Love played together well, although Richard always moved slowly and Love always was very much in a hurry. Once when I caught her running out the back door with a bulge under her dress, I found that she had stuffed several pairs of panties into the ones she was wearing. I then understood the secret of our shrinking supply of little girl panties; Love didn't want to take time from her play to visit the ladies' room, but not wanting to be wet, she would discard the wet ones under a bush, getting a dry pair from her supply. No one could ever say she wasn't thinking ahead!

We were so worn out with the constant demands of four small children that we became lax when Peter came along. He grew up much less disciplined than the others. In addition, he had a natural knack for getting into hot water. A very wise black man who used to take Peter fishing remarked to me one day after bringing him home, "You're gonna have trouble with this one. I can tell by the way he walks."

CHAPTER VII -- THE SECRET

Early in Love's life, before her fourth birthday, God whispered to her the secret they would have between them. He was hinting to me also, but I forgot it until years later.

One day she rushed into the room where I was sewing and exclaimed, "Mama, I hear Jesus calling me, and He's saying 'Come to Heaven.'" Startled, I answered, "Not yet Love." I didn't pay much attention to her then, but a little while later she charged into the room again. "I did hear Jesus calling me and He did say 'Come to Heaven' ". Her earnestness frightened me, and I said again, "Please don't go yet, Love." "But, Mama," she answered, "I want to!" I shared this with Mother and Barbara.

As my children grew, I found that each was different. Love needed constant activity. She gladly went to nursery school at age three, unlike Mike who ran away from kindergarten when he was five.

Love had a thirst for knowledge. When she first learned to read, she read aloud constantly. She followed me around the house until sometimes, in nervous exhaustion, I would seek the privacy of the bathroom. She would follow me there and stand as close to the door as she could, still reading. She read everything she could find. She absorbed all the little girl classics, the type of books her Aunt Lovelace read as a child. Her taste for literature was a wonder to me because I never liked classics until I was grown. My choice had been "Westerns" and horse stories. Love devoured missionary stories of children and especially loved the stories from Miss Amy Carmichael's Dohnavur Fellowship.

When they were very young, Mother had convinced us we should be teaching our children about Jesus. We bought a set of the Child's Story of the Bible. Every night we gathered before bedtime for John and me to read to our little brood of fat cherubs all stuffed into diapers and buttoned into foot pajamas.

Together we looked into the wonders of God's Word.

An awareness and love of God was thus planted in our children's hearts as soon as they were able to talk. One day, when Love was about five, I found a little piece of paper folded away in her drawer. It obviously was there for safe-keeping. I unfolded it and on it was the stick figure drawing of Jesus on the cross. From His lips were coming the words, "I love you, I love you, I love you." A figure was clinging

to the bottom of the cross and the caption said, "My God loves me." I was struck by the profoundness of it, for in her childish heart, Love had already comprehended the real key to the whole of life. Thus began Love's habit of writing the secrets of her heart and hiding them away, so fitting her private personality. As another mother did so long ago with things she did not fully understand about her Son, I pondered them in my heart all these years.

Chapter VIII -- FRANNY

When Love was three and a half we moved to Heathermoor Road in Mountain Brook, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. We had been there only an hour or two when the doorbell rang. I opened the door and looked down into the confident, sunshiny face of a small girl, and into our lives came Franny. "I want to see the little girl that lives here," she announced in her fearless way. I ushered into little Love's presence the one who, from that moment on, became like a sister.

Franny was a beautiful child with aristocratic features and curly blonde hair, a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, a ray of sunshine dancing through the waving leaves. She was bold and fearless and outgoing. Quite the opposite in temperament, Love was quiet and studious and reserved, and I believed the combination of the two little lives so unlike was a balance for both of them. Franny gave Love her sense of adventure. At four Franny persuaded her to slip away from their nurses and crawl over the hedge for an unattended and uninvited swim in a neighbor's pool. It was Franny who suggested they build a fire in the out door basement ventilator to smoke out the cat. They were happily adding fuel to the fire that was billowing along the base of the house when the maid discovered them in time to prevent a major disaster.

Although Franny was always the leader when it came to feats of daring, Love was the bossy one. They played the age-old game of "house" which they pursued for hours on end with Mike and Richard. Franny still says, "I always wanted to be Mike's wife, but Love always made me be Richard's."

Often Mike, who quietly controlled everybody, enlisted them in his budding business ventures, the first of which were Kool-ade stands they sat up on our corner. Love and Franny were in charge of flagging down the cars and making the sale while Mike collected the money, giving the girls much praise as their reward. Sometimes David, Franny's older brother, set up a competing Kool-ade stand, and a price war ensued. The newspapers snapped a picture at the end of a long day with David asleep beneath his sign, the bottom price of 2 cents a glass scratched out and replaced by his final price, "cheap"!

Franny and Love learned to ride before they were five years old, and a life-long bond, the common enjoyment of horses, was forged between them. Together they galloped their ponies across the forbidden Country Club golf course and rode them down the hall of the Eastwood Mall collecting quarters from amazed onlookers as Franny's pony, Boogaloo, bucked at the command of her mistress.

Together they found the meaning of life. They learned to know the Savior, and learned how to go to the Bible for the answers to their problems. Franny was the one with whom Love shared the secrets given her by God.

CHAPTER IX -- THE DREAM

The Heavenly Father was teaching us to hear His voice, and John and I had much to learn. In our conscious minds we had trained ourselves until we really thought our only interest was his job and our house and family. But what is hidden from the consciousness is not always removed from the heart. I had a recurring dream during these years. In the dream I was trying to get back to Madame Stark, my beloved friend from the seventh grade until marriage, but I was always blocked by various physical

obstacles. I would try to crawl around them, or go over them, but I would never succeed in getting my hands on my horse. Once I was awake, any interest in horses was far away from reality, that is, until my younger sister Brownie and her husband, Barry Evans, took up Sunday afternoon horse back riding. They finally decided to buy a horse and insisted on our “inspecting” him to give our O.K. When we saw the horse, the dam holding back the subconscious broke and a great wall of submerged desire flooded over and engulfed our consciousness. This time there could be no denying the strength of this old love.

Before we left the barn that Sunday afternoon, the Evans and the Cowarts had figured out how to raise the \$175 to buy the bay gelding and worked out all the details of dividing his board and expenses. We named him “Finance.” This already ten year old gelding served us fifteen more years. He must be credited with giving all our children, plus Franny and Debbie and Brownie and Barry’s own two daughters, the solid foundation of their equestrian skills. It soon became clear that six Cowarts and two Evans were just too many riders for one middle-aged gelding. Before long, Firefly’s Mailee Dare joined our family.

We found Mailee when John and I were coming back from a trip to the Kentucky Derby. We stopped in Pulaski, Tennessee, to see the horseman, (Mr. Zollie Derryberry) who had kept my mare, Madam, when I was in college. He was a Walking-Horse trainer, but knowing how much I loved American Saddle Horses and having gotten one by default, he wanted to sell her to us for her overdue board bill. Mailee was a large chestnut mare with three white feet. Her big brown eyes, tapering blaze, and well-set ears gave her a look of alert refinement. Although she was already four, she was not broken to ride. We fell in love with her at first sight. A week later we were back to pick her up in our Chevy II, pulling a rented trailer. The wild young mare kept the trailer rocking crazily all the way back to Birmingham, nearly lifting the little car off the road. It was a scary ride! Years later, Mailee became our foundation brood mare and her grandchildren have brought the highest prices of all our colts.

After the horse, Finance was allowed into our lives, our resistance was completely destroyed, and before long, herds of phantom “dream horses” had galloped through to reality.

John and I went to a well-loved vacation spot in the mountains of North Carolina one summer. We loved to hike through the Smokies. I remember sitting on a rock ledge overhanging a deep gorge and soaking in the grandeur of the hazy, blue mountains rising high above us as well as dropping deeply below. Somehow I knew that day that we would never be happy again in a city home. Although no decisions were made in a conscious way, there was a finality in my mood that seemed to say that somewhere in another dimension our life’s course had been changed.

In a very short while this premonition became an actuality as we answered an ad in the Sunday paper. We had no intention of moving, but the description of the minifarm in the ad sounded so charming that we decided to “ride by” for something to do. We had followed the dirt road too far before we realized it had turned into a private driveway and there was only one way of retreat -- turn around. As John jammed the car into reverse the occupants of the house, excited by an approaching visitor, pounced upon us -- dragging us from the car, insisting on showing us the place. Embarrassed, we allowed ourselves to be taken on a tour of the house and land and, too late, our hearts were caught fast in the web of charm the little farm showed us. An eager and clever real estate agent soon had a contract signed. We agreed to buy the farm on the sale of our “city” house. After almost one year of frustration, our house finally sold, and the precious little five-acre farm nestled in the middle of two hundred acres of woods was ours.

The little country house had evolved from two rooms. As it gradually came to wind and twist between the water oaks, it acquired a very real charm not often found in houses much its superior structurally. The dry stone wall bordering the driveway as it curved up to the brick patio surrounded by its planters full of geraniums had all been built by our own hands. The original two-stall barn grew to contain ten large stalls. This, too, we built in the cold and dark of night after the children were tucked into their beds. We

were rightly proud of the compliments the charm of our home brought us.

Many times I had stood looking out of the wide multipaned windows at the pasture that closely encircled the rambling cottage and watched two then seven, then nine horses grazing always close by. It was my impossible childhood dream materializing: to actually live in the country, so close to horses that belonged to me! Very often I would be overwhelmed at the wonder of it.

Before the advent of the farm, there had been the same sense of realized desire as I contemplated my family. I had always dreamed of a house full of boys -- all mine to look after. A girl had never been as real a part of this dream, but one, in addition to three boys, had been given, a sort of special love gift - a very special girl, who was somewhat of an enigma to her mother yet. I was very much aware that in this house a great many of the main ingredients of a dream had come true: my strong husband and healthy children, the peaceful quiet of the country, and closeness of my own precious horses.

CHAPTER X -- RICHLIEU, SNOWFIRE, MADAME, DIXIE

The next important addition to our family was Richlieu Firefly. The Author of our story saw life, not as we did, but all the way through to the end. He knew that Richlieu was a necessary step further down the pathway of this dream. Richlieu was a stallion and if it hadn't been for him, we would never have gone into the horse-breeding business.

Richlieu Firefly was Firefly's Mailee Dare's sire. We were quite impressed with our beautiful Mailee, and her papers told us of her well-bred but unknown sire. Mailee had come from nowhere. The man who had left her in the barn in Tennessee where we found her had just stumbled on her himself. A little detective work revealed that her sire also lived on the isolated farm where Mailee was discovered and we set out to find him.

We found the ratty dirt road where it turned off the highway near Culleoka, Tennessee. We followed it across the rickety bridge as it wound between high swelling hills to the tumbled-down tobacco barn where Mailee had been born. The road ended at a pasture gate, wedged between two brush covered hills. There was a horse looking over the gate watching our progress - a beautiful horse! He was chestnut with a star and a snip between his nostril, large expressive eyes and little sharp ears curled inward at the top. There was a strong Arabian look to his head, but the long, slender, arched neck rising straight up from his shoulders betrayed his American Saddle bred ancestry. With a sharp snort he was gone, his tail high over his back, neck arched as if he wore an imaginary bridle, his motion bold and high. He trotted brilliantly around the fence, then burst into a gallop, bounding down a slope to the creek running through the pasture. He leapt the creek, racing toward the barn where he abruptly wheeled and headed back down the slope, his foot pattern suddenly changing from gallop to the single-foot pattern of a rack! What a beautiful horse, trotting and racking free in his paddock with the perfect form of a trained show horse! Before long we had climbed the path winding through the wild roses and up the natural rock steps to the house at the top of the steep tree-covered hill and had found out the story of this place - how such a horse had grown up in such obscurity.

The only occupants were two elderly ladies, a handyman of at least ninety and the invalid husband of one lady. Eleven years before, Mrs. Franklin and her husband had retired and moved into this wild and lovely place, bringing with them their retired show mare carrying her first foal by the good stallion Kings Farewell, the last son of the great breed builder, Kings Genius. Soon after, Mr. Franklin had been stricken and left an invalid. For eleven years the colt grew into a beautiful stallion, remaining untrained and running free on the now overgrown farm. Mrs. Franklin had somehow established communication with this horse as she was so alone on the remote farm. Though she was a small elderly lady she had taught Richlieu to run into the stall inside the tobacco barn when she opened the door and called, "Come,

dearie.” She had a tiny window cut through the side of his stall, and though the horse was yet unaltered, she trained him to let her comb his tail and trim his mane for a bridle path. She loved him so much, and her invalid husband somehow rested better knowing his horses were still there.

Richlieu had one daughter by Mrs. Franklin’s other mare. That had been Firefly’s Mailee Dare. As a yet unbroken four-year-old, she had been sold by Mrs. Franklin to the adventurous stranger who had found his way up the rutty road and over the rickety bridge.

We soon became fast friends with this lonely and gracious lady and made many trips to see her and her fine stallion. She showed us all the ribbons his mother had won and bit by bit gave us all of her old show tack. Her eyes always brightened up as she, true horsewoman that she was, reminisced about the past.

When Mr. Franklin died, her family living in another state, realized that a 75 year old lady had no business being the sole caretaker of an untrained stallion. They insisted she dispose of the horse.

It was natural that she turned to us, who loved him with her. We were unable to pay a proper price but she insisted that we have Richlieu. In return for a yearling heifer and three hundred dollars, we became his owner. John and I and four children backed our trailer up to the stall of the old tobacco barn, gave Richlieu a shot of tranquilizer through the tiny window, and uneventfully loaded the eleven-year-old unbroken stallion into the trailer and took him to Birmingham. In three months’ time Richlieu was introduced to halter, double bridle, and saddle. He could trot and rack with speed, never losing his natural form, motion high and tail carried naturally arched in the air.

Soon we acquired a bride for Richlieu in Bonnie Stonewall. Bonnie was the insane or eccentric daughter of Ruth Stonewall. Ruth, a daughter of Stonewall King, had been a successful five-gaited show mare when I was a child. She, too, had an unusual later life and had nursed her daughter, Bonnie for six years! Since food in the small paddock where they lived was scanty, Bonnie had grown to adulthood scrawny and crooked-legged with a wild crazy look in her eye. For no apparent reason, she would strike a dead run, her neck ewed as she held her nose high in the air, her knees working awkwardly from side to side instead of from back to front, her eyes rolling crazily inside their wide white rims.

We had acquired Bonnie for a brood mare by only a little persuasive talking in hopes that nothing about her, but rather her fine mother’s genes, would be passed on. By some strange wisdom, however, Bonnie seemed to know what a tragedy to the equine species it would be if perhaps she brought into the world a replica of herself instead of Ruth Stonewall. She decided on a life of celibacy and violently refused a mate.

The children’s longing for a horse of their own was fulfilled when Mike acquired a beautiful grey Welsh pony mare registered as Crefield’s Caroline - but named by her young owner, “Snowfire.” Later Mike added another name and showed her as, “Snowfire’s Memory.” We never did know who she was the memory of. Snowfire was a royally bred young mare with a mind of her own. By trimming her feet we were able to keep her in the fifty-inch-and-under pony division. “Snow” was the first test of Mike’s gift of dedication and discipline toward a goal. The mare was sent to us to breed to our stallion, Richlieu, and for Mike to train. We were later to own her.

It was a feat to even keep her in the training ring for the first year. She bent two metal gates double in her lunging. Every day, rain or shine, Christmas and Easter, Mike worked Snowfire. After a year, his dedicated persistence paid off. Snowfire became so well disciplined and trained for her work, that she could carry to a blue ribbon any child that could sit on her back. After our children outgrew her, we sold her for an enormous sum for a pony at that time. Nineteen years after Mike outgrew Snowfire, she was still winning blue ribbons nearly every time she entered a horse show.

Love also wanted a horse of her own. She, like most children, at one time in her life wanted a white horse. Since she was so young and wanted only a pet horse, I put aside my prejudice against white horses and looked for a “cheap” one. I found one advertised for seventy-five dollars. What a bargain, I thought! When I went to buy it, it was lying down and wouldn’t get up. I agreed with John that, even for seventy-five dollars a white horse that couldn’t stand up wasn’t a wise investment.

Because of the fun Mike was having learning to show Snowfire, we decided we should get Love a suitable horse -- one she could be proud of and could learn to exhibit. We found another Welsh mare of top quality.

What a memorable Christmas morning it was when the little pigtailed girl with glasses found the sharp-eared, pop-eyed little bay mare tied to the tree in the back yard. This pony also had an interesting set of names given her by her young mistress: “My, My” - in honor of the great world’s champion mare of that time - was her show name but “Madame” in honor of my old mare was her real name! Both of them were eight years old. A friendship began that led to many blue ribbons before Love, because of her age and size, graduated to the American Saddle bred horses.

Yet this pony, remained her first love. Often, after the show horses were worked and put in the barn, she would mount her little mare bareback and spend many hours exploring deep woods and narrow trails. In fact, the pony became her transportation.

Dixie was Peter’s tiny brown and white spotted pony, a cross between the Shetland and Hackney breeds. Her sire had been a very fine show Hackney, and her finely chiseled head and large, prominent eyes declared her heritage. She was only two and Peter barely five when they came together. She threw him regularly, but he persisted until the two came to terms. She was his playmate, the only one he had. The pony entered into the game of “Indians” with as much intentness as Peter. He would climb a tree, standing up on her back to get a start, then bid her wait for him. She did wait, standing beneath the tree, until at last he dropped down on her back, then they would go racing off

Mike, deciding to make a proper show horse out of Dixie, taught her to wear a double bridle and take her canter leads. With her Hackney blood giving her high stylish action, she looked like a show pony.

Even then, when Mike was only ten years old, his legs hung way down beneath tiny Dixie. We used to think he looked just like a famous horse trainer, Tom Moore, (who had very long legs) on the world champion mare Bellissima who was also a very small horse. Dixie was dwarfed by most ponies and was just too small to be a show horse. Later Peter tried to breed her to a Jack that lived nearby because he wanted a pinto mule. Dixie never produced a foal.

Richard never seemed to want a horse of his own. He rode them all, including Richlieu. Mailee Dare was the first to take him to the show ring. She was a large sixteen hand mare and he was a little boy whose legs didn’t come below the saddle skirts. Hanging over Mailee’s side, one leg hooked over her back to see if she was on the right canter lead, he caused the spectators at horse shows to gasp. They were sure he would fall off -- but he never did. He had an unorthodox way of riding. His remarkable balance caused him to float over the horse, never gripping with his legs, but always in perfect harmony with his mount. Richard was tough, unafraid of anything, and yet very quiet and slow moving. We used these qualities of his in breaking colts in later years.

CHAPTER XI -- BLANCHITA

Blanchita was Mailee Dare’s first foal. She was the first foal born into our family. Blanchita’s short life

was a beginning study for all of us in producing and raising a colt. She also was God's tool for teaching us the first lesson in meeting life's most profound moments. We gave her to Mike as a yearling to be his to train and ride, since he had outgrown Snowfire. When she was two years old, Mike began her training. Two days after he began riding her, she escaped from her stall during the night. She pawed at the steel gates across the hall of the barn and caught her leg in one. The gate, still caught on her leg, came off its hinges, and the frightened filly bolted. John and I woke up to the dreadful noise of pounding hooves and dragging and clanging metal. Right outside my bedroom window the frantic bedlam came suddenly to an end, and the resulting quiet was interrupted by a pitiful bleat.

Our hearts were pounding with fright as we raced outside and found the filly standing on three legs, her right foreleg dangling from her body. Her eyes begged us for help. I held her mangled leg as she stood trembling and sweating, while John ran for a gun. We knew there was nothing else to be done but end her agony. The sound of the rifle shot waked the children and my heart died as Mike screamed from his window, "You're killing my horse! You're killing my horse!" The first bullet missed its mark. I'll never forget the bewildered look of the filly as the ones she had turned to for help offered her nothing but more pain and death.

As the young mare's body crumpled to the ground, and my young son's cries ceased, my heart nearly broke. I screamed to the sky, "Why, God? Why? How could you allow such agony of body and soul? Why, oh why?"

And then it was as if the still of night wrapped its warm arms around me. There was an embrace of love, more tender and more comforting than my own mother's arms when she had soothed away my childhood misery. That still, small voice spoke in my heart, although to me it came from all outdoors "This is my responsibility, not yours, all this pain, this seeming betrayal of love, this anguish of heart in man and child and beast. You have the cross to prove my love. Look at the cross! Look at the cross and that is where you will see me as I am. The rest is my responsibility. Trust Me!"

The stars looked friendly again that warm summer night, with the smell of honeysuckle heavy in the air. Soon after, Mike went peacefully off to bed. As I will never forget the pain of that night, so I will never forget the tremendous reality of that answer. There is so much I can't understand, but all that is God's responsibility. I have the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ as the pledge of God's love. Sometime, somehow, all that we don't understand will be brought into focus in the light of that Eternal Love who rules the universe. My part is only to this great love revealed in the cross.

CHAPTER XII -- BEFORE THEY CALL, I WILL ANSWER

We took another step down the trail of our dream about two years after we moved to our farm in Rocky Ridge. These five acres were all we would ever need, with ample room for Finance and later, his stable mate, Mailee Dare. Mailee had another colt after Blanchita's sad ending. Sparkling Blade, a two-year-old Saddle bred mare and Richlieu Firefly, the stallion, had joined our herd. Bonnie Stonewall, the eccentric one, and Madam and Snowfire and Dixie brought our count to ten head.

The dream had grown and grown and there were too many horses. They were fast becoming a liability. With this realization, another gear shifted in the unconscious current of our life. With scarcely any conscious thinking about it, John and I found ourselves telling the heavenly Father about a desire for a big farm where we could turn the horses into a financial asset. As the desire increased in pressure, I remembered a Bible verse Mrs. Jones had taught us in the seventh grade: "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of your heart". (Psalm 37:5). Mrs. Jones had told us that this meant God would give the "desire" itself, "the dream," as well as its fulfillment, if He were given first place.

Ever since my childhood, when I was consumed with love for “the baby Jesus” and “the Virgin Mary” a hunger for God had driven me. In our early married days and the years shortly before, I realized the Christianity I had studied so zealously was not really working in my life. I did not have the peace and security that God promised in the Bible. As I tried to find the reason for this, I learned that I didn’t believe God’s promises in the Bible - not enough to commit my life to them. I also realized that to play at the game of being a Christian was foolish. Paul was right when he said in the Bible, “If the dead rise not,” (if the supernatural aspects of the Bible are not true) “then we, Christian, are of all men most miserable,” and we would be better off adhering to the worldly philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.”

I understood that if the Bible was literally God’s inspired Word, as It so declared, to give God anything less than complete obedience would be folly. I understood that if the Bible were “the truth.” it could stand up to any scrutiny that the honest mind of man could put it to. So for the next few years, I studied the Bible in the light of all the facts of science, history and philosophy I could comprehend. Finally the intellectual evidence was so much in favor of the Bible’s claim that I fell at His feet in complete certainty that He, Jesus, was my Lord and my God.

In my natural longing for adventure, I poured through true stories of God leading and acting in the lives of twentieth-century people. I asked God to give me a story, that by its very facts would prove to me that He did exist and act in the lives of modern men as He had done in Bible days.

I didn’t fully realize then how God already had been answering my prayer, how simultaneously He had been working “out” our circumstances to coincide with the dream He had put in my heart at the beginning and in both our hearts so strongly of late. We held up to God in prayer the promise of Psalm 37:5, “Delight thyself in the Lord and He will give thee the desires of thine heart.” Not many days after that, things began to happen.

We told our Lord what He certainly already knew, but desired to hear from us: that we could not afford a larger farm. We agreed with Him that if this yearning in our heart for a “real” farm was not from Him, He would have to take it away. If it was from Him, then He would have to supply a farm, for our only earthly resource was our equity in our small home. Soon John came home with the news that his boss was considering buying, for investment purposes, a one hundred-twenty-acre farm outside of Leeds, Alabama. It was a farm we had often admired, and he wanted us to live there and take care of it!

My “story” was off to a good start. Immediately I made plans to move the horses and decorate the house. My heavenly Father checked me, in His loving way. We were told the deal was off; I was crushed. I reacted in anger toward everyone. I hadn’t yet learned that all things work together for good to those who love God. Deep in my heart I heard the still small voice, “Is it the gift or the Giver you love? Do you love God for Himself or for what you can get from Him?” I realized that the deep hunger in my heart could not be satisfied by all the farms or all the “gifts” in the world. It was for the Giver Himself that I was really longing. So once again I got things in their proper order and God was first in my life.

When I learned this important lesson, God brought the farm back into our lives. There was another hurdle the Heavenly Father knew I needed to overcome. I had to surrender all my independence from Him; in other words, my pride. If we were living on a farm we didn’t own, the children reasoned that would make us tenant farmers. To their way of thinking, that was not a proper social status. I suddenly realized that I could not claim any credit for all the many benefits of the beautiful farm. We had neither designed it nor bought it, but were only being lent it.

Our little farm we were then living on was my pride and joy. John and I had fashioned much of it with our own hands. It reflected everywhere our own taste and artistic ability. We were rightfully proud of

our creative handiwork and sincerely enjoyed the many compliments its very real charm brought us. This new farm I could take no credit for, God alone had given it to us just as it was, already fine and beautiful. Again the still, small voice spoke in my heart. "Do you want to hang on to your very attractive little farm and your pride? Or do you want to bind your pride to the altar and take as my gift a more beautiful and wonderful farm, a farm that in the natural order of things you would never be able to gain for yourselves, and give Me all the credit?"

The spiritual principle involved here was very real. How much more would we rather hang on to our pride and our "little bit" when God would give us "all things" if we would but rip the evil weed of pride and independence from Him from our hearts and lay it on the altar. Very painfully and very slowly I learned this lesson and the joy to which it leads.

The story of the farm has been God's doing from its beginning six years ago to this day. It is another story.

CHAPTER XIII -- HEATHERMOOR FARM

Heathermoor Farm was about fifteen miles from Mountain Brook, a Birmingham suburb where my mother and father and two sisters lived. Heathermoor's one fourth mile of white board fence fronted Valley Road, a former Indian trail that ran through a narrow fertile valley of rolling pasture land. On each side a range of hills rose into mountains.

A paved driveway bordered by the same white fence branched off the road (in a "Y") between two sets of brick columns. It crossed the front pastures and led up the low hill to the rambling white board and brick house with its green awnings and shutters. The driveway passed the house on its right, turned into a dirt road at the edge of the back yard and rolled down the hill one-half mile to the barn and pastures beyond.

The beauty of the place gripped us as we came to the back of the house. The back yard, canopied by huge elms, ended right on the crest of the hill where the pasture sloped away steeply to the white barn. There was a big covered patio on the back of the house. The shaded yard with its lovely places to sit was like a viewing box where we could watch the more strenuous work of the farm on the rolling sunny fields beyond. The rambling house with its dormered second story looked almost too big when we first saw it. Later, however, we concluded it must have been designed for us. It was built like a fort, with brick and plaster walls. Football games, wrestling matches, and track meets on its floors never caused the slightest quiver in its sturdy frame. The ceilings were nine feet high and the rooms bright and spacious. Five bedrooms and four bathrooms gave everyone his own private quarters. Richard and Peter took the two upstairs bedrooms with their sloping attic ceilings. For Mike there was, off the kitchen, the bedroom with bath originally intended for servant's quarters. Mike's room had a balcony across the front overlooking the front lawn and pastures. John and I took one of the rooms at the other end of the downstairs and Love the other.

When we took the children to see the house the first time, it was decorated in a formal French fashion. Mike quickly rejected it because, "it didn't look friendly like our house." It didn't take long to begin our conversion project, however, and slowly the house began to take on a friendly atmosphere. We chose the color scheme that matched the one seen in the autumn country landscape we loved so well - shades of gold and greens and rusts, subdued tones accented with gay plaids. We put up cheerful wallpaper and painted the lovely wooden moldings to accent them. Our restored country American antiques and painting of wild creatures and, of course, our horses, adorned the walls. The house soon turned into a warm and comfortable farmhouse blending with its country surroundings.

Among the shady retreats was what had once been a formal garden. Love delighted in this “secret garden,” which is what the children called it, and often went there to pray. A little plaque among the flowers said, “One is nearer God’s heart in a garden than any place else on earth.” That verse fired her imagination. Boxwood grew on two sides of the flower beds and a muscadine arbor on the third. The fourth side spread toward the wisteria-covered well-house, the lawn, and the house, nestled close to the ground. Not even a step separated the house from the yard. Beyond the boxwood the ground sloped downward through a maze of cherry trees to the board-fenced pasture on one side, and down through the apple-tree-dotted-fields to the lake bordered by the woods. On the other side of the muscadine arbor the farm stretched over limestone projections to the rolling fields, down to the barn and the river and into the woods and more fields.

The farm had been neglected for a long time. The yard and pastures were dreadfully overgrown. The big white barn that was then a cattle barn was filled with debris. There were no stalls inside it and its outer wings were only sheds. The fences were falling down and were overgrown with grass and brush. It took us a long time to settle on Heathermoor Farm.

I had broken my ankle just before the move. While John and the boys were doing the outside work. I was confined to painting the house and sewing the curtains, since I could do that on crutches. Peter was beginning the first grade that fall, and I still feel guilty that this milestone in his life was attended by much confusion. Amid the confusion of moving and all the backbreaking work to be done on the neglected farm, no one had the time to give him the special attention he needed. The strain of being on crutches with the heavy load to carry was telling on me too. We put Peter, his brothers and Love on the school bus that stopped at the brick entrance to Heathermoor. Even then the girls of all ages wanted to sit by him! Maybe this attention made up for what I couldn’t give him.

Through the next years it was a tired but happy family who gathered for dinner each evening in the large dining room. Every window offered an extraordinary view of nature’s beauty. Each member, from John and me to Peter, the youngest, had given real effort and time to making this place our home. Eventually, we lost the feeling of “tenant farmers” for each one’s personality was being etched on all these surroundings, and the natural beauty of the place was having its part in the molding of the characters of the six people gathered here.

CHAPTER XIV -- THE FALL

Our first couple of months on Heathermoor Farm were trying ones. While I was still on crutches with my broken ankle, Richlieu fell on John and broke his collar bone and a rabbit cage door slammed on Peter’s finger and broke it. The worst was yet to come. Love had gone into “town” to Franny’s house. The beautiful Georgian house was located in a fashionable part of Mountain Brook. Hidden away in the woods, with swimming pool and stable, it was more like a resort than “town.” The boys and John were raking the newly mown fescue field with an old-fashioned hay rake that seldom worked. Unable to reach us by phone, Franny’s grandmother had called our neighbors to come tell us that Love had broken her leg.

Clad in my dirty jeans and with my crutches on the seat beside me, I found myself racing the car up the driveway to the Blount’s residence. I limped from the car toward the blood-chilling sound of a child crying in pain. For years after that I lived in fear of again hearing that piercing cry and its portent of agony. I often found my heart in my throat as I imagined that I heard it. I began hobbling through the woods and over the rough grounds of a construction site when barefooted, curly-headed Franny overtook me. Tears were coursing down her cheeks as she sobbed, “Love fell off the house.” Somehow I climbed over the big ditch around the house foundation and into the roughed-in frame of a newly begun structure to find my daughter lying on the floor, her head on a pillow, a blanket over her. Had an angel been there before me? There had, indeed, in the person of Dr. Holt McDowell.

The four little girls, urged on by Franny's daring, had climbed to the top of the unfinished chimney flue and were sitting around the edge of the hole dangling their legs down the narrow tunnel, peering down three stories to the basement. The framed-in flue was dotted abundantly with sharp little strips of tin. Through this treacherous narrow tunnel Love fell all the way to the basement. She suffered two broken collar bones and a compound fracture of the left femur, just below the hip joint. She was fortunate to be alive.

I don't know the details of how she was rescued from the depths of that awful hole. When I finally got there on my crutches, she had been raised to ground level and was comfortably splinted, her head on a pillow, awaiting the ambulance. But I do know that the Everlasting Arms had indeed been there supporting her. Part of the miracle was that the countless jagged strips jutting out into the narrow tunnel had not inflicted a single cut. It was almost impossible that her pretty young face had escaped horrible lacerations.

The other part of the miracle was that Dr. McDowell, who was busy with his residency and very notably "never home," just happened to be walking in the woods the afternoon of the accident. Through his skill, the most expert first aid had been rendered to Love immediately, possibly avoiding many complications and certainly much agony. That day something else happened between the two of them, the doctor and the injured child, something I don't really know about because Love never revealed the deep things of her heart to me. She opened her heart only to a few of her closest friends. Instead she wrote them down and tucked them away, and of this incident there was no record. I only know that the beautiful letter written to her by Dr. McDowell bore evidence to the fact that young and injured as she was, God had been her refuge and her strength. In her pain and shock she had witnessed of this tremendous blessing to the doctor who had saved her.

There was nearly a year of tiresome convalescence after her nearly fatal accident. For eight long weeks she lay in a hospital bed, her knee suspended by a pin through the knee joint to an apparatus above the bed. Her head was down below the rest of her body. When I was told how long she would have to stay like this, and that for six more months she would have to wear a body cast entirely up to her arm pits, I thought I surely couldn't bear it. God promised that from tribulation comes character and character leads not to shame. Slowly, slowly, He was weaving for all of us the threads of life's heartaches into a glorious tapestry fit to be hung eternally in the King's Palace.

The long, dull, hospital stay was diverted only by the frequent advents of Franny who outwitted and outran the nuns to pay her illegal visits (she was too young to make hospital calls). When Franny was around, nothing was ever dull!

Love's only form of entertainment since television bored her, was playing table games with me or John, who was a model father. I think the reason his family meant so much to him was that he had none of his own while growing up. I stayed with Love until school was out, and John came from work and stayed until one of them fell asleep. Most of the time I was amazed that anyone could adjust as well as Love did to hanging by her knee, flat on her back in a hospital bed, day after day. Sometimes it got to her and she would get very nervous about something. The thing that seemed to bother her most was having three "formal meals" a day with parsley on the tray. She yearned for our casual Sunday suppers when everyone ate a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without setting the table. She begged the nurses to just bring her a "pj" wrapped in a paper napkin. This threw the hospital staff into confusion. They had to have special conferences with the dietitian, the doctor, the hospital administrator and all manner of red tape. After what seemed like a "summit" conference, they brought Love a "pj" and a coke, not on a tray, just wrapped in a paper napkin. This seemed to help her morale tremendously, and we were allowed to do it often.

Love read almost constantly. A great deal of the time her reading was in the Bible. There was a young intern who had accompanied her doctor on his examinations a few times, and once he appeared alone. Evidently having seen her Bible-reading habit, he said to Love, "Can't take it, huh? Always have to be reading that Bible, looking for a way out." Then he said to me, "You ought to be ashamed teaching a child to escape like that." Then he walked out leaving us both trembling and nearly in tears. At that time I had not matured enough in my walk with God to know how to handle the young man, so I reacted with fear and hatred toward anyone so cruel as he seemed to be. As I look back, I see his real motivations. Was it not he who was afraid, and did it not remind him of his own need as he saw a little girl suffer so bravely and obviously find her "way out" in God's Word, a way he really wished he had too?

While Love was convalescing, the county school system provided a tutor who came two hours a week. Love spent two additional hours on her studies. Her grades were all A's. When the cast was removed, the doctor surprised me by saying she could ride her horses as soon as she wanted to, and go back to school for the last month. She had always excelled in her school work and she really had a horror of going back with only four-hours-a-week work on her lessons for eight months of the year. She was certain she would be behind the class, and at that time, had not learned how to fail. She was not to learn this lesson yet, for amazingly she was ahead of her class on returning. The crowded conditions of the school, which was largely responsible for the slowness of the class, was one of the reasons we turned to Briarwood Christian School for our children.

Love's leg healed with a bow in the femur, just below the hip. This caused her to limp, but in time the bone straightened and the limp became more of a habit than a necessity. Before her fall she had shown extreme talent in the ballet, in fact, she caused a stir in the ballet school after only a few lessons. The star teacher proclaimed then that she had inherited her Aunt Barbara's considerable talent in the ballet, and they raved about her confirmation and natural grace, much as horsemen get excited about a particular filly showing world champion talent.

I was concerned that her inability to dance would now cause her some disappointment, because she had loved it so much, but God erased all desire to dance. She never mentioned it until four years later when she and Franny became ballerinas again.

CHAPTER XV -- MOVING INTO A NEW LIFE

During those first months of moving into our new life at Heathermoor Farm, the first benefit we enjoyed was relief from the burden of crowding our herd of eleven head on five acres. The large overgrown pastures of Heathermoor would more abundantly satisfy the appetites of our charges. Now crazy Bonnie Stonewall could end her days in peace, wandering the grassy slopes. We hoped we could raise some colts from beautiful Richlieu. Already Sparkle was in foal to him and Mailee had a suckling colt by the great stallion Blanchita's Society Rex, the sire of the ill-fated Blanchita. Since Mailee was Richlieu's daughter, she could not be bred to him.

We got a little more serious, financially, after we moved. We realized horses were not a very secure economic asset. The only money we had was the small equity from our little Rocky Ridge farm. Cattle were a safe, always liquidable asset. It seemed the sensible thing to do was to invest some of this in cattle. Soon we had bought a herd of eleven registered Herefords from our neighbor and, in what was to us like one of the great "cattle drivers" of the "Old West," moved them to our farm. There was much lowing and bawling as the cows tried to return to their old home. We felt very important and excited as we tended our new herd; explaining the whole "business" very "expertly" to my awed sister, Barbara, who had come to watch the "Drive." But "Pride goeth before a fall," and we found out the hard way that we really knew almost nothing about cattle.

God, however, was still guiding and pushing us to the real dream in our hearts. All our attempts in the cow business failed miserably. Even when in later years we changed our Herefords for the huge white Charlais cattle that come from France, we still had disaster upon disaster. Eventually, we gave up the cow business.

The only time we made money with cattle was the year we invested some of my father's money for him. We returned it with handsome interest. However, as we were buying our Herefords, we decided to buy a few inexpensive but registered mares to breed to Richlieu. At that time the reigning philosophy about brood mares in our part of the country held that registered mares of inferior quality which were not good enough for show horses were relegated to the role of brood mares. During our years of shopping for a stallion to breed to Mailee Dare we had become close friends with Bob Smith, the owner of Rex. Bob had been a very successful manager of the successful breeding program of Maryland Farm when it was in its heyday. Later, at his own Greycote Farm he had raised a high percentage of top horses from his grand stallion, Marine Ace, from his small band of four or five mares.

We had much in common with Bob, who also loved the Lord Jesus. I was not afraid to share with him my dream of trusting God to help us raise horses. Bob became our very able teacher of how to breed champions. "Breed the best to best and hope for the best," and "It doesn't cost any more to feed a potential world champion than a potential nag" were some of the adages we learned. All these were exactly the opposite of the local theories. But -- there was one problem. True as it is that you can only reasonably expect to produce a champion from parents of championship quality, a top individual will almost assuredly require a lot larger initial outlay than a mediocre one.

We were not oriented toward spending large sums of money for non-essentials, and expensive horses were not at all essential for us, considering we already owned pets. Taking all these things into consideration, we decided that we would succumb to the local philosophy and try to buy a couple of inexpensive, but registered American-Saddle bred mares to breed to Richlieu for the fun and, we hoped, profit, of raising some colts. The Unseen Hand was guiding, sheltering, protecting and pushing. We heard of one three-hundred-dollar mare which the owner desperately needed to sell. Excitedly we went to inspect her. She was not a bad horse and we decided to buy her, but as we began to get out our check book, her owner suddenly and very definitely decided she didn't want to sell her. We went home disappointed, only to hear three days later she had been sold to someone else.

The next weekend we heard of four more mares that had reasonably respectable pedigrees, their owner, too, seemed desperate to sell. We rushed down to buy the mares, having already decided they were good buys. Again, as we got ready to write the check, the agent for the mares mysteriously decided they weren't for sale after all. We went home astonished. Whatever was there about us that caused this phenomenon happening over five different horses? A week later we learned the four mares had been sold to Tennessee. Flabbergasted, we waited a long time before we tried to buy mares again.

About this time Love fell down the chimney where she and Franny were playing and began her long six weeks' hospital stay as her broken leg healed. While I stayed with Love in the hospital, John went to Montgomery, Alabama, and succeeded in paying one thousand dollars for a beautiful daughter of Denmark's Bourbon Genius. This was more money than we had ever spent on any one thing. I felt as if somebody should stay in the barn with Nanny Hill at night to protect such an investment. The purchase of Nanny Hill convinced us that from here on we would buy only really good stock. We still did not know how far we were to be pushed.

By now Love was out of the hospital and in a body cast all the way up to her arm pits. We had to treat her like a piece of furniture. John made her a sort of rolling chaise lounge in which we rolled her around the house and yard. We pushed her on a mat into the back of a station wagon to travel. It was amazing to

me how well a child could adjust to this miserable inconvenience, but for six months she cheerfully bore it.

The tug at our hearts to buy some more mares just never subsided but instead continued to get worse. One day we loaded Love into the back of the station wagon, sprinkled the boys around the remaining spaces, and sped off to Memphis to look at a mare we had heard about.

We were treated royally by the trainer, all grooms were on hand to present the brood mares to us as if they were indeed show horses. As we waited for them to lead out the mare, two grooms came running down the hall with a gorgeous bay mare on a halter. They stopped across from us and parked the mare, cracking the whip to keep her alert and “looking through the bridle.” We were awed as we viewed the gorgeous bay mare. Never had we seen a longer, finer neck, short back, well-rounded body. And her head - oh, that beautiful head! It was exquisitely and finely molded and as delicate as if it were made of fine china. Big intelligent eyes and curved ears gave her head an alert expressive look that is so dear to horsemen. “Who is she?” we asked. “One of the mares you came to see,” the trainer answered. We had never dreamed of owning a horse of her beauty; so we bowed to the impossible, forgetting that “with God all things are possible,” as they led Denmark’s Touch of Genius back to her stall.

Next, they led out a small chestnut mare. She followed the groom, trotting smartly, with knees folded, feet lifted high, her blonde tail curled high over her back. She, too, had that same Dresden head. This was the dam of two nationally known show horses, a matron of proven ability. Suddenly there was a loud scramble. A chestnut colt exploded from a stall, whinnying for all he was worth, and stampeded to the parked mare, who answered with comforting nickers. The colt, reassured, curled his tail over his back, arched his neck, and began a high, hesitating trot as he paraded around the mare. He seemed to say, “Look at me, look at me! I am the real show!” All we could say was, “Wow!” As the trainer recited the pedigree of the colt, we learned his sire was the great stallion Rex, owned by our friend, Bob Smith, and chosen by us earlier to breed Mailee to. They returned Lady Jane Denmark and her bouncing colt to their stalls.

Next they led out a solid chestnut mare and parked her for us. Had we seen her first, we would have thought she was a beautiful mare, but compared to the other two she lacked fineness and elegance. She was in foal to Rex, however, and that was a great plus.

Convinced of the impossibility of owning the two most beautiful mares we had ever seen, we bargained for the lesser mare. We withdrew to think. We prayed and agonized. Should we spend a lot of money on another horse?

Before the day was over, we had bought Green Acres Promise and were on our way to Birmingham. with her in the trailer and a vet certificate in hand guaranteeing her to be in foal to Blanchita’s Society Rex.

As most of the time they are, our hearts were so slow to receive all that God has for us. There was nothing very special about us, no reason why God should give us special blessing. Yet God had planted the dream in our hearts to live above the earthly plane of things by depending solely on Him. We thought of it as an experiment by which we could prove to modern America that the promises of the Bible were absolutely true, certain enough to be stood on resolutely in the economic and material areas of life. To learn this for ourselves, to have the faith to put it in operation, we had to be forced to stand on God’s promises. There never seemed to be enough courage to launch out until there was nowhere else to go.

Even though we thought this total dependence on God was what we wanted, only He knows the pitfalls and weaknesses of our own hearts. Very gently He was training us and pushing us to another place where He could finally pull the rug completely out from under us and leave us with nothing but His promises

between us and disaster. Now He was giving us some very solid road signs to guide us when we would sincerely wonder if it really were His hand leading us after all.

The first sign had been the gift of the farm itself. The second was this whole episode of buying the mares -the unprecedented strangeness of being refused five mares that were definitely for sale just as we began writing the check. The outcome of the mare story went like this: We unloaded our newly acquired mare, satisfied because she would definitely up-grade the breeding stock of this area. The next day, almost as we were filing away the vet certificate guaranteeing her to be in foal, "Promise" showed up to be in heat! Something had happened to the foal she was carrying between the vet examination and now! An empty brood mare was not what we had paid for or wanted. There was nothing to do but haul her back to Memphis.

As we began the long, hard drive to return the mare, we were beginning to get the point. God was certainly putting a definite road block in our way every time we tried to buy the less than best mare. Could it be that He would have us own one of those Dresden Figurines we had seen when we bought Promise? As we prayed for guidance, it seemed we should try to buy one of them. On hearing our offer the owner staunchly refused to sell one. "They go together or not at all," he stated and refused to budge. "Well, why not?" we finally decided. If we are going to do this thing at all, we might as well do it right. So we traded our barren mare as a down payment and signed a note for the balance of the price of "Doll and Peggy," as the two inseparable ladies were called.

We fairly floated over the three hundred miles of highway from Memphis to Birmingham, amazed at the fact that we had not only the most beautiful farm in Alabama but now also the finest brood mares anywhere, and it all started with a prayer! When we arrived at home, our first act was to call Bob Smith and tell him of the purchase of "Doll and Peggy." When we told him where we had been, he interrupted. "You don't want any of the trash up there," he stated in his matter-of-fact, blunt manner. "But Bob, John continued, "these are the most beautiful mares we've ever seen!" And we told him their names. There was silence on the phone. Then finally came the unbelieving reply. "He sold you those mares? Why, I would give anything to own them, but he never would sell those two."

CHAPTER XVI -- BRIARWOOD CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

One beautiful summer afternoon after Love had come home from the hospital, my sister Barbara brought her childhood friend, Sally Dewberry, out to the farm to share her dream with me. We went out to the lovely, tangled, once-formal garden that Love called the Secret Garden, and sat by the round table. As we sat there, Sally unveiled to me her dream of a school squarely founded on the precept that the fear of God was indeed the beginning of wisdom. If God is God, He must necessarily be the source of all truth. The Bible proclaims from cover to cover that it is the infallible Word of God. The whole body of truth in this new school would be taught in the context of these precepts. This concept of education would create in its student a new purpose for life because they would learn the truth of where they came from and where they were going, and the relation of all between to these ends.

Sally, with her scholarly mind, had done much research and planning for her dream. She was about to launch it into reality. Would we be interested in sending our children to this school? It was not long before I, too, caught the vision, especially after just having seen that with four hours a week, Love could pass the rest of her class in a public school. Surely we needed to challenge our children more than that. Also, Richard had increased his habit of dreaming in class because he was bored.

In a view of the ever-growing spirit of rebellion and lawlessness in the public schools and in the air generally, if we were to be assured that our children developed in the way that we desired, the extra protection and guidance of a Christian school was essential. I was to know profoundly a much deeper

meaning in the years to come.

There were many problems; the problem of finances being a large one. Sending four children to a private school was not a light burden, neither was the transportation. Instead of having the convenience and economy of the school bus, we would be responsible for transporting them fifteen miles to and from school each day. John approached the situation in a typically masculine fashion by seeing the practical problems first, then the resulting impossibility. Yes, there were many obstacles. I saw the problems with the eyes of a woman who knows that where there is a will, there is a way.

Then I took my case to the Heavenly Father, and only the day before we were to enroll did all of the problems work out. Neighbors and friends also sent their children to Briarwood that year, giving mutual enjoyment to both their children and ours all the way through high school.

CHAPTER XVII -- DENMARK

That first spring on Heathermoor Farm, we had three foals besides Sparkling Blanchita to arrive. The gorgeous mare, Denmark's Touch of Genius, called "Peggy," produced a bay filly almost exactly like herself. My sister Barbara's little girl, Nita, instantly named her "Brownie" for her cousin, my sister Brownie's oldest daughter. It was her bay color that made her think of her cousin's name. John honored me by registering the beautiful filly as "Heathermoor's Anita Denmark." All our horses had two names, a formal one appearing on their papers and the ones we called them.

Doll, our other miracle mare had a pretty chestnut stud colt we called "Spider" because he looked so much like a Daddy Longlegs when he was born. Still another, Nanny Hill, had, by Longview Supreme, an unusually smart baby who fought a long battle with Navel ill - a disease contracted by new foals through the navel - and an injured leg.

We bred all the mares but Doll to Richlieu. We decided to put out the money to send her to Nashville to breed to Bob Smith's Blanchita's Society Rex, now standing at Harpeth Valley Farm in Franklin Tennessee. By the second spring we had become increasingly aware that our mares were of more fashionable pedigrees than our Richlieu. In order to interest buyers who, rightly or wrongly, put a great deal of emphasis on the breeding currently producing the winning show horses we needed another stallion. But again we knew we couldn't buy another breeding horse, nor could we afford to send our mares to name stallions and pay the stud fees and board bills. God had given us Richlieu. We would just have to do the best we could. We would breed the mares again to him when their second foals came.

Suddenly another road block fell down across our paths. One morning when I was leading Richlieu to his stall, something startled him. He reared high on his hind legs, lost his balance, and fell over backwards. He went into a convulsion instantly as he hit the ground. It soon became evident his neck was broken. As we helplessly watched in heartbroken sorrow, his life convulsed out of him and he died with great thrashing of head and legs.

His advent had been such a turning point in our lives. He was the only stallion we had ever owned. His bold, proud stallion bearing and personality were always a thrill to us. John cut a lock of his wavy auburn mane for me before he buried him. It is still in the chest under his picture in the den.

Spring was on its way and now we had no stallion to breed them to. We had hardly any money, either. As we considered our predicament, we looked back at all the signs that had pointed the way to the rightness of our being in the horse business. There was the sudden return of horses into our lives when the Evans found Finance, the unexpected purchase of the Rocky Ridge farm, the deepening desire to live on the promises of God, to test them out that we might have solid evidence to share with others, the gift of

beautiful Heathermoor Farm, and failure in the cattle business which was our supreme effort to be “practical” when we did come to our “Promised Land.” There were also the strange obstacles that had arisen as, trying to buy mares, we finally were directed to some of the finest mares there were, mares that had not been for sale to the people who normally would buy them. Now, just as we had realized the problem of selling colts with unfashionable pedigrees, God had overruled our earthly “practicality” again and snatched him from us. There was nothing to do but move on in faith.

Susu and Debbie came up from their home in Talladega to keep the children and the animals for us while we took a week to visit all the finest breeding farms in the eastern United States. We would look at every name stallion and every promising young horse, never saying that our only resources were in Heaven and that we were just waiting on God to direct us. It was an enjoyable and very informative week, but we compared all the stallions to Richlieu. There were none that had his huge eyes, his fine, slightly concave nose, and his expressive ears. During that week we saw only three stallions we really wanted. They were Gallant Guy, Anacacho on Parade (a full brother to our beautiful Peggy) and Blanchita’s Society Rex. Any of these stallions would cost many thousands of dollars, and since no envelope stuffed with thousand dollar bills happened to drop out of Heaven, we came home disappointed.

When we turned in the long drive at Heathermoor, there was a huge banner stretched across the drive way fastened high in the elm trees on either side. The banner said “Welcome Home,” and beneath it were Love and Debbie clad in their shorts and bare feet, leaping for joy and waving to us. I had a great conflict of emotion when I realized the banner was painted on the back of an expensive double roll of the wallpaper I had bought for Love’s room!

Mike waited for us down at the barn where every horse was tied in the corner of a freshly cleaned stall, all groomed and ready for inspection. At that time Mike knew the pedigree of every mare one hundred years back. He, Love and Debbie, with the reluctant participation of Richard, were constantly playing “horse” with little statues of horses. They would prance around in circles holding the play horses but letting their own legs mimic the gait and styles they imagined for each horse. They had long arguments about who won the make-believe classes, the fairness of the judging, and other topics common to horse lovers. They took turns pretending to be different, well-known Saddle Horse judges. Mike even made magazines, replicas of the major breed publications, and “sold” ads to the others. He drew very creative stylized drawings of Saddle bred in the show ring and hilariously mimicked the columnists. All this was very serious business to him, but it really pointed out the “flaws” in the adult world’s handling of gossip, flattery, disagreement, and name dropping.

We were spending considerable prayer and thought on what to do about a stallion these days. One day the idea came into John’s mind to call the man from who we had bought Doll and Peggy and Lady O’Shea. It happened that he did have a colt at two-years old that had a pedigree as impressive as any horse alive. He would sell him for a very reasonable price. We studied the pedigree for several days. It was indeed impressive. The colt’s dam was a famous harness horse, full sister to three of the breeds most impressive sires as well as a sister to the great Kate Shriver. Lady in Lace’s sire was the greatest breed builder of this era, Anacacho Denmark. Every sire and dam in Lady’s family had been a champion back to the Civil War, when the original “Denmark” had carried into battle General John Hunt Morgan, leader of a famous Rebel guerrilla group known as Morgan’s Raiders.

The colt’s sire was Marine Ace, the noble stallion which had sired several world champions for our good friend Bob Smith. “Marine” was Bob’s one true earthly love. Bob literally lived for the stallion, who was old and foundered now, and loved him as much as any man ever loved a woman. Marine’s greatest offspring had come from the same female family as the dam of this colt. This must be the horse. We decided to go see him. If he looked anything like we expected, we would buy him. When we called to make the appointment, the owner had decided not to sell him. He was just too well bred, he said. It

would be foolish to part with a colt of his value as a breeding horse. What was God going to do? Spring was on its way.

About two months later the phone rang. It was the owner of the well-bred colt. If we still wanted him we could have him. All his help had left him, and he couldn't care for all his barn. In fact, if we would come get him this week, he would knock \$500 off the price! Once again we made the trip to Memphis, having already made up our minds to buy Marine Denmark. We recognized him immediately from the description, a large two-year-old, dark liver chestnut, almost black, with a carrot colored mane. He had only one hind sock and not a mark on his face. The colt was still gawky, being well grown for his age, but he had a very good trot and gentle Marine Ace disposition. After short deliberation we owned a stallion. Instead of the bold and prancing Richlieu, who had paraded arrogantly in front of mares, we now had a very adolescent, though handsome colt, who didn't yet know that he was a stallion. No one in his family had ever been anything but a champion, so mostly on the breeding certificate we held in our hands, we charted the future of our breeding program.

When the mares foaled our second spring, we successfully mated them with the yet unproven young stallion.

CHAPTER XVIII -- REX

We were convinced that we still needed a name stallion. Blanchita's Society Rex was our choice, but he had cost Bob Smith many thousands of dollars. Modern tax laws had allowed him to depreciate the stallion until he felt he could sell him for far less than he had paid. John hopefully worked out a plan for an investors' syndicate to buy Rex and bring him to Birmingham. The plan failed, however, and we abandoned any hope of ever owning such a horse. Then we got Denmark, a young unproven stallion. Many doubted that as a coming three-year-old, he could even get the mares in foal. But he did. Nevertheless, we had still to wait the judgment his coming foals would render on his ability as a sire.

One Saturday evening during this waiting period, we got a call from Bob Smith. He was in a rage. He had attempted turning the eccentric Rex out with some mares. Up to this time Rex had spent his time chasing his own tail and biting his own flanks in his stall. His tail was eaten off at his hocks and his sides bore many self-inflicted scars. This strange phenomenon, though rare, is not unheard of in stallions. When Bob turned Rex loose in a paddock, he went crazy. He injured a mare, ran through a fence and hurt Bob. To Bob, horses were equal with humans and thereby deserved his moral judgment. He was so incensed by Rex's behavior that he wanted to GIVE him to us if we would come get him immediately. When John told me Bob's offer, I was incredulous.

"Why, people don't give away properties worth thousands of dollars like Rex," I said. "Don't kid me about things like that!" "I'm not kidding," John assured me, "He really means it."

In the shortest preparation time we ever made for a trip we farmed the children out, hooked the horse trailer to the car and started to Nashville, before Bob could change his mind. In a few hours we were headed back to Birmingham with the great stallion, Blanchita's Society Rex, in our trailer. In our hands we held the certificate transferring to us the title to the magnificent animal. We drove home in silence, occasionally looking at each other to be sure we weren't dreaming. Was this really happening to us? Of all the great horses standing at stud, this beautiful horse had been our choice. It would have taken many thousands of dollars to buy him, and no money had miraculously dropped into our hands when we went in search for a stallion. Financial schemes we had tried to work out to buy Rex had failed. Yet, at the appointed time, God had done a greater miracle. We were bringing home our hearts' desire as a gift.

We thought about the day years before when we had borrowed a trailer to haul Mailee Dare to Nashville

to breed to Rex. We had marked that day as our entrance into the “big time” horse breeding business, for we were taking our mare to the court of one of the kings of the breed. We had chosen Rex without even seeing him because of the raves of others who had seen him and bred their mares to him and because we had seen colts that he sired. We were not disappointed when Bob led the copper chestnut stallion out of his stall that first time.

When Rex was on display, he had a way of striking a pose that made goose pimples on one’s spine. It was as if a string were attached to his poll that pulled his arched neck straight toward Heaven. When he was stretched to his fullest height, his beautiful brown eyes would look down his elegant nose at the mere earthlings before him, then his gaze would soar far over our heads, fixing on some invisible thing far in the distance, something that only horses see. The phrase “the look of eagles” was an apt description. We have seen many great animals in our day, but we have never seen a creature of such royal elegance both in his conformation and in the kingly spirit he projected so forcefully.

One of the great old horsemen of that day used to come over to Greycote farm regularly to watch Rex strike his indescribable pose. “You have to take your hat off in the presence of a horse like that,” he said, his voice quivering with emotion. Rex’s pose was so breathtaking it eluded any attempt to immortalize it. A famous horse photographer came all the way from California to take his picture. He took countless shots, but could not pin down that spine-tingling look. He used Rex’s picture on his letterhead. It was a picture of a regal horse, but one had to stand before him in the flesh to feel the “witness of his spirit.”

Such was the horse we unloaded at Heathermoor Farm. Though not a tall horse at the withers, his head, supported by his long, high neck, barely missed the top of his new stall. After dressing the wounds he had gotten in the wild stunt that had delivered him into our hands, we shut the barn door on another miracle.

All that night there was a sense of unreality as we contemplated the miracles that had befallen us. Heaven had indeed given us the best of both worlds. There was something so much more satisfying about blessings that come totally apart from the natural working of things that we knew were responses of Heaven itself to prayers, both conscious and unspoken. We pondered the heavenly significance of these things and also their romantic earthly meaning. In this world we were nobodies, but for eternity we were the children of the great King.

Yet, alas, as the Heavens are high above the earth so are His ways above ours. In this world everything is operating between diametrically opposing forces as between the blades of scissors. He has told us in His Word that regardless of the origin of the force opposing His great Good, He had chosen to use it to refine as gold the characters of his children. It is this way our relation to Him is purified and strengthened, just as Peter and Richard strengthened their bodies by straining against the force of gravity as it focused upon their bar bells. Such is what the Bible calls “the weight of Glory” and it is for another dimension that the fullness of its beauty will be revealed. So for us, too, this miracle had its testing.

The next evening Rex seemed very stiff from his antics of the day before. We decided to turn him out in the paddock to exercise. He paced up and down the fence for a moment, then, he reared as if to jump it and his hind end collapsed. For a few minutes he struggled furiously to get up. Then he lay still. We were dismayed. We didn’t know what to do but stand by helplessly.

During the afternoon he attempted to get up several times but just couldn’t seem to get any support from his hind quarters. Each time he struggled we had to remove sections of the fence to keep him from injuring himself. We called a vet whose diagnosis was a pelvis broken in three places. “There is no possible way he can ever stand,” he said. “Every time he thrashes, those bone ends damage more muscle

and any moment his spinal cord will be severed. I am sorry but there is no hope for this horse.”

We couldn't believe this was happening to our miracle. John called Auburn University's Vet School. They gave the same hopeless verdict: "Destroy the horse." By now it was late in the evening and the night in our hearts was as dark as the sky. We sat by the fallen Rex all night. His thrashings were subdued because of the tranquilizers he had been given. Morning light found the experts urging us to put the horse to sleep, but during the night the conviction kept increasing that God had not given us this horse to snatch him away from us. Then John got an idea. After calling a neighbor who had a wrecker, John made a canvas sling and lifted Rex to his feet. With the help of the wrecker he carried him to the barn. Somehow they got him into a stall and into the ingeniously designed sling John had rigged up. It allowed his feet just to touch the ground for balance, but the bulk of his weight was supported by the canvas under his belly.

Rex, because of the unnatural circumstances life had forced on him since colthood, had many eccentric habits. Yet this high-spirited, wounded animal, seeming to know in his pain that we were trying to help him, cooperated fully. He made it through the first night. The next morning his head was held high and his eyes blazed with their familiar spirit as he rested in his sling.

John kept consulting experts everywhere about what could be done for Rex. Everyone had the same gloomy advice: "Put him to sleep." But we reckoned not on human wisdom. Another miracle was not too much for the God who had worked a miracle in the first place.

The next six months put almost as much strain on our family as if there had been a seriously injured child in our midst. We had many problems to contend with: chaffing sores, sling adjustments, swellings. Most terrifying to me were the times when Rex slipped out of his sling and hung awkwardly by his neck and front legs. Sometimes we had to let him all the way down and call in all the neighbors to pull on ropes and wenches and adjust chains and straps. It was always frantic and uncertain as we wondered if more damage had been done to his pelvis. We learned something about country neighbors, though; no matter the time of night, the cold, or physical exertion necessary, they never left us until all was well again.

One time Rex slipped and John tried to straighten him by himself. The frantic stallion grabbed John by the arm and shook him as if he were a rag doll, finally throwing him against the wall. John had a mashed arm, but miraculously, it was not amputated by the stallion's powerful teeth. Except in the fright and pain of that crisis, Rex, so long known for his eccentric disposition, seemed to cooperate fully, knowing we were helping him. Whenever we approached his stall, there was the groan of wrenching chains and metal as he swung around in his harness to greet us, his eyes full of friendly fire. He enjoyed being groomed, because he couldn't roll or do anything for himself. Grooming him became harder and harder for me because all the flesh and muscle had deteriorated under his chestnut hide, leaving it stretched tightly across his protruding bones.

For a while he reminded me of a monkey swinging around on its swing, so well had he learned to manipulate his sling. Then gradually we realized that his hind legs were taking more and more of the weight of his body. Finally there came a day when we dropped the pressure of the sling off him entirely, and he stood on his own four legs. We took the sling off him for longer and longer periods at a time and moved him around the stall. At last the day came when we took him from the stall. He was the same as a person who, having been confined to bed for a long time, was beginning to walk again. John and I walked on either side of the almost-skeleton horse, balancing him with only our hands as he weaved and swayed along, his great head high over ours, never ceasing to look this way and that as if he were unaware of his pitiful condition and our support.

Very slowly Rex regained his strength. We walked him for longer and longer periods a day until he was

able to trot. The part of the pelvis that was supposed to sever the spinal chord had fused around it and his back was permanently rigid where it connected with his hind quarters. This caused him to move stiffly behind, but he could move, he could trot and he could do the one job assigned him on this earth - breed the mares. Gradually the flesh began to creep back between his bones and his hide, and after more than eight months Rex was a horse again. We had witnessed another miracle.

During Rex's convalescence our vet and friend, Barbara Benhart, had come into our lives. Encouraged by the success Rex had achieved in his sling, she and John made two slings and together saved many horses by this method.

Denmark's colts, lively sprites, came that spring. I could hardly get anything done for going out to sit in the pastures to watch them. It was a delight to squat down in the grass, so as not to frighten them, and wait for the soft fuzzy babies to come investigate me. They would stretch out their tiny, soft muzzles with the long soft whiskers curling around them and breathe baby breaths and snorts as they felt my face with their soft lips. Gradually I was able to get my hand on one's rump near his tail or back of his neck - if I could get in two or three scratches before the timid little creature darted away, I usually had them enslaved. Most foals can't resist having their backs or tails scratched. Soon their noses would be describing a circle in the air as their upper lips twitched in delight from my fingers digging into their fuzzy hide. They seemed to change every few hours at first, and I didn't want to miss one minute of what was going on.

Even though we were well satisfied with Denmark's first babies, we naturally bred the mares back to Rex, the already proven stallion. He got all his mares in foal that year.

But Rex remained a problem. Every time a horse passed his stall, he ran against the door, banging himself against the wall. He seemed to crave company and would even let me clip him without a halter in the stall. But he was only satisfied with human company. He worried himself into a frenzy when left alone. I began to see why he had become such a burden to Bob. After a year of such behavior I noticed Rex beginning to have trouble extending his left forefoot. There appeared to be an injury to the radial nerve in his shoulder from all his banging himself. We waited months, but the damage did not reverse itself. Next we noticed clear symptoms of wobbler syndrome as his hind legs began to become uncoordinated. I had studied all the vet books I could get on spinal injuries related to his condition. I concluded that the calcium deposit fusing his pelvis to his backbone had begun to grow and was pressing on his spinal column, paralyzing his hind legs. The vet confirmed my diagnosis and before long Rex was back in his sling. Once again we went to the barn each time with the suspense of whether he would be up or down weighing upon us. His flesh wasted away again, but his proud head never lowered and his fiery eyes never dimmed. Then one day we found him standing with his head down. John and I looked knowingly at each other. That was it for Rex. The wrecked body was telling on the proud spirit. It was time to release him from his prison, to let the noble life that had shown through the once sleek hide go back to the God who made him. We called the vet. With one injection of his marvelous drug, Rex's spirit soared instantly free, and the dried up carcass hanging from the rafters by the sling held little resemblance to the gorgeous creature we had first seen at Greycote Farm.

Rex died at thirteen, a very young age for a breeding stallion's worth to be truly proved. His colts had not long been coming to the show rings of America. Rex had been bred very lightly, owing to his always unusual circumstance. He had never been highly advertised as most successful breeding horses are. His colts had belonged to individuals. They never carried behind them the weight of a farm attempting to push a stallion by giving every advantage to his offering. Two days after Rex died, the editor of the Saddle and Bridle, magazine publisher of the famous Sire rating of the American Saddle bred, called us from Missouri. The stallions' get are given points according to the size and prestige of the horse show they competed in and the honors won. The stallions are ranked according to the total points accumulated

by their get that year. Out of more than one hundred stallions ranked in the United States, our miracle horse had ranked fifth! We were amazed and elated, but our joy was short lived when we told Mr. Thompson that Rex had died two days before. He sadly informed us that it was the policy to include only living stallions on that published rating and Rex had not had enough colts, he said, to show up on the deceased sire rating. We were so disappointed that the world would not be advised of the largeness of the miracle of Heathermoor Farms' Rex. As if to make up to us a little for our disappointment, when the Deceased Sire rating finally was tabulated Rex came out with an amazing ninth!

Most people never knew that one of the finest sires of the American Saddle Horse breed, the gift to a couple of nobodies who believed in prayer, died in Leeds, Alabama. He produced only one crop of foals here for us, but most of them became the replacement brood mares for our original herd and their cross with Denmark is proving very successful.

CHAPTER XIX – SPRINGTIME

Springtime on Heathermoor Farm was a continuous worship experience to me every time I walked through the yard. Every tree burst into full bloom at the same time, all but the giant elms, whose bare black branches showed the tiniest sign of the promised life. There were all shades of pink, from deep watermelon to pale pink, nearly white. The glorious trees formed a cloud all around the house and yard. While the trees were blooming, we had green grass instead of the usual splotched green of winter weeds against the brown of summer grass. As if touched by a fairy's wand, the grass came out suddenly in emerald green. It was like a rich new carpet under the many pink clouds of the varieties of crabapples, cherry and peach trees, the red bud and the white pear trees. Even the "stink" tree by the "little house" burst into white glow at the same time. Every morning I awoke in my room to the concert of the birds. It seemed there were over a hundred birds singing a symphony to this glorious celebration of life! No matter what my mood or how I felt, I never woke up to this site without a sense of worship. I always took a tour out by the secret garden, trying to inhale, to drink in mightily this beauty before I went to the barn each morning.

As spring gave way to summer, the birds continued to sing, and plenty of rain assured many lush shades of green to cover everything. The variety of the different shades of green, of one shrub against another, against a background of trees, seemed like a symphony of God's glow. I never took any of this beauty for granted. The great variety and placement of trees, the river rippling over the rocks by the bridge, the lay of the house, the rolling pastures decorated with limestone outcropping, the plan of the gardens always spoke to me of the Author of all beauty waiting somewhere in another dimension.

Since God is the Author of beauty and so much of it was here, it was quite natural for the children to think and feel beyond that beauty to its Source. Of the boys, Peter seemed to have the keenest appreciation for beauty. He knew where every nest was, where the land turtles laid their eggs, and where the blue heron nested in the woods. He watched the beavers build their dam in the lake and saw the rare wild turkey. He found the fawn's little body by the entrance of Dry Branch, which flowed into the lake. He knew where the first wild rose blooms were and picked them with the dew still on them to take to his first sweetheart at school. When, in his teenage years, it seemed to me that he had not a thought in the world of anything but football and weight-lifting and perpetual physical "violence," he would disappear for a while, and I would hear him exclaim when he appeared again, "I don't see how God made the world so beautiful."

The first foal born on the farm that spring was the offspring of Sparkling Blade, a lovely fine-boned mare that Mike had first shown in a pleasure class as a three-year-old, much against John's will. He had rightly argued that a ten-year-old boy and a three-year-old filly were scarcely a ripe team for a horse show. In spite of John's opposition, Mike's and my enthusiasm had mounted as we groomed Sparkle for the class. John was right and our project ended in dismay. Terrified by the music, the young mare bolted to the

center of the ring, ran over the ringmaster and was excused in disgrace. Finally, as a six-year-old, Love exhibited Sparkle to first place in the first show of the season. Now Sparkle was soon to be a mother.

It takes a mare something over eleven months to produce a foal. The last few uncertain weeks seem like an eternity as “the watched pot never boils.” Every morning and evening we marched out to the front pasture and all knelt down to peer underneath Sparkle, eagerly looking for the swelling of her udder, which would be the sign that our wait was nearly over. And every day we left disappointed. She was not yet “making a bag.” But finally the great day arrived and the udder began to swell. We knew the time was near, perhaps a week away, for as yet the wax had not begun to hang from the teats. The appearance of wax usually signified the event would occur within twenty-four hours.

The next morning when we made our check on Sparkle, my heart froze. She had obviously foaled in the night, but there was no baby in sight. The much-trusted sign had failed to appear. Nervously Sparkle trotted to the banks of the lake and neighed loudly. Receiving no answer, she loped back to the other mares. We began a frantic search of the limestone spotted pasture. It was raining, but we didn’t even notice. As we searched behind every tree and along both sides of the fence, Sparkle kept returning to her vigil by the lake, calling for her little one who would never answer.

We finally found the spot where she had foaled about ten feet from the lake bank. The foal, in its thrashing to get to its feet, had apparently fallen down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

We were sick with disappointment. The colt we had so eagerly awaited for months we would never see. Our hearts grew doubly heavy as we watched the grieving mare who remained at the spot where she had last seen her firstborn. The poor mare was bewildered that there was no response to her frantic cries. About two weeks later the boys fished the tiny skeleton of the foal out of the spillway where it finally emerged.

Yet, in the weeks to come, Love and her brothers often had a chance to see the careful planning of the Great Designer as a foal was born and, on occasion, they shared this learning experience with their friends.

Horses seem to prefer having their foals at night, in strictest privacy. We watched them only from a distance, if at all, just in case that rare time should come when a mare needs help. For when she does, it is usually a matter of life and death for the mare and her baby.

We had been up all one night with Heather, a young mare about to have her first colt. Since it was very early in the year and still quite cold outside, we planned to have her foal inside. There is much more danger inside the stall because of the chance the foal will be crushed against the wall; so we planned to watch her carefully.

The next morning just about the time the children’s driving group arrived, Heather began to labor. Love invited the whole group down to the barn to watch the production. The helpless driver gave in to the children’s demands, and they poured into the barn to watch this seldom-seen miracle, as we tried to make the eager group aware of the mare’s need for privacy.

About fifteen minutes later, when Heather sniffed her newborn filly, eight little angels were hovering above, heads hanging out of the hay loft, feet hooked over the rafters, arms clinging to the highest beams on top of her stall. All were hushed and awed, sufficiently reverent at the miracle of life they had witnessed.

CHAPTER XX -- LESSONS

Since John worked in town those days, and I often depended on my children for adult work and responsibility; each in his own way always rose to the occasion.

The big white barn with its red trim at Heathermoor Farm was not filled with horses as it is now, but residing in it were the first four yearlings that had been foaled on the farm. As I came home with the driving group one sunny afternoon, it seemed we all had a mind to go directly to the barn before we unloaded books and changed into work clothes. With horror I looked in on the “Dresden” mare, Doll’s yearling we called Spider. He was down with his hind foot caught in his halter and his neck bent around almost to his stomach. The circulation to his head had been cut off resulting in the head swelling to a huge, grotesque size. His eyes were swollen shut and his nostrils were almost closed.

I was certain his neck was broken and trembled in revulsion and helplessness. I wished John were there. With his physical strength and coolness he would know what to do. But he wasn’t there and it was up to me, a woman with her young sons, to make the decision and take the necessary action. We cut the halter, freeing his hind leg and head from each other. The colt’s head flopped uncontrollably and grotesquely at the end of his long neck. Steeling myself against the horror of the situation, Mike and I grabbed the convulsive head and held it securely, not knowing what else to do. Finally, the colt got to its feet, still unable to control his head and neck, the boys and I held the monstrous head in our arms as the colt braced his legs to support his body.

We held and held. Our arms grew weak with fatigue, our hearts sick with the seeming hopelessness of the situation, when Love and her friend Louise appeared in the stall. “Mama, Spider is going to be all right,” she announced. “How do you know?” I asked. “Louise and I have been lying in the hay praying. We asked God to make the clouds form a cross if Spider would get well, and He did,” she said matter-of-factly. Louise echoed an affirmation. Although Spider had the “big head” for a few days, in a couple of hours he was supporting his neck, in a week he was good as new!

This near-tragedy averted by children’s prayers gave me insight to what Jesus meant when He said of those who sought to enter His Kingdom, “Except ye come as a little child...” Love and Louise simply trusted that God heard their prayer. And He did.

We all shared the responsibility of the farm. We divided it up into chores and made each child responsible for one area. Mike did the feeding and haying in the barn. Richard fed the pasture horses. Peter did the long, boring drudgery of watering. The boys did their jobs before school in the morning and late at night after football practice. Love’s chore was washing dishes. Love hated her dish washing responsibility. Every night as she growled over her burdensome chore, she vowed that she would use paper plates when she grew up. Then she decided she would marry a rich man and just throw away the dirty dishes. Finally, she decided on women’s liberation and demanded that she get to swap chores with the boys. Her brothers thought this was a great idea. They recognized that her job took only a few minutes in the evening and that theirs was twice a day, rain or shine, hot or cold. Feeding and watering the animals took lifting. John’s gallantry made the thought of his daughter wrestling with heavy feed sacks unthinkable. But Love only wailed at him that he was being stubborn.

I prevailed upon John to go ahead and let them swap for a while, assuring him that very soon Love would be back at her dishes. For a few days Love appeared at the barn on schedule, and with the help of her little brother, Peter, managed to unload the feed into the wheelbarrow. Quite soon when dark and cold and physical effort took its toll, she quietly began to respect her older brothers’ masculine capabilities. Realizing that there was no use arguing with their daddy about who was going to do what, Mike and Richard reluctantly returned the dish washing chore to Love.

After supper dishes were cleared away and the children had gone to their rooms to study, John and I would return to the barn to look after a sick horse or shoe one. Horseshoeing is a very necessary and very expensive part of horse-raising. To conserve finances John learned to shoe and did a pretty fair job of getting special shoes made. Often we were up late at night as John plied his farriering trade. How exhausted and cold we would be as we left the barn so many times late at night. As we closed the big barn doors and looked across the quarter-mile of sloping pasture, we would see the many lights twinkling from the windows of our mansion on the hill. How secure and handsome it looked, sprawled elegantly across the crest of the hill with giant elms like huge black sentinels guarding it. Inside was warmth and beauty, security, nourishment and rest. And it was all the gift of our Heavenly Father.

We saw the bareness of winter. When the wind ruffled the long coats of the horses, they scarcely resembled the sleek shiny creatures of summer. Long hair hung from their chins and legs and sometimes icicles clattered from their tails and fetlocks as they walked. This was the time when the “men were separated from the boys” as to who really liked country living, for our work went on as usual, even though we would have preferred to stay holed up by the fireplace in the living room. John always kept a fire going and the boys kept us supplied with firewood. In fact when they were older, they sold firewood to make money.

Sometimes when the water pipes froze, from the house to the barn we hauled water in fifty gallon drums in the back of the pickup truck. It always seemed so futile because so much splashed out as the truck lurched over the road to the barn. Mostly it was numbness of fingers and noses and toes we had to contend with as we poured and hauled feed to forty-five horses.

We agonized over the stands of winter rye which grew so slowly or not at all. In fact, it retreated before the grazing animals. It seemed impossible that soon, in another season, this vanishing carpet of green would come leaping from the earth again, overrunning everything in its path. Then it could not be held in check by the hungry, grazing horses, so the boys had to attack it with tractor and bush-hog.

The dead black limbs of the trees would burst forth in flowering glory, rejoicing that the night of winter was over. The mares would drop their wry winter hair to be adorned in sleek, seal-like coats of spring. The miracle of birth would be everywhere as little foals and calves greeted the world in amazement. All this wonder of the world would be registered on the clean slate of their newly awakened awareness. Eyes that had never seen, lungs that had never breathed, legs that had never walked and ears that had never heard would suddenly be thrust into the fullness of life, so different from the human babies or puppies who grow gradually into an awareness of the external world.

The barren mares would take new hopes that now even they could re-create themselves, and they hurried to the fence where the stallion “paws the earth, and rejoices in his strength, and his snorting is something to hear.” (Job: 39:19) As we watched this recurring miracle, we often thought what Heaven must be like if earth was so full of beauty and awe. Did not the whole creation each spring eloquently preach of the Resurrection?

In summer the great elms hurled a canopy of green high above our beautiful house and its gardens, our oasis in the desert, our cool green shelter from the blazing heat of the summer sun on the fields. As I see it in my imagination beckoning to us in the distance, I am quite certain that God intended this as an analogy of the even more rest, security and blessing, also freely given us by Him in the Heaven for which we were created. We saw the cycle of life repeated often. From an early age the children were acquainted with many of the secrets of God’s creation.

They knew the wonder of birth and often had a chance to see the careful planning of the Great Designer as a foal was born. What a miracle to know that every little detail of the little horse’s entrance into this

world had a purpose. He came packed in the shock absorbent cushion of water, his sharp little hoofs padded with a substance that looked like fish meat so he would not kick a hole in his first safe resting place. He came into the world head first and even his struggles and falls were designed to strengthen his muscles and break the umbilical cord on the “dotted line.” It was so tempting to want to cut him free and put him on his long spidery legs, but if we interfered and cut the cord (instead of allowing it to break roughly thereby crushing the ends together) it could cause a hemorrhage. His thrashing was necessary to tone up his muscles and get the blood circulating so he would be prepared to run with his mother in just a few minutes if necessary. But we learned not to interfere. How like our own thrashing around in the Christian life. We want God to make it easy for us, but He knows that struggling is good for us. It produces character that enables us to meet this life with confidence. In James 1:2 we read: “Is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is in full bloom then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.”

We saw the animals die, some as babies, and sometimes we had to intervene and end their suffering. But all of this is just a part of this fallen creation that is travailing in pain waiting to be released from its bondage to decay when Jesus comes back. The children learned to accept these things. The deserted bodies of the dead animals gave mute evidence that they, the personalities that we knew and loved, were no longer there and so we returned their bodies to the earth.

Most of my time was spent outdoors caring for the 45 horses God had given us. As I walked across the green pastures and watched the bright-eyed young animals so drunk with the gladness of life, my heart swelled in worship. For my God, who sometimes seemed so awesome and majestic, the god of justice and judgment, was also the God who created a foal, a playful kitten, or a friendly puppy with its innate love of man. It was God who gave the young this overwhelming, frolicking joy in the miracle of life. It was the curse of sin on the creation which introduced the “bondage of decay” that gradually dulls this sense of wonder. What will it be like when the curse is lifted and the exquisite joy of the young is eternal? I realized so joyfully that Heaven would not be a strange place to me, not at all, for the creation was indeed constantly declaring to me the Glory of God!

CHAPTER XXI - SUMMERTIME

In many ways, the next few years were the “summertime” of our lives. Even though all of us had many responsibilities to uphold, the children never lacked for fun times. The wide open spaces, the lack of necessary concern for the “neighbors,” all produced freedom from tension. Our backyard extended far, and the other farms and mountains beyond held endless adventure. Our house and farm became a haven for friends’ children who lived in “stricter” circumstances. What happy memories those years bring back to me! The last days of childhood rolled on with their innocence and absences of the heavy responsibility that adolescence brings.

The “Key Hole,” which is what the children called the little spring-fed pond in one front pasture, was always a favorite place for them to play. In a rain storm it overflowed half of the pasture. As the water receded, there would be little puddles left here and there. The boys would “fish” in these little puddles. We just admired their vivid imagination until one day Richard brought me some fish he had caught. We were amazed. Then another time the Key Hole flooded and people were picking up fish in buckets out in the flooded pasture! Our neighboring farmer picked up forty fish! Apparently the fish rode the underground stream that fed the pond and surfaced in floods!

In the summer floods the same pond became the favorite place to race bareback horses through. The children reveled in the great splash made by the galloping hoofs and the thrill of the powerful lunge as the horses, feet no longer touching bottom, were swimming. Peter topped all the feats at the Key Hole when

as a teenager he drove the Standardbred trotter at racing speed through the waters with two young ladies as passengers in the two-wheeled cart. He was standing up, driving like Ben Hur in a chariot race, while the girls wildly clutched the sides of the careening chariot, the splattered mud giving them all the appearance of bronzed images.

The lake in the other front pasture, although much bigger, was never the attraction the little pond was. It had taken its toll of livestock. First Sparkle's foal, then a calf, then a fawn - for many years we just left it to the beavers. Then it came into its own as a swimming hole.

Franny, Love's close friend since our days on Heathermoor Road in Mountain Brook, spent a great deal of time here. Whenever she came to the farm, she brought both her pony, Boogaloo, her bird in a cage and sometimes an Irish setter. We always picked her up, since we had a horse trailer. I can still see them in the dusky evening as we opened the door to the trailer. Instead of unloading in the usual way, Franny, bird cage in hand, pushed by the pony's hind quarters and slipped a leg over her back. With one hand holding the bird cage she pushed the halter from the pony's head. Boogaloo half backed and half leaped from the trailer...off they went! Bridleless. Boogaloo would run like a wild Indian pony with Franny still holding the bird cage and the other hand waving in the breeze, the dogs yapping at the pony's heels. Boogaloo thundered in the direction of the house as Franny announced to the universe, "Here I am everybody!"

We didn't have to import all of our company. The Willoughbys had moved a mile down the road a year before we had. We had met them formally the afternoon Love broke her leg. They graciously took our three boys in for the night while John and I were at the hospital. From then on their four children and our four were the best of friends, growing up "in a litter" as Betty described it.

Debra was the oldest Willoughby. She was a wide-eyed beauty with rich golden blonde hair. When she braided it in pigtails, she reminded me of the fairy tale "Gretel" with the thick, golden ropes hanging over her shoulders. In high school Debra captured all the titles for girls', Favorite, Beauty, etc. She was Mike's age but Love and Debbie and Franny's close friend. Debra was a strong, very positive character. She rode "Cream Puff", a silver-grey Shetland with white mane and tail.

"Cream Puff" was equally as self-assured as Debra. As long as she was on him, his will bowed only to hers, which was stronger. But whenever "Cream Puff" was subject only to the usual control of horse flesh -ropes, fences, barns - his stout heart could overcome them all. He refused to spend the night away from home. Five-foot fences were nothing to him, nor were barns and stalls. Windows were made to be jumped through, and doorknobs fit his mouth perfectly. Distance was no problem either. His homing instinct was flawless. Every morning when the other ponies were obediently submitting to the fences and stalls where their mistresses had left them, Cream Puff was back home in the Willoughby barn, inside the gate and fence which were only meant to keep the other horses out.

Our cherished childhood dream had come true as Love and Debbie, daughter of my lifelong friend, Susu, were growing up together .having the same adventures with horses as their mothers had shared as girls. For a year Susu and her doctor husband, Bob Denny, had lived with us on Heathermoor Farm in the little tenant house by the barn. During this time Bob was moving his medical practice from Talladega to Birmingham, and they were finding and buying the farm just beyond the Willoughby's. Debbie was their only child, an unusual little girl - very small, with black eyes and dark brown hair, and a very self-sufficient character. She was about like Mike in her discipline and dedication to the goals she set for herself. Taking care of and training the horses seemed to be her central love. She became the finest horsewoman of them all, and many of our horses owe their good foundation to Debbie's skills.

In those days Debbie rode Lady, a large Welsh pony mare whose hair grew so long in the winter that her

whole body looked like fields of grain ruffled by the wind when she ran - or like a giant quiver of jelly! Of course, Love rode her beloved Madame. Although Madame had been a star in the show ring, she resorted to her undisciplined ways on the trail.

It amazes me that we could have been so naive as to the children's activities. Many of those nights, Love and Debbie and Franny and Debra (and sometimes the boys) would climb out of their windows, catch their ponies and ride away. They rode, bareback, far and wide through the woods, down the country road galloping through people's yards. It seemed the most fun was to excite sleeping families, then roar away into the protection of the darkness when the lights flashed on in the houses. They skinny-dipped in the river at times, thrilling in the lunging bodies of the ponies as they splashed through the Little Cahaba's murky meandering waters. Sometimes they would lie down in the middle of Highway 119, which passed in front of the farm, enjoying the warmth of the pavement against their bare feet and faces. The biggest delight was the freedom of enjoying things forbidden by propriety in the daytime, the feeling of being free from adult interference.

The things the other children remembered most was the eternal trouble Love was having with hardheaded Madame. Every time they galloped through the woods in the darkness, Madame would run off in the opposite direction. Soon the others would hear a crash of limbs and crushed brush as Madame collided with the forest and then Love's frustrated screech, "Madame, you idiot!" Somehow Love always forgave the pony for her insurrections.

Four different ponies of doubtful value - but four little girls of unusual spiritual depth and strength of character. The lessons they learned through the years together with the animals and the great out-doors were as permanently etched on their characters as the ponies' sweat stains on their jeans.

CHAPTER XXII -- BENNY AND HEIDI

One evening after we had eaten dinner with a friend down the road, she took us on a tour of her barns. We were especially interested in her beautiful Suffolk sheep. As we got ready to leave, she reached down into the resting mass of woolly bodies and lifted out a little ram lamb. "Take him to the children," she said.

Looking forward to their delight we drove home with "Benny" nestled in my lap. We put the nubby-coated little lamb into the bed with Mike, who was sound asleep. Benny's lonesome "bu ah-ah" startled Mike awake, but he was pleased enough with this "real live" stuffed toy to make worth-while all the trouble that followed.

When we introduced Benny to our dogs, he was not a bit afraid of them, nor they of him. So he grew up thinking he was a dog. He followed them off on a hunting spree only to be left behind and lost the first day. We remembered the Bible stories of the good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine and continued to look for the one lost sheep. We looked until there was nowhere else to look. I had given up and was walking down by the river when I heard a little bleat above the rushing of the water. There was Benny perched on the top of a rock that was barely raising its head above the foamy water. I don't know how he got there, but we had to wade knee-deep into the swift current to rescue the little lamb. I don't think Benny was as dumb as most sheep because after that, the dogs never got away from him. When they rushed out to bark at a cow or to greet people, Benny rushed with them. When the dogs flopped out panting on the patio, Benny knelt beside them chewing his cud.

Mike decided he wanted a goat. He located some for ten dollars a piece and "you catch." On the way back from Sunday School we drove him down to the goat farm to "catch" his goat. After catching a young doe, he struggled to get her into the back of our station wagon. John made him take off his Sunday

clothes so that he wouldn't get goat smell on them, and Mike rode back to Leeds in his underwear with "Heidi" clamped between his knees.

Heidi and Benny and the dogs took right to each other. They seemed to think they were all the same species - dogs, I believe. Heidi joined Benny running with the dogs, charging at cows or chasing strange dogs and rushing up to meet humans. They also, just as dogs all seem to do, had spontaneous ideas about the comforts that a house held and were ever trying to come in the house to see if they were right.

The week we went on our stallion hunting tour, the boys spent the night out. Susu and Debbie and Love were to come up from Talladega to stay with them the next day. When the Dennys arrived at the house that we had left immaculate, the den door was ajar. Rushing out of the house to meet them were the three dogs and Benny and Heidi. They were feeling particularly happy because they had just had a wonderful evening and morning of not being dogs, goats or sheep but humans in their own house! They had slept on the beds, wet on the beds, and rearranged the furniture, especially the lamps which they thought looked better on the floor. Poor Susu and Debbie and Love walked into the chaos the animals had left and had to set it all in order before the boys came home and, I am thankful to say, before we came home!

Heidi went on to have a career in the theater when she and Mike answered an ad in the paper to try out for the "goat" part in "Tea House of the August Moon." Heidi got the part, and for several Sunday afternoons I had to take Mike, and his protégé Heidi to rehearsal. Finally the week came for the performance. Since she would be "acting" every evening and we could not bring her in from Leeds and back every night, the director of the play arranged for Heidi to be sheltered in the Birmingham zoo. We were given tickets for the final performance. Dressed in our Sunday best, we all went to the beautiful old "Temple Theater" in downtown Birmingham to watch Heidi perform. We were invited backstage after the performance to meet the cast and retrieve Heidi. Later a very proud Cowart family left the elegant theater, leading a great lady of the theater, who happened to be a goat, down the streets of Birmingham.

Benny, being a male, developed along different lines. Just as Benny thought he was a dog, so Peter at times thought himself a ram. He would get down on all fours and butt heads with the lamb and tease him unmercifully. This wakened a sleeping instinct in Benny that whispered to him that he really was a sheep instead of a dog. Not only that, but he was a young ram! Benny began to grow some little horns, which he tested regularly on Peter. Finally, it seemed his one goal in life was no longer to be a dog but to settle accounts with Peter. He was growing fast now, a lot faster than nine-year-old Peter, and he was really developing his "punch." He would flatten his ears against his head, roll his eyes around a time or two, drop his head, and leap off the ground, colliding like an All-American tackle with whatever his target was. By now he could knock a child Peter's size flat on the ground with one of his leaps.

Peter had taken on more than he could handle at this point. He could seldom go out the den or the back door because Benny would be waiting on him, so he developed another method of leaving the house and going to the barn to do his chores. Since his room was upstairs he climbed out the window and walked across the patio roof, then took to the trees. He could go through the trees to the white board fence, which he became quite adept at walking. He left the "heights" only when there was a car or some other shelter he could beat Benny to.

Benny seemed to have eyes only for Peter for a while, and the rest of us were safe. One day, Love coming up from the barn, met Benny as he was stalking Peter, who was walking the fence toward the barn. Benny and Love stopped, staring hard at each other. Love picked up a heavy board lying by the fence. Benny flattened his ears and rolled his eyes, signaling an attack. Just as he left the ground for his charge, Love brought the two-by-four down hard right across his head, fracturing his little horns. The stunned sheep stood with legs spread, shaking his head and looking in amazement at Love. For a while he went back to stalking only Peter. Things were deteriorating, however, for although he never charged

anybody bigger than Peter, we began to have increasing numbers of small casualties. Every time a friend came calling with a smaller child, it wasn't long before we would hear a shriek and would run out to find Benny materialized out of nowhere, arrogantly eyeing a flattened child.

Peter used his "battering ram" to help him settle accounts with little people he was at enmity with by luring them into Benny's range. One smart alec youngster whom Peter disliked got his tooth knocked out by Benny right on our porch, much to Peter's delight. One bitter enemy even found himself locked in a stall with Benny.

One day Peter attempted to leave the house without alerting Benny. He sneaked around to the garage where his bicycle was and started riding up the long paved drive to the mailbox. Above the wind in his ears, he heard the clatter of hooves on the concrete and looked back to find Benny in hot pursuit. He pedaled harder, but the now seventy-pound ram overtook him, charged his bike from the rear and bent the fender, charged again and blew out the tire. Forever afterwards, the wheels of the bike wobbled badly out of line, damaged irreparably.

About then Benny started taking on bigger and bigger people, and we were forced to give him to a sheep farmer. Years later I heard the ram had gotten so dangerous only one man armed with a two-by-four could go into his field.

CHAPTER XXIII - THE ENEMY

Vicky was a chestnut mare that I had eyed since she was a colt playing in the field of a farm in Tennessee. She grew up to be very much like her dam, a famous show horse since her yearling days. Her dam, Denmark's Vixen, was well named, for she was almost vicious toward anyone except for her owner and our good friend, Bob Smith. The elder Vixen, a royally bred lady herself, had been mated with Blanchita's Society Rex, who was later to become our miracle stallion. Their young daughter, therefore, was heiress to the best that royal blood could promise. It seemed that fate was jealous of something so especially endowed as young Vixen and determined to even the score with the chestnut filly. In her first two years she was dealt a series of devastating blows. But the trials only proved the gold of Vicky's brave spirit, and she overcame them all. Her first bout was with a severe case of colitis. The veterinarian who attended her gave Vicky up for dead. When she struggled back to life, he declared she was the only horse he ever knew to survive the terrible disease.

Later she was left for dead by sunstroke only to miraculously recover. The doctor declared she would be so weakened by these assaults on her health that she could never stand the strain of training required of a show horse. So, fairly early in her life, Vicky became a brood mare. They were happy circumstances indeed that caused our paths and Vicky's to cross again when she was six years old. Soon she came to live at Heathermoor Farm joining Denmark's harem.

We eagerly, somewhat nervously, awaited Vicky's foaling time in the spring, for we remembered the vet's gloomy prophecy about the delicateness of her constitution. One overcast morning I noticed Vicky lying down in the paddock that surrounded the barn. At first I gave it no thought as I went about my duties, but an hour went by and Vicky got up and moved but once. I looked at her closely to see if any of the immediate signs of foaling had appeared and they hadn't. She didn't seem upset. And she was not going through the usual prefoaling routine of nervously walking and constantly getting up and down. She just lay quietly. Later that morning, when it became apparent that the mare was having some sort of trouble, I called the vet.

We had seen many foals born in our experience, or at least we had been around where they were expected

and then safely delivered by their own dams. Yet, only once had we encountered a difficult birth among our mares or even our neighbors' mares. Mares just foal quite easily and efficiently by themselves. But all the books warned that when trouble struck with a mare it was nearly always fatal to mare or foal, and the quickest action was necessary.

Our vet, Barbara Benhart, arrived. She was quite unlike the stereotype idea of a "horse doctor," for this small, pretty, and lady-like person limited her practice to horses. Small and delicate as she appeared she was an able doctor. She seemed afraid of nothing and able to handle any horse with the help of her black bag of magical tranquilizers and anesthetics.

On examining Vicky, she announced that Vicky was indeed in trouble. Her foal's head was bent backwards, instead of lying on the front legs and pointed out the birth canal as it should be. It was a very difficult presentation. By now Vicky was in hard labor. The bag of water had burst and the two little feet were in view. Vicky was now down, stretched out on her side, in the typical position of a foaling mare. Barbara stretched out on her stomach on the ground behind the mare and tried to push the foal back between contractions, so that she could find and grasp its nostrils with her fingers and pull the bent head around. In a little while it became evident that the foal's neck was broken by the hard muscular contractions that battered it against the mare's pelvis bones. A neighboring farmer came to help, but the contractions of the mare fought against all efforts to push her foal back enough to straighten its neck. By now Vicky had gone into shock and had lost consciousness. It seemed fate had finally overcome all the promise of her illustrious heritage. Then, with the help of a "calf-pulling winch" and another vet, Barbara delivered a nearly dead Vicky of a beautiful filly - its future already erased by death.

We administered drugs and glucose intravenously to the unconscious mare. As I sat there on the tender new spring grass by her chestnut body and held the glucose bottle as it dripped slowly into her veins. I was overcome with depression. It seemed such a sickening waste. All that was involved in producing that little dead body that lay behind me on the grass came to mind: the mating of the mare and stallion at just the right time, the miracle of conception that had produced in eleven months from two microscopic germs this fully-formed young horse.

Not only had it grown but it had been "packaged" so beautifully for safety during the incubation period in the shock absorbent water "bed", the "padding" around the little hooves lest they poke a hole in the cellophane bag this miracle package was wrapped in. The wonderful timing system had begun the birth process exactly when "the cake was ready to come from the oven" and had filled the mare's udder with the colostrum which would immunize the colt against the diseases in the neighborhood it entered. There was the warm pale milk waiting behind the colostrum and the wonderful "knowing" that would tell the mare to turn and lick this wet little body and love it and endure the first ticklish torment while it poked its nose around her belly and her udder, searching for the teat it "knew" would be there. And there was the fierce maternal instinct that would turn the mare into a fighting machine if any other creature approached the foals rubber-legged body, which she had never seen moments before. All these miracles and countless more could only speak of a Designer, a marvelous engineer, chemist, physicist and even more - a Personality, because into all these precious mechanisms that made up the horse machine was "life." A part of this life was "love", the warm and tender, almost bewildered excitement this mare would have for her new baby. But with all this perfect planning, something had gone so wrong. This mare lay unconscious, scarcely breathing, and this foal, so marvelously produced, was dead, already in the grips of another sinister process which was dissolving what had so wonderfully been brought about - a reversal of creation as the little body began its return to the dust.

There could be no moral judgment on this animal, I reasoned, for she was incapable of choosing between good and evil, obeying only the laws of nature marvelously programmed into her genes. Vicky was just a helpless victim of some horrible cosmic mistake. Whose was it? If God had made the plan had He also

made the mistake? For indeed something had gone so very wrong. Then I remembered a verse from the Bible I had learned years ago, “For we know that things of nature like animals and plants suffer in sickness and death as they wait for the great event. On that day thorns, thistles, sin and death and decay, will disappear.” (Romans 8:22)

What I was seeing in the tragedy of Vicky’s fate was the result of the age-old curse on all the creation brought on by man’s sin. For the whole universe had become violently bent, twisted from its original perfect purpose when man first wrenched himself away from God and gave ear to the Devil’s lies. It was to undo this curse that the Redeemer had died. This creation that I loved so well was waiting on “tiptoe” with me for that great day when “death and decay will disappear” and we would share together the glorious freedom from sin which God’s children will enjoy. Another piece of the puzzle of life suddenly fell into its place.

The glucose bottle had dripped empty and there was still no stir from Vicky. We covered her body with a sheet to protect it from the increasing heat as the sun headed for high noon. There was nothing else we could do; so we headed to the house for some much-needed nourishment.

Our meal was over. We went to check on Vicky, but the sheet draped mound was not on the ground where we left it. To our amazement Vicky was across the pasture grazing with the other horses. We had removed the foal’s dead body. Since Vicky had never seen it, her maternal instinct had not been set into motion and the tragedy for her didn’t exist -- another of the Creator’s miracles.

Once again Vicky had faced death and won. Apparently the evil forces gave up on Vicky then, for three other foals arrived with beautiful ease to both mother and child!

CHAPTER XXIV -- THE LAST DAYS OF CHILDHOOD

At first they were too young to be boy-and-girl conscious -- the four Willoughbys, four Cowarts, Debbie, Denny and Franny. Together they discovered the joys of camping out, the older ones often sharing their sleeping bags with the younger. How many hours they labored improving “Camp Lumberjack”! Huge stacks of firewood marked its boundaries, and stones formed the fireplace which supported their grill for cooking.

Many a summer night the elder Willoughbys accompanied by John and me drove across the farm in a car, then hiked toward the flickering campfire to find the children tucked in their bedrolls, the patient ponies tethered nearby, and often our huge dog, Rip, sharing a blanket with someone. Perhaps it was all the nights out under the stars with only the woods creatures for companions that caused these little girls to grow so close to God.

Camping became a regular way of life with the girls and boys until they grew too big to camp together. Spend-the-night parties and outside friends made a tremendous task of chaperoning the large groups spread across miles of wooded darkness. We solved the problem (we thought) by putting the girls and their visitors a mile down the road in the Willoughby’s new barn loft, while the boys camped across the river at Old Camp Lumberjack. With about one-and-a-half miles of woods, fields, several barbed wire and wooden fences and the meandering Little Cahaba River between them, they were safe from indiscretion. The only proper exit was the narrow farm road which turned into our driveway that came close to the kitchen door. John and I were relaxed in our house, feeling confident that everything was under control, when John Willoughby drove up and asked where the boys were. “Why, they are settled down across the river,” we said. “I think they are down at my house,” he said. John Cowart leaped into the car with John Willoughby and they sped down the road to the Willoughby’s barn. But there was only a hayloft of giggling girls who answered the fathers’ anxious, “What’s going on?” with a snickering,

“Nothing.”

Back raced the bewildered fathers down the half mile of highway to the long driveway and then the bumpy road to the river bridge, which they crossed. They bounced along the pasture to the edge of the woods where the boys were camped. All the boys were quietly sitting around the campfire sipping soup as if they had been there all along. How could they have been down at the Willoughby's barn? Although John Willoughby had thought he heard their voices, the smothered giggles of the girls testified that no strange males had been around. They had definitely not passed our house on the road. Yet somehow they had covered a great distance on foot and had outrun the car!

We learned the secret sometime later. When John W. had been attracted to the barn by the girls' giggles and the commotion, the boys had raced across the road to the little Mount Hebron Church up the hill overlooking the Willoughby's dark brick house. The old cemetery climbed on up the hill behind it and spread to the church's left. Its quaint entrance was beneath an old-fashioned arch that bore its name, "Mt. Hebron." It always reminded me of Bible days, and certainly the life and culture of the little church were the last of a disappearing country way of life. There the boys had hidden as John W. drove down to our house. The preacher who lived next to the church heard the boys and, fearing vandals, fired into the air with a shotgun.

Realizing the game was getting very serious, the boys had bolted as the crow flies in the direction of Camp Lumberjack. The repeated shots of the gun had discharged adrenaline to a remarkable degree, and fences and river and woods and fields had been passed as if they were standing still. As they recounted it later, Doug fell over a fence and landed on his knees, Peter was quite sure he must call on the Almighty to help. Imagination running wild, they decided the prayer was answered by the surge of power he experienced when he imagined he felt the buckshot from the preacher's gun peppering his hide. Grabbing Doug's arm, they sped after the older boys.

The adults couldn't prove their case that night, but perhaps if the fathers had gone a little closer, the pounding hearts and heaving chests would have given the nonchalant campers away.

Horse shows came into our lives when Love was only six years old. John decided to take Mike, who was nine, to a little horse show held in a ballpark by the fairgrounds. He borrowed the company garbage truck, a pickup with a removable body, to transport Finance. Mike rode him in the "English Pleasure" class. His riding habit was his Sunday suit. He rode beautifully and Finance performed perfectly. Triumphantly he came away with the red ribbon. From that Sunday afternoon excursion, John was "hooked." He was ready at the drop of a hat to load Finance in the garbage truck and go to any and every horse show he could find, and there was at least one every Saturday! In those days the quality of the pleasure classes was such that a "grade" horse like Finance, well ridden, was always in the money. He was always second or third and, once, fourth, but never first! Today it takes a pedigreed horse costing thousands of dollars to win these same classes. This unpretentious venture into the showing of horses grew steadily through the years till now we take truck loads of fine horses to a Saturday night show nearly every week of the season!

During that time there was always a big Birmingham Horse Show usually in conjunction with the State Fair. We had three colts, that the children were eager to show in the halter classes. Debbie had bought one of the colts. She and Love were eagerly training Debbie's Little Jane and Nanny Hill's colt by Richlieu named Richlieu's Farewell. Mike's favorite was a small stud colt named Lad O'Shea. Mike had a real feeling for Lad and was trying his best to figure out ways to save up money to buy him. Later, from Doll we got Crystal Springs, a lanky filly that none of the children wanted to show.

Mike was raising Dutch rabbits then. He was an enthusiastic student of breeding. He had learned the

principles from studying horse pedigrees. He strictly adhered to the fundamentals of breeding “the best to the best and hoping for the best” and “to cull breeding stock, and cull ruthlessly.” The rabbit show was going on at the Fair the same time as the horse show. Mike entered a young dutch buck with perfect markings. The rabbits were judged in stages, the winners from each division competing against other winners of age and breed groups in pyramid fashion until finally a best-in-show was chosen.

Mike was running back and forth between the rabbits and the horses. He and Love and Debbie showed their colts in the halter classes. We used fire extinguishers to excite the colts while we were training them so that they would flag their tails and snort, but these measures were strictly forbidden during classes. It could be dangerous since the horses of unsuspecting handlers might be spooked and cause someone to be hurt. As the children ran their colts into the ring, Peter could not resist setting off the fire extinguisher. As it hissed and spurted out its white powder, alerting all the horses at the show, Little Richlieu, Love’s colt, who was every inch a show horse anyway threw back his head, flagged his tail and bounced his way to first place. Mike was third with little Lad O’Shea. Graciously, no one reprimanded us for Peter’s misbehavior.

Mike put up his colt and rushed up to check on his rabbit’s progress. Soon he came running back, proudly waving the blue ribbon his little buck had won in the first division. We showed horses all day, bringing home several blue ribbons while Mike kept running back from the rabbit show with more blue ribbons. Finally, as the horse and rabbit show drew to a close, Mike returned from the rabbit show brandishing a huge trophy with the inscription, “Best In Show.” His little Buck had edged out all the hundreds of rabbits in the show for final highest honor! To crown our success a man bought Mike’s tiny black and white buck for the amazing sum (to us) of forty dollars!

Several years later the little colt Mike showed that day and believed in so strongly became a World Champion 5 gaited horse five times. Lad O’Shea was also voted the American Horse Show “Horse of the Year.”

After his beginning on Finance, Mike was winning countless blue ribbons with his gray Welsh mare, Snowfire. Love began by leading her yet unsaddle-broken pony, Madame, in a halter class. Her little bay Welsh mare had quality, no doubt about it. Love exhibited her with a flair. I know there was not a prouder moment in her life than when the judge awarded the blue ribbon to her pony in their first performance.

Later, when Madame learned the art of being a saddle horse, John took the two children and their ponies to every horse show in the state as they hotly pursued the State Championship for fifty-inch saddle ponies. In all those years, Madame beat Snowfire only once. She was always second to her, but then nobody ever beat Snowfire! Once, when John was unable to take the children and their ponies to a show, we had a black man that worked for us drive the truck. When Snowfire won her usual blue, a huge smile lighted up his dark face and he announced, “Now we’ve got the Alabama World’s Champion!”

At thirteen, Love graduated from ponies to the American Saddle bred horses. She showed Sparkling Blade (the horse whose first attempt at showing had proven disastrous). They won first place in the large English Pleasure Class at Hueytown. The next year, she rode Miss Emily of Graycote to many blue ribbons. Miss Emily was the elegant but hateful daughter of Rex.

At home all by herself, Love was breaking and training a hot four-year-old that we had bought for a brood mare. Her efforts at exhibiting Butterfly did not meet with great success, because the mare was just too high strung to train well.

Love's and Franny's riding experience was extensive because of the many young horses we were turning out. Love's favorite colt to ride was Lad O'Shea which Mike had set his sights on when the colt was a yearling. Mike had been frantically trying to figure out how he could raise \$5,000 to buy him. As it turned out, it would have been a small price, for Lad and his stable mate, Crystal Springs, became world champions. But when Mike's interest in riding waned, his sister became Lad's first rider.

The colt was so full of himself in anticipation of a ride that he was quite difficult. Someone would try to hold him still as near the fence as possible so that he could be mounted. Then Love would leap from the top rail to his back as he exploded into action.

At fourteen, Love and Franny became interested in equitation, which is the art of riding on horseback. After we found a good teacher for them, they set themselves to master the art. Love rode Lady B. Good, a grand old walk-trot mare by Desdemona Denmark. Franny's parents bought her Denmark's Thunder, or "Black Moses," as we called him. Showing the handsome horses, the two girls were the picture of elegance in their tuxedos and top hats. By now our showing had become much more sophisticated and the girls were eating it up.

As a rider, Love was as elegant and graceful as anyone who ever sat on a horse. I thought her beauty was the perfect compliment for the aristocratic elegance of the American Saddle bred horse. Whenever I saw her in the ring that summer, my eyes would fill with tears and goose bumps would crawl down my back. I was so proud of her that I couldn't hold it back!

But Franny and Love by no means abandoned their first loves--Madame and Boogaloo. After the show horses were put in the barn, the girls mounted their ponies bareback and explored the country far and wide.

In July, when Love was fifteen and so many changes were taking place in our little girl, she became enamored with a new pony. She tried hard to sell her childhood treasure, Madame, to buy the larger, faster pony. The farmer who owned the new pony asked us to guess her name. After many tries, we gave up. "Her name is Heaven," he said. It was a suitable name.

CHAPTER XXV -- FOOTBALL AND CHEERLEADERS

I'll never forget Briarwood's first football game. The boys were greatly excited because the school had hired a professional baseball player to coach football. But Pete McKenzie, the coach, didn't have much to work with. None of the junior high boys who turned out for football had ever played until two weeks before the first game.

Briarwood's apprehensive yet eager boys met Highlands Day School for their first game. The opposing team had been playing together in this league since early grammar school and were well molded together as a team. The game was a disaster for us. I think we were beat a hundred to nothing. But a few boys showed a glimmer of potential in this, their first encounter. One was Richard, who earned the name of "Hammer" from the coach in this game.

Richard had always been so easy-going and somewhat lazy, never driving himself to goals as Mike did. But on the football field his star began to shine. Through the next years it seemed to us he rested the whole year, reserving his energies for those few months of football which he pursued with every bit of his saved-up strength. The sport revealed dimensions in Richard's character we had never seen before. He was as disciplined and dedicated to his goal as was possible to be. No matter what the odds, he never quit but fought with all his strength to the bitter end. Later in high school, when Briarwood had a formal football program, his hitting became so damaging, he cracked his helmet, and we had to order one

specially made. From then on his black helmet, standing apart from the gold “lion” decorated helmets of the team, was a familiar sight leading the Lion’s charge. The experts said “he had an uncanny ability to follow a play.” He won a trophy for most valuable lineman every year and finally for the most valuable player.

Mike’s football career was interrupted by so many things, that it didn’t seem meant to be. The first year of the “Y” leagues at Briarwood, there was no “7th grade” for Mike, and he had to go to the public junior high. In his Junior year he broke his collar bone in practice and was sidelined for the rest of the year. Then a broken hand, incurred in a scuffle with Peter, interrupted his football.

His senior year the coach, knowing Mike’s dependability, talked him into coming out for football after the season had begun. Because it meant so much to his daddy, Mike agreed. As usual, Mike’s strength and his dogged determination to give it all he had were a great asset to the team.

The natural grace and balance of the true athlete showed up in Peter when he was very small. His prowess on the football field had begun in about the third grade when he led the miniature Briarwood “flag” team to victory over Crestline (my old grammar school) by two touchdowns. Peter’s charisma, his inborn leadership qualities, showed up even then. To celebrate their win, his small teammates carried him off the field on their shoulders.

He showed such great potential in the B-team games that on the last game of Richard’s senior year, the coach let him in the varsity game as quarterback. Peter had a “great arm” according to the coach. Richard had spent his blood and sweat and tears on the field in the tough but inglorious role as a lineman. In this final game with Peter as quarterback, for the last few plays, the coach let Richard play end.

It is true that it takes a team to win a football game. Often the greatest heroes are the hard-hitting linemen. Still it is the one who carries the ball over the goal that the crowd glorifies. This maneuver was designed to give Richard his opportunity to end his successful high school career in a blaze of glory with a chance to score a touchdown. The play went off smoothly. Peter fell back and threw the ball. Richard broke loose and ran into position handily. He reached out his arms for the spiraling pigskin as it headed straight for him. All he had to do now was close his arms around the ball and glory was surely his as there was a clear field between him and the goal line. The well-aimed pass hit him squarely on his number “Sixty” and his arms closed tightly around the all important pigskin sphere. But alas -- it squirted from his arms like the seed of a squashed grape! Instead of passing over the goal line in glory, the last play of Richard’s football career ended with him grimacing, clenching his fists leaping high in the air and falling to the ground in disgust at himself. Peter has not ceased teasing him about this fateful error until this day. Could it be that “pride goeth before a fall?”

Peter went on in his brother’s footsteps to win the most valuable back award when he was only a junior. That year Briarwood was the state champion. As always, Peter attracted attention with his hard-driving runs and long, accurate passes. Yet, even when he wasn’t performing as well as some others, the cameras and sports writers seemed drawn to him. His name and picture were always in the paper. Since Mike, Richard and Love prayed him into the world, I’ve been aware of this specialness about Peter, and I keep wondering what mission God has for him when the fires of life have refined his character.

A friend once watched the boys helping their father catching unbroken colts to put halters on them. It was a wild, harrowing experience. The boys would go in the stall with the frightened colts who ran up the walls and over anyone in their way. There would be considerable struggling, banging and crashing around until someone got one arm around the colt’s neck and another hoisted the tail up over the baby horse’s back. This was the only way you could hold a colt. Someone else then put the halter on him. After observing this wild, rough maneuver, the friend said, “Now I see why your boys are such good

football players.”

They didn't know that the reason they were such good “colt wrestlers” was that nearly every night since they were born, they had rolled and wrestled with their daddy, usually in the middle of the living room floor. The price I paid for this was frayed nerves (I hate physical violence and noise) and the loss of many wedding presents. Even now, hidden bricks and logs hold up some chairs that have crumbled beneath the onslaught.

One of the strangest afflictions that seems to strike young teens had overtaken our little girl about the time she became thirteen. Suddenly her natural reserve was shattered by the wild compulsion to leap through the air, contorting her limbs and giving loud voice to silly rhymes. Not only was she afflicted, but the virus had affected most of her friends. It seemed whatever their physical shape or athletic ability or normally sane personality, for no reason at all, and seemingly at any time or place, they would all begin leaping and shrieking. Even the most inhibited seemed to cast aside all restraint whenever the compulsion overtook them. Since we first became aware of the cheerleading virus, we have observed that it seems to attack most girls in the pre-to-mid-teens every summer. To us it is still a most remarkable phenomenon.

When God is shaping a life that is to reflect His glory for all eternity, He often uses the most unlikely things as the blade of his chisel. This bent for cheerleading, revealed so suddenly and forcefully in Love's life, was to be an important tool in teaching her the great lesson that all of life is the means by which the Father shapes His chosen ones into the image of His Son.

As Briarwood was a new school, a football team and cheerleading squad were just beginning the year Love was thirteen. With great enthusiasm she threw herself into preparing for cheerleader tryouts. Happily she made the squad. How well I remember that first year of Briarwood's full-fledged football program. We joined the crowd of parents and students filing into the brightly-lit stadium, our hearts reflected the anticipation of the crowd. The brisk autumn evening made us all feel sixteen again. How we cheered and screamed when the gold jersey team ran out on the field. John and I had our hearts filled with the deepest pride and satisfaction as we saw our strong and handsome teenage sons exercising with the team and Love leaping and cavorting with the other cheerleaders. We were quite certain that Briarwood cheerleaders were by far the prettiest, most stylish, best trained, and yet most ladylike of any cheerleaders in the world!

How could anyone ask for greater blessings than we had. Our four children were all well and strong and happy, and all so very handsome. The boys were all masculine in every way and our daughter feminine and elegant.

In our American school system, boys who are on the football team seem to attain a certain desirable status automatically among the other students. It is equally true with the girls who are cheerleaders. Although the schools seek to point out that all elevated positions carry with them an inherent responsibility to good leadership, human nature would turn this obligation inward and revel in the very exclusiveness of the attained position. So Love proved to be entirely vulnerable to the most natural result of human ambitions. She became part of a little clique of exclusives. We were only vaguely aware of this in our pride of her devotion to her team. We always encouraged her to put her undivided efforts into the group's attempt to be the very best cheerleaders they possibly could be for the Lord's sake.

When cheerleading tryouts came up again for her ninth-grade year, we all just naturally assumed that Love, one of the most dedicated of the Briarwood cheerleading squad, would make the team again. The girls were scored by a number of possible points for each of several different categories. A panel of judges individually scored the cards which were then totaled. However, this judging was different from

most others of its kind, for these judges met together before the tryouts for prayer, each asking God for wisdom to mark the cards fairly.

I'll always remember the afternoon the results of cheerleader tryouts were announced. I met Love driving to the barn with Franny in the car. (All the children drove around the farm as soon as they could see over the steering wheel.) She looked out of the car window at me, with that clear steady look of her beautiful eyes and said calmly, "Mama, I didn't make cheerleader." I could see tears welling up in her eyes. I had never seen her give way to her emotions, and this time, too, she fought back the tears and went on her way. But I gave way to the storm of emotions that overwhelmed me. Her very strength in the face of such severe disappointment, which could have wrecked a lesser character, made her hurt more intolerable to me. My mother instinct rose with a surge of indignation that any of those judges who called themselves my friends could so abuse my baby. Did they not appreciate the fact that she was one of the pioneers of the program? She had given it everything she had, and did they not appreciate that we all had sacrificed time and conveniences to help her set the example of a deep sense of obligation to duty? When I told John, his indignation rose even higher than mine, for the darling of his life had been wounded, and that was inexcusable. We never mentioned our bitter feelings to Love. She hated emotion, and in serious matters, somehow always seemed untouchable.

Determined to set straight the policy at our school which could do such an injustice, I stormed up to see Sallie Dewberry. As I did, I found that I was not the only one aware of the severe hurt that had been inflicted on Love. There had been only one point on the judges' total score that had kept her off the team. And she had been the only member of the original team to be dropped. The teachers had discussed overruling it, but they were perplexed. Had they not earnestly prayed that God would guide them in their decision, and had they not chosen a very impersonal system? While all agreed that Love should be on the team, the score had denied her the position. If they honestly believed that God had guided as He had promised, were they not obligated to abide by the decision? It seemed that to fail to do so would indicate a lack of trust on their part. All these people were earnest Christians who honestly loved the young people who had been committed to their care. But they knew also that as hard as the decision had been, they trusted God had a purpose. One of her teachers was greatly concerned with the seeming injustice when she met Love alone in the locker room and spoke to her about it. Someone told me that Love had comforted her teacher by saying it was all right, for she knew that it was from God for her own good and she knew why. Love wrote in her diary that she "was not being a good witness and was getting to be a snob." She fully understood that her relationship with God was of eternal value and it must not suffer--even if it means "cutting off your right hand." Her Bible notes and underlining bore evidence to the studies she did on all forms of "false pride" and "snobbery." Thus, Love learned her first recorded lesson in submission. As is always true after offering to God the sacrifice of obedience, her vision of Him grew clearer.

CHAPTER XXVI -- PROBLEMS

In the midst of these happy times there was ever a great burden hovering over our shoulders. The Heavenly Father was testing us, instructing us, stretching us. It was not His intent to save us from problems, but to teach us to trust Him - to guide us to the answers to them. We had so much to learn, not only about the horse business and the business of trusting God, but also about ourselves. We had been led into the horse business by some remarkable sign posts, but now we owned some fine young colts we could not sell. Untrained colts were not in demand in our part of the country; in fact, finished show horses themselves were not worth much here. The center of the horse business was around Lexington, Kentucky, and we were far from there and had no name that drew people from other parts of the country. How could we sell them? How could we train them?

It seemed we had come to a vast, dry desert. The miracles had stopped. My story had never reached a

climax. If it appeared that the Heavenly Father had led us to a dead end, no one would be inspired. And that was not all. I knew nothing about our finances at that time. Then, one evening I learned that all of our earthly assets were gone. John's monthly salary was all that stood between us and disaster. I was devastated. That night I could not sleep. I got out of bed, put on my robe, and went for a walk. I walked out into the wide plain of the front pasture, where there were no trees or buildings to detract from the vastness of the sky. I sat down in the damp, sweet grass and looked at the unfathomable black dome above me, which twinkled with a million stars.

I got a small glimpse of the hugeness of the universe and the relative insignificance of man. In the past, such glimpses had given me a sense of loneliness, of a lostness in this vast sea. Yet strangely there had never been this feeling of loneliness since we had moved to the country. Rather, there was a definite sense of a friendly Presence that permeated the entire atmosphere.

As I gazed up at the starry heavens, I thought of Abraham. God called him out also to wonder at such a sky. He, too, was facing a broad desert for he was an old man and God had told him to try to count those uncountable stars. He told him that even though he had not a single child then, he would have as many descendants as there were stars in the sky. It seemed to me the same God that spoke to Abraham so long ago spoke to me that night. "Look all around you," He seemed to say. "Are you not living in a miracle? Is not all this faith made sight?" I looked at the expanse of pasture stretching all around me, the dark forms of the mares grazing, the house in the distance, silvery white and silent against the dark background of the trees and the starry brilliance of the sky. Not one of us could have dreamed only a few years before that all this could ever be ours, that I should be mistress of this farm and these fine horses. It had come about in ways so out of the ordinary. It was a miracle! I was standing in the middle of a miracle! "If I could bring this to pass, if I could turn that shadowy dream into this substance can't you trust me to finish the story?" the voice seemed to say. I remembered the Biblical definition of faith: "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) Faith was believing when you could not see.

The next step seemed clear to me that night. I had to wrench my grip away from all earthly security and with the arms of faith grab on literally "for dear life," to the promises of God. Although my only other choice was despair, it took a violent effort to make the switch, to reach out into the darkness and take hold on God, but the evidence for His being there was all around me.

From that point on I was almost afraid to have anything earthly to cling to, for fear I would have to make that leap again.

CHAPTER XXVII -- JANIS

Another thread being woven into the tapestry of our life was Love's friendship with Janis. As a pre-teen. Janis lived near the town of Leeds in a "neighborhood." John and I, very fond of her parents, often tried to promote a friendship between the two girls - Janis and Love. It seemed, however, we couldn't get anything going. I remember several times, when we parents were exchanging driving chores, the girls would sit on the back seat of the car for many miles and never speak the first words.

Janis went to her first term at Briarwood unwillingly. She had joined the Leeds Junior High cheerleading teams, and the next term she was to be head cheerleader. Giving up such a position was indeed a sacrifice. As if to reward her for giving up something so important to her, Briarwood began its first formal cheerleading venture that fall. While the girls were practicing together to become cheerleaders, they became fast friends. Their friendship grew as the years went by.

Janis was neither a horsewoman nor a camper, as were Love's childhood "sisters." In fact, both times I

saw her riding behind Love on Mailee she fell off. Janis seldom spent the night here on the farm; instead their days together were nearly all spent at Janis' apartment. By then the Raders had moved to Vestavia and were in walking distance of the shops and stores. For a country girl like Love to be free to frequent such sophistication was truly an exciting adventure. She had been bitten by the clothes bug, and the trips to the shops always resulted in a yearning for a certain "latest thing" in fashion.

"I love clothes," Love wrote on July 5, 1973, "I wish I was rich and had lots of cute clothes and a blue convertible MG, and I'd go shopping all the time, or I'd take my cousins places and go see people. I found two dresses I really love (really three). I hope Daddy will let me buy them."

I do believe Love bought every product on the market to enhance her physical beauty. She had products to grow nails, eyelashes, curl eyelashes, whiten teeth, clear eyes, thicken hair, train eyebrows, remove hair, and clear skin. With all this passion for beauty products, her skill with makeup was wonderful. Although every hair was in place in the beautiful arch of her eyebrows over her wise brown eyes, one could never tell that she used these "beauty aids." John called them her "chemicals" and planned to buy her for Christmas a dressing table to store them in.

Love, Janis, and Franny spent much time making "collages" for each other. These were pieces of poster paper on which they pasted pictures cut from magazines, pictures about every thought that went through their heads. These pieces of art were really interesting and were labors of love for each other. A note in Love's diary July 14 read, "I was just reading some old letters from Sandy and you and I like your serious ones the best--I'm going to make you a collage. I think they're fun to make and I want you to finish mine. O.K.?"

Janis and Love's friendship grew even closer. They began to pray for each other and bolster each other up spiritually. Love recorded several wonderful talks with Janis and her mother, Marsha, about the "problems of growing up, and Jesus." Love listed Marsha Rader as one of the five people she loved best. It seemed Marsha had a particular gift of looking at young people's problems through their eyes. She seemed able to roll back the years and remember and understand.

The rage for pierced ears was upon them and Marsha pierced Janis', Franny's and Love's ears. Franny's mother made her let her "holes" grow back. John teased Love, asking her why she didn't put a bone in her nose also, but Love kept the tiny gold earrings in her pierced ears.

CHAPTER XXVIII -- LOVE

The fourteenth year of her life and her freshman year in high school found our only daughter, Lovelace, transformed physically from a fair child into an even more beautiful young lady. At fourteen and a half she looked and seemed sixteen. Of medium height, about 5'4", she was slender and elegant, with a striking look of intelligence. As breeders we were used to evaluating horses by their looks of refinement and quality, and she seemed to be the embodiment of these attributes in the female human.

I have always felt a great need to be surrounded by beauty in the house and yard and the animals we breed. I often give thanks to God for giving me four handsome children, but especially that He had allowed our daughter to grow into our ideal of a young woman. And in her spirit she was growing too. The trusting innocence of childhood gave way to the churning, turbulent, and intense emotions of adolescence, the birth pangs of the mature person. We on the outside often wondered what was happening to our daughter, for hers was not the way of confiding her joys and her sorrows, and often all we saw were outward manifestations of this growing process, the typical signs of adolescence. She spent much time behind her closed bedroom door, had a tendency to gripe about rules and restrictions and had a loss of interest in family affairs. We were never concerned about her school work or her obedience to us,

for we felt the strength and dignity she had would never allow her to betray herself. But we were very concerned about her being aloof and often inconsiderate of us. Whereas John was able to handle her in such a way that she considered him “cool” and “strong,” my frustrations at her actions just seemed to alienate her still further.

But God was still carving and molding these lives of ours -- so imperfect, but important enough to Him for Jesus to have died for them. Because we belonged to Him, he was ever making the “all things” work together for our good to make us fit for Heaven. There was one powerful tool that God chose to finish the work He had begun in Love. Strangely, it was the thing for which she was named.

Many years before when she was barely four years old, and again when she was nine, Love acknowledged the course on which her life was charted when she had hidden away her certificate of church membership. Inside its folds she had folded still smaller a little note that spoke her purpose: “I love you, God,” it simply said.

Love’s friendship with God, begun so early in life, was to be as only it could -- the guiding light to lead her through the raging seas of emotion common to so many extremely sensitive people in their adolescent years. As adult life loomed before her, Love started to consider what life was all about. She began to sort out her childish dreams from the goals she really desired for herself. “I’ve set many goals that have become a part of me. I want to be an actress, a writer, a leader in one of many areas, to be famous and to change the world,” she wrote. “I want never to forget to take life easy and relax and love. I want to understand and appreciate history and culture and yet have a young heart open to receive modern ideas.” “I want to please my God and be close to Him and worship His wonderful majesty. I want to be humble before Him and yet be His devoted friend.” “I want to learn the secret of a happy life, but I want to learn it now while I’m still young”.

But the overriding pull of her life’s goal was in the meaning of her name. In her fifteenth summer she wrote, “Love is a pretty word -- It’s my name -- that makes me feel special. People don’t forget me because my name is Love, and I should ‘love’ people and make them ‘love’ me -- lots of people love me. Jesus loves me, my parents love me, Lynn loves me, Janis loves me, Franny loves me, Aunt Barbara loves me and maybe someday ‘he’ will love me.”

Love wrote in her diary some of her ideas on what life was really all about as she saw it through the churning of her adolescent emotions. “I’m doing a lot of thinking this week. I am attracted to deep people who are not shallow and carefree. I think I want to be a psychiatrist, at least study psychiatry -- that’s kind of why I want to be an actress. God’s giving me the ability to be interested in this new awareness of my deepness. I’m very interested in life now...I want to learn the secret of a happy life--I want to learn it now while I’m still young so I can enjoy life. The main thing I don’t like about myself is when I’m out and stuff, I don’t feel like being cute and entertaining. I’m quiet and tired and people don’t like that. I’m just not a night owl. I get tired and bored. I like to be serious at night.”

It was through this reflective side of Love’s nature that God brought about a great lesson in His earthly work in her life. She began experiencing an intense emotional turmoil during adolescence. Before she was fifteen, Love fell completely in love. She never told us, but it was obvious to all of us and really didn’t need telling. As Franny said later, “It wasn’t puppy love, for Love was much too deep for that.”

Love expressed it like this: “May 7--God knows I have to have goals to strive for and He’s set marriage for me to strive for. I’m only conscious of him and God, all the time. He’s part of my conscious now - just like God is. I guess only God can tune it down a little bit, so I can develop open-mindedly. See You!” She gave herself to this new love in an inexperienced and a somewhat indiscreet way - she wrote in her diary. But since her beloved was not ready to return her feelings, it seemed the friendship melted

away. Love was left heartbroken.

Although she never spoke a word to me of her joy and then her heartbreak, I knew, as only a mother can know, what had happened when she called me to school to pick her up because she was “sick.” She was truly sick, for the deepest pain of all is for a sensitive person to be rejected by the object of her love. I knew the cause of the tears she tried to hide. I was heartbroken. I thought I was a failure as a mother because I could not get her to confide in me. I knew so well her pain, because I had experienced the same thing in my own longing for love in the stormy years of my adolescence.

But Love’s passion was a holy one, and she knew that beyond the heartache of her rejected love there was a Lover to whom she was all important. In her own words she said: “April 4--Five minutes ago the thought of being cheerful and courageous at school tomorrow seemed impossible, but I found this verse: ‘Keep up your courage and let us show strength for the sake of our people’ (at school don’t be moody or depressed) ‘and for the cities of our God.’ (Maybe I’m being a stumbling block to some other people) ‘Then let the Lord do what is good in His sight.’ It’s up to Him. I’ve dedicated our relationship to Him. This is about the hardest thing I’ve ever done. I’m crying at the thought of losing him but he’s God’s now. I’ve given him to God. It’s up to Him whether or not He wants to give him back.”

One of the first documents she wrote of this adventure was a letter dated April 4: “Dear God, I talked to Lynn tonight. I’ve decided that You are going to be the most important thing in my life. What’s he compared to You--ZERO! God, I’m also surrendering all my rights to You. The right to date, to love, to be hurt, to talk about people, to be happy. Everything. I mean business. God, help me keep these promises.”

On May 6, in the agony of the first great heartache of her life, she began the study of the meaning of suffering in the book of Job. She learned from this man’s suffering that all the suffering of God’s own children is ultimately from the hands of a loving Heavenly Father. It is intended to produce the only relationship under which we were designed to function, a complete submissiveness on our part to His perfect will. It is not an easy lesson because it involves a cross, but the way of the cross leads to a resurrection to a new kind of life. Only by this way can we ever find lasting and perfect peace and joy.

“April 6--Today is my first real day of surrendering him to God. I was so happy. I didn’t care whether or not he liked me. Today, me and Franny and my parents are going to Mobile. I’m happy I’m putting God first, but it’s hard to keep putting God first. The more I think about him, the more I ignore God. I’d almost rather God took him away!” Love was still yearning over her true love and pondering the meaning of why God was allowing her to suffer. “April 29--I guess the Lord wants me to find comfort in Him,” she surmised. “I wish he’d send me some comfort in the form of something human - maybe when I learn to depend on Him to fulfill all my needs, He’ll give you back to me. I feel like this is real love because I don’t demand anything in return.”

Gradually, as Love learned the tremendous lesson of complete submissiveness to God’s will, all her arguments stopped. She marked in her Bible: “And who am I that I should try to argue with God, or even reason with Him?” (Job 8:14). And with Job she learned a lesson far beyond her years - “Then Job replied, I know that you can do anything and that no one can stop you. You ask who it is who has so foolishly denied your providence. It is I. I was talking about things I knew nothing about and did not understand, things far too wonderful for me.” (Job 42:2) And beside it she penned the word “submissiveness.”

“The one thing that’s come out of all this is I think I have a pretty good grasp on the idea of what love is--June 15. Love is: 1. patient - put up with his shortcomings. don’t let them bother me.

2. kind - I should be kind to him always, be thinking of making him happy.

3. loyal - never say or do anything to hurt him.
4. believe in him and defend him - I should expect good of him and let him know it
Let him know I have confidence.
5. not jealous
6. not selfish - always think about what's best for him
7. not rude
8. not boastful
9. not irritable

“Love isn’t based on reason, or it wouldn’t be love-- it will forgive and put up with faults on either side.”

“I don’t ever want to be jealous--I don’t want to cut people or gossip. I want Him to be proud of me, the way I look, the way I act, the way I dress. I want to be sympathetic and sweet and friendly to everybody. I just want Him to be proud of me.” (Colossians 3) “Most of all, let love guide your life.”

Her Bible was marked with much emphasis on the wonderful description of the truly good wife of Proverbs 31:10-31-- “If you can find a truly good wife, she is worth more than precious gems...Charm can be deceptive and beauty doesn’t last, but a woman who fears and reverences God will be greatly praised.”

“May 7--I just got home from the 2nd skating party and I saw him with her...” She had decided that God had promised in the end that she would have her heart’s desire, but she pondered, “I’ve just got to keep the faith. But then I start worrying if maybe it was just made up. I guess God isn’t through with me yet. He wants to keep making me a godly woman. It’s really kind of cool. He’s got it all worked out and I’m just trying to jump to the next step.” “May 9--Now at the end of the year I’m beginning to love school and life and the people. I wish school was just beginning. I guess I’m sort of feeling insecure about this summer and not seeing him. I can’t do that. I’ve got to trust God. He’s in control.”

“I’m also learning to relax and enjoy life. I’m convinced that’s the secret to life. Just relax and enjoy life. Don’t get uptight. Right now, I’m proud to be a Christian, I’m not ashamed at all. I’m even ready to face persecution. I hope maybe God can use me to witness to X. I have a burden for him. I got a letter about rush. I’ve got to pray about rush. I’m not sure how. Maybe I don’t love him. Maybe God just let me think so, so I’d learn this lesson I’m learning. Good nite!”

CHAPTER XXIX – FELLOWSHIP

As the days went by Love found out how easy it was to keep taking her sacrificed love back from the altar, and that brought with it deep, deep pain. “Oh, that my sadness and troubles were weighed. For they are heavier than the sands of the seashores,” she cried with Job. The great question came up into her heart as it does in the hearts of all who suffer, “Why?” “I am weary of living. Let me complain freely. I will say to God, ‘Don’t just condemn me, tell me why you are doing it,’” she marked this verse with great emphasis. In need of help she shared her heartache with friends and they closed the circle of love by praying for and counseling her from the scriptures. “I got real depressed again. I told Lynn and she told me that I shouldn’t let anything but God determine whether or not I am happy. It helped me. I feel o.k. now.”

Sandy encouraged her and she kept this note: “Love, I’m praying so hard for you. This is the critical point in your life. You make some very important decisions during this time Keep the Faith!” “P.S. ‘Lord, you know I don’t want to do your will, but Lord I choose to.’ Sandy.” Again, “Love, the Lord has said for us to ‘cast all our cares on Him, don’t worry about anything, instead pray about everything’. I know you know this verse but I think the Lord’s trying to tell you to stop knowing them in your head and start feeling them in your heart. Start applying all the verses you know. That’s what the Bible’s for, to

live and learn by. Remember, that nothing can separate us from His love. Romans 8:38-39. Be sweet! Sandy.” Again - “Didn’t you like chapel? I think that was so good when she said, ‘I don’t want to do it but I choose to.’ That’s so important to your Christian life. Maybe you don’t want to do it. God knows you don’t, but you choose to do what God wants you to over your own will. Boy, that’s hard to do! - Sandy.”

About her friends she wrote: “They love me and pray for me and did what they thought was best. I guess it’s all been worth it though. I’ve learned so much about God.” “It’s kind of like a boy-girl relationship. I can tell Him my problems and depend on Him and He comforts me. He’s showed me that He can take his place and He can be everything and more than him. I feel better now.”

The circumstances of a Christian’s life are ever guiding and training the beloved child toward the very center of God’s will. Even temptation and a yielding to it can be tools in the Master’s hand. That May Love had just begun to be allowed to date a little. Although her heart belonged to another she was not lacking invitations. Looking and seeming so much more mature than her years, she attracted some older boys, and we unwisely let her accept a date with one of them. She discovered the power a beautiful woman can exercise over a man, and yielding to this natural impulse she “led him on,” not being thoroughly honest.

But the Counselor was abiding in her young heart and in the midst of the most natural of human temptations the still small voice chided her. In heart-broken sorrow she wrote, “I let God down. I didn’t act like a Christian. I’m bitterly sorry I disappointed Him. I realized now that I love God more than anybody. I’m in love with Jesus. He’ll always love me. He’ll be true to me, and I love Him.”

“I feel better, I read Ephesians chapter two about God’s mercy. And I have no right to ask for mercy, but I am. ‘Once you were under God’s curse, doomed forever for your sin. You went along with the crowd and were just like all the others...But God is so rich in mercy: He loves us so much that even though we are spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, He gave us back our lives again when He raised Christ from the dead. Only by His undeserved favor have we ever been saved’ (Ephesians 2: 1-5). I’ve also learned that God is my strength and my true friend. I need not worry. I can rest all my problems on Him. He’ll gladly bear them because He loves me.” Love wrote in her diary.

CHAPTER XXX -- ENVY

While God was teaching Love the heavenly lesson of possessing Him first in order to love others with His love, there was an area in her life which had yet to feel the refining fires of God’s love. Love never let us see even a little glimpse of her spiritual battles and victories. This inability to enjoy spiritual things with her was one of my deepest heartaches that summer. Most of what we saw in our daughter then were the typical symptoms of adolescence: moodiness, closed bedroom doors, gripes about rules and restrictions--until July. Earlier there was one attitude that particularly distressed us. She was envious of the affluence of some of our friends. The house and farm and its grounds that God had given us to live in were magnificent by any worldly standards. But our financial situation did not meet what most people expected the inhabitants of such a place to have. We had no help and the work was hard. Love’s work was washing dishes over which she agonized each evening.

Love greatly appreciated quality. She had a very gifted eye for any form of refinement and her tastes were very expensive. Used to pinching pennies, I often found inexpensive clothes and shoes that resembled their more expensive counterparts, but every flaw was only too evident to Love. She often spent her own money earned from selling her Peekapoo pups to make up the difference. She complained about these conditions, always yearning to be “rich”. “I want to be rich and have a beautiful home with large green lawns and fine horses and an Irish Setter and a Persian cat and beautiful clothes and lots of

flowers,” she wrote.

We were distressed by these attitudes for we saw it as a lack of gratitude for all God’s graciousness to us. I saw it as my own apparent failure as a mother; all the while we did not see what was going on in the depths of her heart. Looking back I see that often things are not what they seem. As the transformation of the seed to the full-blown flower first involves the rotting and decay of the seed husk, so we often see only this process not remembering that the very rotting, which is ugly in itself, is the promise of the developing flower. So we did not see what was really going on in Love’s heart. She was coming to full bloom right under our very noses and we did not see it.

But Love, imperfect though she was, belonged to God. He was ever bringing about the reconciliation of the way He intended her to be and the way she still was. She fully understood that no matter how strong the world’s pulls were, she loved and wanted Him above all else, and in revealing to her these particular sins, He pointed her still closer to the wonderful plan He had for her. This is what He taught her: Psalm 73 “how good God is to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff. My feet were slipping and I was almost gone. For I was envious of the prosperity of the proud and wicked. Yes...their road is smooth. They grow sleek and fat. They...have every thing their hearts could ever wish for...Have I been wasting my time? Why take trouble to be pure? All I get out of it is trouble and woe...If I had really said that, I would have been a traitor to your people. Yet is so hard to explain it - this prosperity of those who hate the Lord...Then one day...thought about the future of these evil men. What a slippery path they are on - suddenly God will send them sliding over the edge of the cliff and down to their destruction; an instant end to all their happiness; an eternity of terror. Their present life is only a dream! They will awaken to the truth as one awakens from a dream of things that never really were. When I saw all this, what turmoil filled my heart. I saw myself so stupid and ignorant: I must seem like an animal to you, God. But even so You love me. You are holding my right hand. You will keep on guiding me all my life with your wisdom and counsel and afterwards receive me into the glories of heaven. Whom have I in heaven but You. My heart fails, my spirits droop, yet God remains! He is the strength of my heart, He is mine forever!”

CHAPTER XXXI -- WHAT DO WE WANT OF GOD?

There was another thread the Lord was weaving into this wonderful story. The simultaneous weaving of the several different threads, so interrelated and yet so unaware of the other’s existence, is to me one of the exciting parts of the miracle.

Being a teenager is hard, for I have been there, but I do believe it is equally a trying time for the parents of teenagers. By the world’s standards not one of our four teenagers was bad. It was just little things like attitudes, and the seeming absence of the wonderful light of God that had shined through them so brightly in their childhood, and was now so dim.

John handled these trying times much better than I. At least he did not alienate himself from the children. But my own oversensitive nature was sorely hurt by all these manifestations. All my reactions seemed to only further complicate matters. I was really succumbing to my lifelong tendency - the most persistent sin of self-pity.

How had we failed? With all the light God had given us and all the light they had once manifested why could we no longer see God’s light shining through our children? Certainly we had made mistakes, but no parents had tried harder to be good parents than we. We had taught them the Bible, loved them, stayed home with them, prayed for them, tried to lead them in the truth by example. We had sacrificed to send them to a Christian school. What more could we do? A promise kept ringing in my ears. “Bring up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” But my aching heart kept

crying, "Now Lord, I want to see the light again now!"

It was then the Holy Spirit seemed to speak audibly to me. "What do you really want for your children? "Why Lord, You know I want them to belong to You." A flood of thought engulfed me about my true desire for our children. Did I want God's light to shine through them so they would be more understanding of me? Or perhaps a more "holy" reason - so I could have "fellowship" with them? I came to grips in a brand new way with something I had always known. If we have the best of relationships with our children - if they have the best of health - if we give them all the clothes, cars, and material possessions they think they desire - if we give them the best education so that they are the most successful businessmen, scientists, artists, athletes or whatever - In the end, which comes to all men, when all these things have vanished away, they will have ultimately gained nothing and lost everything. The only thing we could ever give them that would last, that would have any real value in this life, or in the world to come, was a relationship with God through Jesus, who is the only Way.

God's timing is perfect. For in his own private way John had come to the same conclusions and his prayers for the children each morning had a strange urgency. We both cried out to God in our separate ways, "Yes, Lord, all we want for them is You, that they might fulfill the one reason for which they were created - to glorify You."

I was led to say with great earnestness, "not for fellowship or comfort for me, Lord, for that will come one day in heaven. But whatever it takes - my life, their lives, John's life, anything Lord. Let them glorify You!" I could say this with perfect confidence for I knew that He loved them far more than I did. He alone knew their breaking point and would push them no further than was necessary. I remember the exact spot where I finally settled this great matter and could say with absolute certainty, "Lord, let them glorify you, no matter what the cost." I bound my Isaacs to the altar and the fire came down and consumed the sacrifice.

CHAPTER XXXII -- THE VISION

The invisible and the visible were on a collision course in regard to many things. For in July we began to see a change in our now fifteen-year-old daughter. As yet, we had no idea the depths of her spiritual insights, but we began to see its fruit. It seemed she tried so hard to obey us pleasantly, and she began to be extremely conscientious about helping me. Often we noticed a certain look on her face. It was a look I can't describe - sort of wistful and dreamy, as if she were seeing something we did not. Often John and I found ourselves asking, "What's come over Love?" She was most certainly a different girl. "Mama yelled at me about how I'm always mean and hateful except when things are going my way, and it wasn't her fault if things didn't turn out like I wanted. She's right. I'm sorry and I'm going to try to be nice and helpful to her. (I found some perfume in Franny's purse and I put it on. It smells so good.)" she wrote. She and I had several really good talks in which I got that breathtaking look into her deep wisdom in regard to people and situations upon which she set her thoughts.

Later in July John's father died of a heart attack. Mr. Cowart was one of those granddaddys that little children loved and he loved them. In their early years he had plenty of time for them, but we had scarcely seen him during the past few years as he lived in Atlanta. This summer Love had felt a very deep interest in finding out her "roots." She had wanted to know all about these absent family members and had vowed to find out more about them. Yet before Love could follow through these new stirrings in her heart, both John's father and mother died.

On July 26 we went to Troy, Mr. Cowart's home town, for the funeral, and for the rare family reunion that only death and marriages seem to bring about. My own mother and father and sisters had driven down and met with John's brother and his family. Love had enjoyed seeing her Cowart cousins and we

were all struck with the similarity between Love and her cousin Linda.

On July 27 she wrote: “We got up at 5:00 this morning and went to Troy to the funeral. Its about 6:00 P.M. now. We just got back. The funeral was interesting. I met some of Daddy’s relatives. They were all nice, fine people. Daddy didn’t act sad. I don’t think he was. He’s such a wonderful, strong person. He’s such a man in every since of the word. He never complains or never shows emotion. I don’t see how anybody in the world can be as strong as him. I think he’s the most wonderful man in the world. Mama’s the luckiest person. God must really love her. I’m so afraid my husband won’t be half as good as Daddy and I’ll be disappointed in him. I guess God will give me the right person so I don’t need to worry.”

On the trip to Troy, Love had brought along a book she had been reading, Jonathan Livingston Seagull. The book was very intriguing to her and she had asked both her Daddy and me to read it. Now she wanted to know our opinion of it. This was really unusual because it seemed like the last thing our teenage daughter ever wanted these days was our opinion!

To John the book was just a fairy tale, but I believe I caught something of the mystery which was beginning to absorb Love--the straining toward a goal--toward God--no matter what the cost--the assurance that the longing in our heart did have its fulfillment somewhere--in God. I caught a little something then of the fascination the book held for her.

On a rainy July night, Love wrote her interpretation of the mystery of the little book. She had taken her broken dreams to God asking Him for comfort and He had given her a new hope in that hour of prayer under the muscadine arbor in the Secret Garden. She wrote:

July 8

Tonight is a dark rainy July night, to be exact--Sunday. Just about everything is wrong. For one thing my heart was broken. Fifteen is not too young to be in love. I am very much in love, but he is not. It hurts so deeply.

God, where are you--Is God here? Is he alive? Did He care? Did He care that I loved him? Did He care that he didn’t love me? That my best friend (Franny) had betrayed me? Did He care at all? I had tried so hard to be good to please God, to make Him pleased with me and give me him. I knew He had the power to do it, I knew there was a God and I knew He cared and yet if He did, why? Why was I so miserable when I tried to please Him? I had pictured myself going into a tremendous dark room, talking to a powerful being, begging Him for the one thing I wanted in life and promising to do what he asked. I had begged Him to take my love away. It had been 4 months since first I began to love him. We had dated for 1 1/2 months and then unexpectedly he’d had enough and we were through. I realized I loved him. But God wasn’t there tonight. He didn’t care. He was somewhere else and I was miserable. I thought about killing myself. But something held me back. Was it that I had a special potential I could sense, yet had failed to uncover yet? But I couldn’t leave this miserable. I had to find some peace. Something powerful, maybe something from God--but I knew there was a God. Yes. He had to be there, I’d felt him so many times, giving me peace and strength to continue a little further. I got down on my knees (I always felt better that way.) “Please give me peace. God, wherever you are, come and help me.” It took a while, it wasn’t miraculous, but a slow peaceful, drowsy feeling crept over me. A new hope bloomed in my heart. It was possible! I must learn to look past my own limitation. Something would happen. The future looked bright and then I realized there was something--a potential in me to learn to live, a drive that could never be suppressed, not by thoughts of him or thoughts of death and someday, when I had enough of it mastered, I would

lead others. I thought of Jonathan Livingston Seagull which I had just read. That was me. I wanted to live, to find happiness more than anything. The reason to live was not to eat, it was to fly. And I wanted more than being popular, more than having him, more than anything to fly--to live. I needed to practice, to work, until I had found a touch of perfection. And--maybe never get there, but that's great. Impossible goals have always attracted me. I walked back to the house through the drizzly rain--happy, confused, uncertain but definitely happy.

CHAPTER XXXIII -- LEXINGTON

We always went to Lexington to the horse show in July. I had been going with the children on this pilgrimage for about seven years. Generous John had decided this trip would be my vacation, so he sent me off with a friend and one of the children while he held down the home front.

The first year I took Mike, the next year, Love. The third year was Richard's time, although he really cared nothing about the horse show. Love wanted desperately to go again, but determined that she shouldn't shove him out of his due, Richard bravely tackled the long weekend with three women. Love couldn't stand being left at home and talked John into making the drive up just in time to get there for "stake night" on Saturday. From that year on, the Lexington horse show was strictly a woman's trip.

These trips with Susu, my lifelong friend and her daughter Debbie, Love and Franny as regulars, provided a remarkable record of their growing up. Every year on the same day, for the same number of days, we drove over the same road in the same number of hours, and stayed in the same place, and did the same things! Yet nothing was the same. For every year the little girls that accompanied us were so very different and yet the continuity of the same life force ebbing through all those growing creatures, somehow tying together the different bodies they used each year, the different perspectives, understandings, viewpoints and desires into the same person. It makes me wonder--what is a person? Which one is she really--the baby, the little child, the beautiful young girl, or the old woman? She is all these people and yet none of them, for one has vanished when the next one takes over. That is a real unfathomable mystery to me! Looking back over those years, we saw the little girls' innocent wonder give way to the fighting, squabbling, wrestling of pre-teens in the back of the station wagon. Then they became the giggling, hopelessly silly young teens. Gradually, so gradually, the graceful swan of the young lady emerged.

The trip to Lexington that summer had shown to me a Love almost completely changed into a young lady. Franny, who was six months older than Love, had conducted herself with perfect poise and grace. She had been the one who admonished Love to "grow up" the few times when the silly teen had risen to the surface. But mostly this trip had been one of adult companionship. We had enjoyed the food, the horses, the dressing up in a new way together. Love wrote in her diary, "The week I spent in Kentucky was like heaven, I kept my mind completely off him and concentrated on having a good time."

CHAPTER XXXIV -- DREAMS COME TRUE

August is not my favorite month. The brittle dry remains of summer cover the farm. The air is hot and humid and even the dust from the usual dryness is depressing. Gone is the rich and virile green of summer, yet the world is still untouched by autumn's magic. That year John and I were preparing to go to Louisville, Kentucky, to the State Fair Horse Show. It was here that the world champions of the American Saddlehorse breed would be crowned.

The great show is held at the KY-State Fair Grounds in the coliseum known as Freedom Hall. Here the elite of the Saddle Horse world gather from as far as California and Canada and Maine and Florida. The

pageantry of “stake night” when the world’s finest and most tested three-and-five-gaited and harness horses meet to vie for the roses is the most magical moment in a horseman’s life. All the lights are dimmed in the arena as the orchestra begins the strains of “My Old Kentucky Home.” This signals that the big one is about to begin. Each contender bounds into the rings with the spotlight focused on him as the announcer calls out horse, rider and owner’s names. When the cast is complete, these “Peacocks of the Horse World” begin a display of speed, motion and precision, of elegance and gameness, directed by horsemanship of the highest degree, for the title of five-gaited grand champion of the world. Leading up to this class are the world champion titles for three-gaited, fine harness, and the titles for younger horses.

It was the world’s champion title for junior three-gaited horses, four-year-old horses, that we were interested in. The three-gaited horse is the epitome of elegance in the horse-world. It shows the most refined version of the trot (not the powerful speed trot of the five-gaited horse). It requires a horse of utmost quality in conformation. The mane is roached off to emphasize the slender, perfectly arched neck.

To produce a horse of quality enough to even be in contention on stake night is a feat most people in the horse world never accomplish. We were going to Louisville this year to watch the first fruits of Heathermoor Farm’s breeding program perform in the three-gaited stake for junior horses. Our dreams of glory were pinned on Crystal Springs, an elegant, light chestnut mare - the first foal bred and foaled on Heathermoor Farm. She was the daughter of our miracle stallion Rex, the great sire whom God had literally given us, and of the lovely mare, “Doll”, to which we had been directed in such an unusual way.

Crystal, or “Little Doll” as we called her, had been nurtured and trained on Heathermoor farm by our inexperienced hands. Love had been her jockey and John had driven her to the cart, and God, in answer to our desperate pleading when we had done all we knew how to do with her, had sent just the right man to buy her in Doss Stanton. This horseman was a scout who selected a colt or two every year and then “sponsored” them in further training until he found just the right place for that individual star to shine. Many a good potential show horse never gets a chance to develop its talent because of not being put into just the right hands. We were all just thrilled to think that God had honored our venture in faith, via the horse business, by even allowing Crystal Springs to get to the ring in Louisville.

Although I usually was very melancholy and homesick the night before I left the children, it had always vanished completely once I was on the road, but this time the loneliness for Love persisted. At times it was almost depressive. Yet strangely, I didn’t feel this way about the boys this time.

On stake night, we were able to get reserved places just above the box seats in the center of the coliseum. An intense air of excitement always enveloped Freedom Hall on this night. All around the ring hung the metal plates bearing the names of each year’s winner of the big five-gaited stake and they all projected a glory from the past. The bugle blew for the junior three-gaited stake and we waited expectantly as the graceful young horses bounded into the ring, knees and hocks popping as if on springs, delicate ears on alert and large expressive eyes bulging with life and spirit. “There she is,” I called. “No,” said John, “that’s not her.” Then an excited “There she is! There, look there!” he gripped my hand and pointed at the next horse. In the gate she sprang, radiating elegance with every springy stride, gold highlights glinting from her tawny coat. So that was the end product! The finished work of a docile and baggy broodmare. The cute foal, the scraggly, bushy adolescent colt had become the most gorgeous of all creatures! Our hearts were just bursting with pride and we wished with longing that the children were there to see her. The workout over, the class lined up and the judge called the winner. Then to our amazed ears, we heard “the reserve World champion three-gaited horse is Crystal Springs!” Our ears nearly burst with joy!

There was so much more realized there for us than anyone else in all that vast crowd that packed Freedom Hall. For tonight we were realizing the fruit of a life lived literally by faith (although sometimes

falteringly) in God's promises. His great faithfulness was demonstrated to us that night as all our struggling to know and do God's will for the past six years, all the hard work and disappointments and discouragements, all our utter inadequacies were overruled and rewarded. God had caused us to triumph over all these things! The story we had asked God for had come to its climax.

The wonderful young mare who had just been acclaimed among the very finest young horses in the world was the first foal bred and born on the farm we asked God for, by a great stallion we had prayed for, raised and developed and trained by a family of untrained horsemen, who every day had asked the Master Horseman for wisdom. Finally the mare was sold to the one man able to see that she got her chance! We had no money, no farm, not much experience. We were way out of the horse country, but we had God on our side...All things are possible with God! Our thrill over this tremendous interacting of faith and history was dimmed only by the pang of loneliness for Love - the equally attractive young woman who had been this fine mare's first rider.

When we arrived home the next day. Love was already home from the lake. She had cleaned up the house and done the shopping. Again, we were amazed at this new spirit we had seen of late in our almost grown girl. The next day she willingly helped me tackle the tremendous mess of our attic closet. It was such a wonderful treat for me to be working side by side with Love. Seeing her put her heart so willingly into such an unglamorous project thrilled me. I was struck with how grown up Love seemed, so capable and eager to help, sometime later, we both stood back and admired our orderly closet, feeling together the satisfaction of a job well done. As I looked at her standing by the closet door, I wondered if she could know what a strange elation the commonplace little adventure had caused in my heart. I hoped not, for she would surely think I was crazy.

CHAPTER XXXV -- ANOTHER THREAD

The summer of Love's fifteenth year a friend gave me a copy of The Intercessor by Norman Grubb. It was the story of a Welsh coal miner, Rese Howells, and how he came to trust God. As his desire to know God better, increased - God would show him deeper truths and give him stiffer tests to prove them in his life. After each test his faith grew stronger and he was able to see and lay hold of more and more of the riches and power of God. God trained him to such a point that he and the prayer warriors he commanded were God's tool to stop, through prayer, the advances of Hitler and deliver civilization from annihilation by Nazism. In this way God allowed this servant of His to be the means by which the Gospel could be preached to the whole world, preparing the way for Jesus to come back.

There was a chapter in the book that somehow, in a way I cannot explain, seemed especially to catch my attention. The Howells were led to go to Africa with the very definite guidance which this man had learned how to hear and respond to. It meant giving up forever their only child, a baby boy. Rese thought it would be unfair to be continually "switching parents" on the child. This was an unparalleled sacrifice in this staunch soldier's life. But fixing his eyes on Calvary and what it had cost God to purchase their redemption, Mr. and Mrs. Howells give up their only son that God's power might be released to bring salvation to many. Claiming the promise that "whoever gives up father, mother or children for my sake I will give back a hundred fold," and leaving their son with his brother and his wife, the Howells went to Africa. God caused the Holy Spirit to be poured out in such measure in honor of His servant's sacrifice that 10,000 people entered God's kingdom soon after as a result.

I was so thrilled and excited by this wonderful, true story. Oh, how much I wished to see God's power in this way! How much I wanted to learn to pray so that I could really see Heaven move in response as it did for Rese Howells. I asked God earnestly to teach me how to pray like this. Shortly after, the verse Matthew 19:29 came up in our devotional readings and we pondered it. "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's

sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

CHAPTER XXXVI -- COME AWAY MY BELOVED

Tuesday, August 28, dawned dry and hot. Only the plans of football in the air brought hope that nature would soon change her tired and dusty summer garb for a bright new colorful dress of autumn. Soon there would be a nip in the air to revive my spirit that was worn down by summer’s heat. Soon school would be starting and Love was anticipating it “I’m excited about school starting and football games and cold weather...Oh, it’s fun. It’s exciting!” But later in the day, Love’s joy had a set back. “Today Janis told me she was going to Vestavia. I cried. I couldn’t help it. I love her so much. I don’t know why I feel so yuck. I guess its partly Janis. But somehow I feel the Lord feels sorry for me. I wonder if something terrible is going to happen to me?”

Football practice had started, and with it the cheerleaders had begun their dedicated work-out. Love was coaching the Junior High cheerleaders. Her goal for them was perfection. Some of the girls, however, did not have the grace and coordination to measure up to her idea of perfection. More trying to Love was the fact that some did not have the zeal. There was the mother’s perspective on cheerleading which was for it to be mainly a fun time for their children. A time of being a part of things, and just something to do. Love had fretted and chaffed over the impossibility of reconciling the two ideas. To her it was unthinkable not to have as your goal the very best. But this would involve hurt feelings and disappointment for some girls who had not the ability to be the best cheerleaders, or who had not a strong enough desire to endure the necessary discipline. The mothers’ view prevailed and Love had to struggle with what she had. Most of the time she was utterly frustrated and vowed never to take this job again.

On Thursday, August 30, Love prepared a devotional from the book which had been her constant companion of late. The title was Come Away My Beloved. She studied on her devotional in the tack room between horses she was working. In the devotional she told the cheerleaders about “Safety in God’s Will.” “It’s the only safe place to be,” she had said. She was certain that she was there. Because of the awareness of being in God’s perfect will she had a feeling that “something wonderful was going to happen tonight.”

In the afternoon Richard took a carload of boys and Love to the school for football practice. When the cheerleaders rehearsal was over, the girls usually hung around the practice field visiting and watching the boys practice. Evening approached and the fathers stopped by on their way home from work to relive their own boyhood, discuss the merits of the individual players, and assess the future of the team. When praise fell on a particular daddy’s son, how proud he would be! For that dad, at least, the day was made!

Nearly all the girls had been called for, or had taken themselves home, and Love sat all alone on the steps of the gym waiting on Richard to come from the locker room to take her home. Someone snapped her picture sitting with her knees folded to her chest, chin cupped in her hand - waiting.

Love had a date that night and she began dressing about 7:00. She put on her shocking pink robe as she stepped from the shower to watch a show about horses on TV. As we sat watching the TV, Aline dropped by with the Gresham children. They were headed across the river to Camp Lumberjack for a campout and wanted Love to join them after her date. Love sort of halfway promised that she would. She resumed her dressing and Franny popped in. She had been at the barn and was on her way home. Even then, before her make-up was complete, I heard Franny exclaim, “Love, I never saw you look more beautiful.”

We, too, looked up in amazement as Love appeared in a dress instead of the usual jeans. But not satisfied, she changed again. This time she wore a pale champagne-colored muslin dress that was

particularly becoming to her and on her feet were the thong sandals that she had bought with her own money. I had found some just like them for one-fourth the price, but her discerning eye for quality saw every flaw in them. She would have none of the cheaper version. Instead, she had found these. "Love, why the dress?" I asked in amazement. "I just felt like looking beautiful tonight," she answered. And beautiful she was. I looked at her in admiration, but suddenly she disappeared again. This time she came out in Franny's dress, white organdy with tiny pink rosebuds and a sash. It was a lovely dress, but just a little too short for her. Love is taller than Franny.

Even now I can see her standing by her bedroom door, straight and slender, queenly in the soft white dress, her silky brown hair falling down her back, her oval face serenely radiant and her olive skin never clearer. The roses in her cheeks proclaimed her good health and anticipation. I remember thinking. "She looks like a bride on her wedding day."

About eight o'clock Love finished her dressing. On top of her messy bed she laid down her Living Bible and next to it the book recently so important to her, Come Away My Beloved. Quickly she entered a notation in her beloved diary, "I'm wearing a dress tonight - me! can you believe it? I'm really excited about tonight!" Her date arrived and she said goodbye to us and some girls who were still there. The last thing she said to them was, "I have a feeling something wonderful is going to happen tonight!"

CHAPTER XXXVII -- GONE OH DEATH IS NOW THY STING

As Love walked out of the door, I picked up the book I was reading, and settled down in my favorite reading spot, the love seat by the living room fireplace. Somehow I couldn't get into the book. My thoughts wandered. Suddenly, I realized that I was very unhappy. Something strange gripped me. A lonesome, lost feeling consumed me. It seemed it was an accumulation of all the horrible and lost feelings of a lifetime. I had never experienced anything like it. What is wrong? I wondered. Am I sick? Is this an attack of Satan? I had a great urge to run to John and ask him to protect me, but I realized he would probably think I was losing my mind. Was I? Finally, I got into bed with my Bible but found little relief from this oppressive "something" which had hold of me.

I heard a siren wail. I thought it was coming from the gangster program Peter was watching on television. The high piercing sound of the siren seemed to cut like a knife blade into my heart, and I shuddered. I had just drifted off to sleep when the telephone rang with its awful news. I sat up as John crashed into the bedroom. "Love's been in a wreck and she's hurt - bad," he barked out as he began frantically throwing on his clothes. I leaped out of bed to begin dressing, wondering if, in such a situation, one should bother with everyday things like dressing and combing hair. "What happened?" I gasped. "That was the security guard at University Hospital," John said. "He said to come quickly, but not to have a wreck."

The boys had just come home in separate cars and were demanding to know what was happening. "You stay here, and we'll call you just as soon as we know something," John told them. But I interrupted. I knew the agony of waiting and not knowing, and besides I wanted my brood around me. John agreed, and we all leapt into the car for the long, torturous twenty-mile trip to the hospital. I gripped Mike's hand with all my strength as we sped down our rough and winding country road. A deer bounded across our path, the first one I had ever seen here, and yet everybody else had seen them. Though I felt strangely numb, the blessed assurance that God was still in control came sharply to my mind. "God doesn't make mistakes," I said, and I knew it was true.

John began to pray, but I couldn't. I was too numb. I thought of Love, who hated suffering, and was so sensitive to pain. What was she suffering, God? What horror was her flesh being subjected to? And for the first time in my whole life, at the very depths of my being I wanted to change places with her. I had said many times to a friend, "Oh, if I could suffer that for you." But now I said it to God with all the

earnestness I possessed. Something big broke inside my heart, and I was free for the first time to really understand what love meant.

We were met by a sobbing Elaine in the emergency room of University Hospital. Her son Jay had been driving the car and although he, too, was in critical shape, she was doubly heartbroken., feeling his responsibility as the driver. As we all clutched each other's hands, we thought of our teenage sons and how easily any of them could be in Jay's place. We understood the hazards of young people and cars. As we shared our grief that night, it was forged into an iron ring of love, binding our hearts together.

The officials ushered us into a barren little closet that served as a waiting room. The starkness of the room was softened only by the officials' concern and kindness. It seemed we waited a long time. Finally we learned that Jay was not so seriously hurt as Love, whose condition was very grave.

It was about eight o'clock when Love left the house. It was after nine before we were called. I just assumed that the wreck had occurred long after they had left home- maybe somewhere downtown. I did not know until a day later that the wreck had happened only a minute or two after they left our house. The strange feeling had come upon me just exactly at the moment of the wreck. Love's condition was extremely grave. There had been no pulse when she reached the hospital. Now I am convinced that Love's spirit had gone when I had experienced the mysterious feeling. Only the dying shell of flesh had reached the hospital.

Somehow, I knew quite certainly that Love would die, and quite strangely I was at peace to let her go. Over and over the assurance kept coming that God allowed no accidents to happen to His children. The words to a hymn kept welling up from my heart, "And I know what'ere befalls me, Jesus doeth all things well." The truth of the promise that "My strength is made perfect in weakness" became so evident to me during that wait. The boys were crowded into the little room together with the Johnson's younger son Luke and daughter Lydia. John and I stood and sat alternately. Our flesh was trembling. There was a terrible stab of pain in my chest, a physical thing. But somewhere else, where "I" was (in my spirit) there was perfect peace. There was no fighting, or striving, no wishing this wasn't happening, no disbelief. It was the truest sense of reality I had ever experienced. It seemed that all my senses had been tuned to a fine and sensitive pitch, and there was no darkness at all! It was the "peace that passeth understanding" and it really did "mount guard and garrison about our souls." The term "that passeth understanding" is the only explanation for the security we felt in that peace. Certainly we were not capable in ourselves to conjure up such a certain reality as that peace at such a time as this.

In about an hour the doctor came and wanted me to sit down. It wasn't necessary. I knew what he had to say. I knew that I wished to share with him what had hold of me. Somehow Barbara, my beloved sister, and I responded to his announcement together. In a strained whisper we said, "Jesus doeth all things well."

CHAPTER XXXVIII -- GOING HOME

As we left the hospital a chapter of our lives that began fifteen years before came to an end. It was this very place where Mother and Daddy, Barbara, John and I gathered to welcome the little girl that God had sent into our lives - Tonight He had called her back to Himself. As we all walked back to our cars, the mission she had been sent to accomplish began to unfold. I recalled her feeling of expectation., the desire to look beautiful, and Franny's white dress. Barbara remembered just the day before that Love had prayed with her, "Lord what a privilege to live in your presence, and I do mean a privilege." In the Bible class the day before her death she had no requests, only praise. Her time of waiting for answers was almost over.

As we drove the long way back to the farm there was silence in the car. I realized we had been given much: the peace that passeth understanding, the awareness of her anticipation of something great about to happen (which had been her going to Heaven), and the last look at her so beautiful in her bridal dress. Our Heavenly Father had so much more for us. He had only just begun to open the storehouse of His treasures that He was about to rain down upon us.

When we arrived at home we went into the room where Love had dressed. On top of all the mess on her white tester bed was her Bible and a book. We had seen her with the book almost constantly the past week, but hadn't paid it any attention. What a confirmation of faith that little book had for us. On the cover was a painting of the light shining through the clouds. The title was like the voice of God himself, Come Away My Beloved.

She had laid it down title up as she had left the house. The book opened to where she had been reading and we found underlined, "My will is not a place but a condition...you can trust me, knowing that any pressure I bring to bear upon thy life is initiated by my love, and I will not do even this except you're willing and desire...because ye are depending on me for guidance and direction, I shall give it" she had underlined. "Move on steadily, and know that the waters that carry thee are the waters of My love and My kindness and I will keep thee on the right course."

The next paragraph (where I picked up) was entitled "Release Thy Grief". I read "never bury thy griefs but offer them up to Me. Thou wilt relieve thy soul of much strain if ye can lay every care in My hand...turn it over to Me and in doing so, ye shall free me to work it out." Coincidence on top of all else?

We opened the Bible on her bed and there was a reference in the front to a starred verse. "The only thing I want from God, the thing I seek most of all, is the privilege of meditating in His Temple, living in His presence every day of my life, delighting in His incomparable perfection and glory. There I'll be when troubles come. He will hide me. He will set me on a high rock..." (Psalm 27:4).

As the family gathered in the living room with our beloved friends and neighbors, it was as if God Himself had left us a note. "I called her away, Love, My beloved" in answer to the longing of her heart spoken by the verse marked for us in her Bible. "The thing I want most of all is the privilege of living in His presence every day of my life."

This special message from Love and God, who is the "God of All Comfort" was the confirmation of the great miracle of the "peace that passeth understanding" which we were experiencing. It was indeed faith made sight. What joy leaped in my heart as the dazzling light of the glory of God caused the whole meaning of life to become suddenly so crystal clear. It was just as the Bible said, death for the Christian was the beginning. Heaven is what we were created for!

Suddenly we saw so many things with a newness and clear perspective. Things we thought we had known, but in this new light it was as if we had never understood them. It seemed like the windows of our lives had been very fuzzy, and now were marvelously washed! A feeling of great success as parents swept over us. Why this is what all the struggling of the past weeks had been about. The struggling with the question of what did prosperity really mean for our children, and of how much we were willing to sacrifice for it. This is why God had put this prayer on our hearts with such urgency. Now we saw the proof of the intellectual answers to which God had led us such a little while before. Oh, the perfect timing of our God. We had given to our child the only thing that has any real and lasting value; the only thing that could have endured such a night as this. Why, this is what the business of parenthood is all about! God had given us a baby girl and our top priority was giving her back to Him.

There was a great and terrible wound in our bodies. A literal part of our own flesh had been wrenched away. But it was a physical thing, something we knew would heal. We knew with a certainty we had never dreamed possible that Love was in Heaven. We knew that she knew where she was going and longed to go there. All else we could have given her had vanished away this night. But as she had marked in her Bible, “Love would go on forever” and “at His right hand were pleasures forevermore.”

We saw so clearly that it was for this moment we were all born. We saw the temporariness of all that the world has. We saw the amazing solidness and reality of spiritual things: that our relationship with God, our citizenship in Heaven and our treasures stored there were the only lasting reality. We felt the strong and certain security that only this can give.

When we left the hospital the promise of Matthew 19:29 flashed into my mind like a neon sign. (And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mother or children or farm for my name’s sake, shall receive many times as much and shall inherit eternal life). I had asked God to show me His power. The last few weeks I had hungrily asked Him to teach me the meaning of intercessory prayer. Prayer with power had to involve a true willingness to take upon oneself the burden of the one you were interceding for. This was the real meaning of the love Jesus was speaking of.

Now I understood the significance of the Scripture requiring a willingness to sacrifice dear things and relationships in the light of this kind of prayer. It resulted in God’s power being mightily released. I knew certainly that we had made the sacrifice in gladly giving back Love to her Heavenly Father. I knew on the basis of His promise that I could expect Him to give back to us the one hundred fold. In some mysterious way we could claim lives for His Kingdom. It was the law of the Kingdom of Heaven, something given to gain something else. Every time my very highly tuned emotions would feel a stab of grief I would instantly hold my offering up to God and claim from Him some new lives for His Kingdom. “Lord, we give her gladly to You. Only let me see the one hundred fold come in.” Instantly the pain disappeared and bright joy appeared in its place. Only two or three times did this sacrifice fail to bring peace. I immediately sought Him again. “Lord, comfort me,” I prayed. Instantly I was comforted. It was a real miracle, and I can truly say we had almost no grief at all!!!

The clutching pain I felt in my chest, which I thought would be there for weeks, suddenly left forever the very next day. For me, who was so afraid of the pain death would cause that I could not even read about it, this was a priceless miracle.

CHAPTER XXXIX -- THE DIARY

The next morning Peter pulled out a scrapbook that was under Love’s bed which contained the disorderly stack of papers that constituted her diary. It was written on farm stationery and notebook paper. Was it another coincidence that caused him to pull out of the stack the very piece of paper that had her momentous letter of July 1?

To Whoever Cares:

Today is July 1, 1973. I have just been revealed something, and it is that I’m going to die young. I’m not sure exactly how I feel about it. Right now I’m crying but maybe tomorrow Ill be glad. I’m different, very different. I’ve been aware of this for a long time. I don’t fit this world. But I have learned one thing that’s made me able to live and that is to love. I can love more deeply than any other thing. It’s the most real thing I know. I want to express how I love to you, so you can too.

I love you world - you people. I love you, and I want us all to be happy. I want to show you how

before I die. My life is a constant wanting but not getting. I guess it's better than getting and not being thankful. All I know is someday in heaven I'll be fulfilled. Earthly things don't really matter anyway. But I want my life, my death, my words, my love, something of me to change this old world. I hope you can understand the deep meaning behind what I stupidly try to express. Try to understand I'm a lot more than I seem to be. When I die, I want everything natural and normal and nothing hidden or changed. Because my life begins after my death.

Philippians 3:13 - "I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead..."

I have often thought of how much the hand of God had been in that one act of Peter's. There was one chance in several hundred that he would pull out that letter from the stack of similar papers. The fact that he found it early - the day after the accident, before her service - further complemented the details of the last evening.

Barbara's little girls, Nita and Peggy, were with Peter when he discovered the letter. The mystery and wonder of it all were not lost on the little ones. Peter echoed Peggy's question to Barbara, "Mama, do you think Love was really an angel?"

CHAPTER XL -- PRAISE

In the light of all this glory God was showing us, there was one thing I could not bear that night. The practical ones brought me down from the mountain where I was beholding His face, by mentioning the earthly necessity of a funeral. A funeral? For Love? Love so young and full of life? Love so full of expectancy? Love, who just tonight was beginning to taste life in all its fullness? For a few seconds there, I saw death as the world sees it - stark, staggering tragedy. The sudden irrevocable end of youth and beauty and joy, eternal pain in the hearts of those still living, the nightmare of a breathless, battered body, the desolation of the grave, the tragedy of a life unfulfilled, a budding rose crushed before it reached full bloom. The very horror and offense of death was wrong. It was totally illogical. It was not what God had planned. It was certainly the emanation of something sinister. It was indeed the wages of sin, the result of man's deliberate turning from the Source of the satisfaction of all the heart's longings (which is God) to worship himself and his own way.

But so greatly did God love His rebellious creation, and so great was the destiny He planned for man, that He has reversed the horrors of death. In the person of His Son Jesus, He died on the cross, that we might be acquitted from sin's curse. All of history is measured by His cross. It stands alone as the central figure of man's story. He proved His victory and pointed to the restored destiny of man when He rose from the grave on Easter morning in His body. It was the same body, yet somehow wonderfully changed, and then He returned to Heaven.

This was the priceless gift He offered to whosoever would return to Him: complete forgiveness, a new quality of life and Paradise restored. For those who had thus become His children, death, the evil enemy, had been transformed to a friend, a gateway to the fullness of living that had ever been His purpose for man.

No, there would be no funeral for Love as we ordinarily think of it. Why even the very tone of the word spoke of desolation. There would be no mourning, for our mourning had already been turned to joy two thousand years before. "What can we do?" I asked Frank Barker, my brother-in-law and my minister. Frank responded immediately with a suggestion that I think might be the beginning of a new way to celebrate a Christian's death. When a Christian has been delivered from the wages of sin which is death, by the great sacrifice of Jesus, how can we mourn? Doesn't such a fact call for the highest praise? Yes,

we would have a “praise service.” And so a small graveside service was followed by a service of praise at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. The simple sermon Frank delivered will echo into eternity.

We praised Him for Jesus who had removed the sting of death for all who come to Him. We praised Him for Paradise, our intended home. We praised Him for the preparation that He often gives in the death of His Saints and for the fruit that would surely come from Love’s testimony. We praised Him for the peace that passeth understanding, that did indeed “mount guard and garrison about our souls.” We praised Him for the Comforter who is the Holy Spirit.

The Comforter was there in all His power and when the huge congregation rose to its feet for the final hymn, “How Great Thou Art”, I knew as did many others, that it was just as Jesus said, our faith in Him was the “victory that overcomes the world!” A letter we received from one friend summed up the thoughts of so many. She wrote, “Everyone who attended the service was heavy of heart and expected to burst into tears. Instead of tears everyone was lifted into joy. It was as if a healing had spread over the entire congregation. Only God can do a thing like this.”

CHAPTER XLI -- BROTHERS

What about Love’s brothers? Did they praise God for victory over death also? There is something about the death of a young person that is far more tragic than that of an old person. Old people are expected to die, but the young? What of teenagers right on the threshold of adulthood, of really living? No one expects them to die. No one even thinks of them as being vulnerable to death, especially their own contemporaries. No, they are all too consumed with the force of physical life: of trying to live fully as individuals for the first time. When all of their physical vitality is suddenly stilled in death, the young are more caught up in the mystery of it than older ones ever are. Suddenly they are aware that death is a reality even for one in whom the life force is so strong. I believe this is the reason God chose a teenager through which to show us all He did. He wanted it to bear great fruit in the lives of the youth. He wanted us to know that Heaven is for the young! Youth and all its beauties and vitalities are God’s gift. It is the curse of sin that ages the heart and body. In Heaven the real force and beauty of that which we have glimpsed of in this earthly life will be there in a dazzling, shining way eternally.

Our children are not very communicative in a vocal way. So I have to rely more on their actions and things their friends tell me, than their own words. As we left the hospital, the older boys were silent. Only Peter reacted outwardly. “Why did Love have to die?” he questioned several times. When we arrived home he crawled into her tousled bed and has slept there ever since.

The next morning Mike went with his grandfather to make funeral arrangements. Richard went out for a walk. But Peter was sobbing. “When I think of Love being in Heaven I’m not sad, but when I think of her not being here, I cry.” A little later that day he questioned, “If Love had been in her bed and God wanted her, He would have taken her there, wouldn’t He?” The security of the saints was beginning to dawn upon him. After the service, Peter suddenly came leaping into the room. He had received an obvious revelation from God. “Mama, if somebody gave Love a new car we wouldn’t want to take that away from her would we? Well, how could we want to bring her back from what she has now?” With that Peter settled forever the loss of his beloved sister. And he was right. Only our own self-pity could keep us from rejoicing with her over what she was now experiencing.

Later Peter had his testimony before his youth group. He said that if he had died the night Love died, he knew that he wouldn’t have gone to Heaven. But on that night he had asked Jesus into his life, and it was beginning to be different. He was thus the first fruit of Love’s death.

Mike’s first thoughts were for Jay, the young man who was driving the car. The second night Mike sat

with Jay in the hospital all night. He took the flowers from the altar to Jay. They were beautiful, laughing daisies that Franny said Love had wanted for her service. A bond of love grew between the boys, and they entered college together as roommates.

One of the other miracles of this story was Jay's healing. His face and skull were badly damaged by the accident. The doctors said it would require much time and plastic surgery to repair him. But in 6 weeks Jay was back watching the football team with hardly a trace of a scar. And very soon resumed his roll as captain of the team on the field.

Mike is my very silent one. Tall and handsome, he is the one I know will succeed at any task he chooses. He has learned the meaning of self-discipline and hard work, but not of conversation. What a glorious blessing it was to me to see the "life verse" he had chosen to be under his senior picture in the school annual. "My contentment is not in wealth, but in seeing You, and knowing all is well between us, and when I awake in Heaven, I will be fully satisfied for I will see You face to face." (Psalms 17:15).

Richard, the one Love had prayed for as her last request - I'll never forget the victory I saw on Richard's face as Frank was preaching Love's Praise Service! He turned and looked at me and on his handsome, manly face I never saw a more radiant look of strength and victory. There was joy sparkling from his blue eyes. It was as if to say, "Mama, we've got everything. If we've got such victory here, nothing can lick us!" I remembered the Scripture, "He has given you the whole world to use, and life and even death are your servants. He has given you all of the present and all of the future, all are yours." (I Corinthians 3:22). Life and even death are ours. A week later it was reported to me that Richard answered a question in a Bible class concerning what he had learned the past week. He answered slowly, "I have learned that all things do work together for good to them who love God."

John expressed his feelings this way: "Our bonds to this earth have been loosened as the Lord has shown us things too beautiful and wonderful to comprehend. I know we will never be the same again. He has given us beauty for ashes and joy for mourning. Our great strength and joy right now is that we are sure Love is beholding the face of the Father even this minute. And knowing that our pretty little girl is there waiting for us is added incentive to be getting ready for that journey ourselves. The things of earth don't seem nearly so important now."

"I just have to tell everyone that same thing. If you know that your children belong to the Lord then you don't have to worry about what He does with them. And if you don't know, there isn't anything on this earth as important as getting the Lord into their lives. Because when you are waiting in a hospital to learn if your child will live or die, money and fine schools and big houses and prestige seem awfully insignificant."

CHAPTER XLII - THE WEDDING GARMENT

In the Bible the physical aspects of the story, like names and places, often have a spiritual significance. I believe in our lives the same is often true. The full significance of some of these facts did not burst completely into my understanding in the first weeks after Love went to Heaven. Yet it seemed as if some of these incidents just would not fade unobtrusively into the background. They kept forcing their way into the corners of my mind insisting that I pay attention to them.

One such incident was Franny's white dress in which Love met her Savior face to face. This last eventful evening, feeling strongly the premonition of glory, she had tried on all the dresses in her closet. She changed again and again. I wondered why. She finally chose Franny's dress even though it was too short for her. The significance of the white dress burst instantly into my mind when I knew that Love was in Heaven. Still it bothered me badly that the dress was too short. I kept trying to put such a seemingly

insignificant fact out of my mind. For a whole year, I struggled with this seeming foolishness.

Nearly a year later I learned the significance of the dress. Franny told me for the first time a precious secret she had with God. "I loved Love more than anything in the world," she told me. She had begun to put her love for her friend before her love for God. Franny had realized that she could not just wish Love out of her life. She who had been more than a sister since they were three years old was very dear. "I couldn't just walk off and say, 'See ya, Love'." So as a wise, true child of God, this lovely fifteen-year-old blonde had offered God her great sacrifice. "I asked Him, if there were any way to take Love out of my life, so I could depend only on Him, to do it."

"When Love died," Franny told me, "I knew He had done it for me." So Love had carried her beloved Franny's noble offering to her heavenly Father, the literal forsaking of all else to live only for Him. In some mysterious way, she put on the dress belonging to Franny as she represented Franny's surrendered love before the throne of God. How like the day when all God's children will stand before His Throne, the fruit of the Savior's Sacrifice, and we can rejoice that our complete and only covering will be His Righteousness! "Dressed in His righteousness alone faultless I'll stand before the throne."

CHAPTER XLIII -- NO GREATER LOVE

The last two days of Love's earthly life had been marred by her heartbreak over the thoughts of Janis not being at Briarwood School that year. The day after Love had entered the eternal city not made with hands, loving friends established the "Love Cowart Scholarship" fund, and money was pouring in. John woke up the next morning with a certain conviction that Janis was to take Love's place. The scholarship should be awarded to her. But would the Radars accept, for already Janis had been at Vestavia High for three days?

God was working on both sides of the situation. Marsha Radar was having second thoughts about Janis not being at the Christian School. She heard about the scholarship but felt certain that Janis would not qualify as they had no financial problems. They assumed it would go to someone in need. In order to seek God's will, Marsha and Herb had decided to put out a "fleece" like Gideon in the Bible had done. They asked God if it were His will for Janis to go back to Briarwood to have the scholarship awarded to her. They reasoned that this unlikely event would be a sure test. Then our minister called the Radars with the news that a scholarship had become available and who but Love's dear friend should go in her place. It was so obviously God's own doing, so perfect the timing, that the offer was accepted.

The first day of school dawned four days after the accident. We had all already mourned the losing of Janis to public school. Pretty Janis who was our head cheerleader would surely be missed, but that wonderful morning what a shimmering, golden joy awaited us when we saw Janis back at Briarwood in her uniform as head cheerleader! She was there as the recipient of the Love Cowart Scholarship!

It held a very special meaning to us. God's Word says that "greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." I thought of Love's love for Janis and her heartbreak just six days before at the thought of her not being at Briarwood this year. Yet because of her death. Janis was there. It seemed so befitting their love for each other. And from that mighty grandstand where the great cloud of witnesses who have finished the race are cheering us on, where our Cheerleader is now drinking at the very fountainhead of all joy, I felt the brightest smile of all was Love's voice of praise joining our own thankful hearts. "My God, how great Thou art!"

CHAPTER XLIV -- LOVE'S OWN STORY

In the days that followed, we pulled the scrapbook from under Love's bed. On its disorderly pages a most incredible story unfolded for us. We all knew that Love spent a great deal of time writing. Whenever we sought her behind the closed bedroom door, there was always a rustling of paper as the Diary was stuffed back under her bed. Peter knew she was writing her story. That was why he went straight to its hiding place the morning after the wreck.

The writings covered the last four months of her life when Love had begun her last search for fulfillment of the desperate longing for love that is in every human heart. It began by an unrequited earthly love. Heartbroken, she began to consider what love really meant.

Her contemplation began with her name. The description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 seemed to her what God was telling her He wanted her to be like:

“Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude, Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out.”

She realized that this perfect love must first come from God before it can flow through us. Over and over in her secret writings to her earthly beloved she affirmed -

“Oh, if I could tell you how much I love you, but I love God first and best.”

She felt that God had promised the fulfillment of this longing.

“For the Scripture tells us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed.”

As the summer wore on, Love began to realize that it couldn't be an earthly love that would satisfy her heart. Her passion was too all consuming for mere human love.

“I realize now that I love God more than anybody. I'm in love with Jesus. He'll always love me. He'll be true to me and I love Him.”

One time during the summer, Love felt herself losing sight of the goal, so she took her faltering faith to it's Author for she realized the seeking of God's will was worth any cost.

“Dear God,
I'm sorry. I don't know exactly what for, but I'm sorry. Something has come in between our relationship. You won't talk to me. Show me why please. Is it him, God? God, you know I want to put you first. God, please give me the desire to have you before him. God, why are you stripping me of everything I love? At least, I still have you, and I do love you.”

“Psalms 43:5 “Oh my soul. Why be gloomy and discouraged. Trust in God. I shall again praise Him for His wonderful help, He will make me smile again: for He is my God.”

“This terrible experience has taught me a lot of things. (1) I love God. I really do. I feel love for Him from my passion instead of just plain gratitude.”

“One thing that's come out of all this is I think I have a pretty good grasp on the idea of what love is.”

And again she wrote,

“... I have learned one thing that’s made me able to live and that is to love. I can love more deeply than any other thing, it’s the most real thing I know.”

Love was trying so hard to see the invisible through the veil of flesh that still held her captive. At times her vision grew so very dim and left her heart heavy as she struggled to find out the answer to the “great reason” she believed God had for her suffering.

“I’m so tired of trying to be patient and have faith. Oh, God why can’t you make it easier. If I find out this is just a part of growing up I’ll kill myself. But God I know it isn’t. You’ve told me. You’ve got something wonderful planned. I’ve just got to learn to be patient. Help me.”
“I’m completely discouraged. I lie in dust. Revive me by your Word. I told you my plans and you replied. Now give me your instructions. Make me understand what you want: for then I shall see your miracles” (Psalm 119:25).

As her fourteenth year was drawing to a close she wrote,

“I wish I knew specifically what God wants to teach me. I wish He’d be clearer. I’m so tired of trying to figure out what He’s telling me. I don’t know whether I interpret it right. It’s very depressing. I don’t understand why a fourteen-year-old girl can feel this way if it’s not for some great reason. God what is it?”

A week later, at the beginning of her fifteenth year, God answered her pleading prayer to know the great plan He had for her life, which she recorded in her momentous letter of July 1:

“It has just been revealed to me that I shall die young...”

It seemed to us that her writings from then on were similar to the writings of the Old Testament prophets. A shutter would click in the back of her mind and she would see ahead in a flash. She wrote in an unmailed letter to Janis:

“Janis, I promise I think something’s wrong with me. I don’t understand why God lets me be so miserable. He doesn’t have to give me what I want. But He could take the desire away. It’s not like I’ve turned away from Him. I’m always aware of Him and talking to Him, but I just can’t have a normal relationship with Him like everybody else. I’m just not normal. I’m a weirdo. I’m so different from other people it’s like I wasn’t meant for this world. Like I was meant to die. Sometimes I feel like that, like I wasn’t meant to live and then I get this terrible fighting feeling. Like I’m fighting for my life. I don’t want to die, I want to live!

I just read Jonathan Livingston Seagull, and he’s exactly like me. He wants more than anything in the world to fly, to live! He realized there is more to life than just staying alive and making it as comfortable as possible. There is perfection to strive for, so he dies and goes on. I know this sounds stupid. I don’t know why I’m writing like this, but I’m the kind of person that looks for more in life than little things. You know that. I’m very confusing even to myself. I guess I’m looking for something more. I guess I’m a freak, but so was Jonathan. Well not really, there were a few others.

...This has been going on for four months - getting worse all the time - I’ve already written out my will!!

Love,
Love”

Time was running out for Love. The Master Weaver’s shutter was clicking with lightning speed as the final threads of the tapestry, so tangled on one side, yet so beautiful on the other, were weaving into place.

“July 27 - I feel old now, old and mature. Like I’m a woman now instead of a kid. I feel like I can really love now. I guess I had to mature early because my life is not going to be very long.”

“July 30 - I’m just so glad all the pain - the hurt of growing up and loving a person is almost over - I’ve almost found myself - I’ve almost found God.”

She marked in her Bible, “And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We too wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as His children, including the new bodies he has promised us, bodies that will never be sick again and never die.” (Romans 8:28)

“August 7 - I’m not sure I’m going to keep a diary anymore. I feel like my misery is coming to an end pretty soon, I really do. One way or another then I won’t need you. I still love you.”

“August 8 - I’m happier than I’ve been in months. Just think God and I are friends again. He loves me and I love Him, and I’m going to Heaven!”

Her Bible study turned to Colossians 3:1-4: “Set your sights on the rich treasures and joys of Heaven...Let Heaven fill your thoughts: don’t spend your time worrying about things down here. You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in Heaven with Christ and God. And when Christ who is our real life comes back again, you will shine with Him and share in all His glories.”

Only faintly now she saw Him through the “darkening veil”. But the blessed day was coming when “His glory should be revealed.” Her true Beloved, the Heavenly Bridegroom, was calling to her through the title of the book presently so dear to her, Come Away My Beloved. “Rise up, my Love, my fair one and come away. For the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers are springing up and the time of the singing of birds has come. Yes, spring is here. The leaves are coming out and the grape vines are in blossom. How delicious they smell. Arise, my Love, my fair one and come away.” (Song of Solomon 2:10-12). And she answered her very last week on earth. “Whom have I in heaven but you? And I desire no one on earth as much as you.”

On August 30 Love had put on her bridal gown, made her last notation in her beloved diary and “Letters to God”: “I’m really excited about tonight!” With a radiant look on her face she stepped into the car with her date. Two miles down the road there were angels waiting to take her into the presence of her true Beloved, the Heavenly Bridegroom. In an instant faith became sight as she saw Him face to face. In a twinkling she received the desires of her heart as all the longing for love of the past four months met its completed fulfillment and all the struggling to know and do God’s will ended as the truth burst gloriously into clear focus. The promise she had underlined in her Bible on this side of the curtain, “No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed,” became a blessed reality.

CHAPTER XLV -- CONCLUSION

And so the power has been abundantly released into all our lives and we are all such very different persons from what we were a year ago. So much, much closer to the Source of all love, joy and peace, of

perfect security and of tremendous success. “He that forsaketh for my sake, I shall repay a hundred fold.”

It happened suddenly and unexpectedly, but I know now that God had been preparing me for this moment all my life. I know of no other explanation. It was contrary to anything I ever imagined - this loss of a child, our only daughter. Although certainly there was shock and pain initially as the two worlds collided. Then the wind that flowed out of the open door of Heaven into earth as Love stepped through, brought with it feelings of glory I had never known before - not even on childhood's magic Christmas Eve.

After three and one-half months, I am still enveloped by a shimmering glory that colors everything I see in its beautiful other worldly light. Tonight as I sit here with my thoughts, it is as if God had honored my lifelong dream to see (and still a fear that I might see) an angel. He had brought another dimension - one I had always sensed was very close, into plain view. All the fifteen years of Love's life seemed sanctified as if all the time she and I were living out God's special plan. She had been sent on a mission: she was the tangible link of my everyday world with the world of Heaven. My constant reminder during the cold light of day that there was something so much better than this life's best - just outside our sight and not very far away - the realm of blue skies and laughter and no impossibilities that the fairy tales hint. “In His presence is fullness of joy.”

Already her desire to “help change the world” by her life and death had been honored. Her story had flown around the globe and been translated into another language. Letters were piling up telling of lives changed and faith strengthened by Love's witness.

We received one letter from a lady in Florida who had been sent our letter telling something of Love's story. The lady, whom we do not know, was sending a copy of the letter to friends in California. She wrote to us, “I feel the urgency to write you so that you might see how far and wide your letter has already reached. Your desire to tell the world that the Bible is true, that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and that God is completely faithful to His promise has begun to spread like wildfire throughout the land.”

As I sit here in the quiet of this Christmas Eve, I am pondering the facts of my circumstances, this Christmas when there are no presents under the tree for her - and still this strange other-worldly peace and glory envelopes me. Can it be the beautiful face all spotted with green face cream is not sleeping on the pillow in the tester bed where I've kissed it good night so many nights for so many years? Can it be it will never be there again?

Can it be there is no present under the tree for her? That I will never know again the surge of pride as people marvel at her beauty; that we can never admire her physical perfection again? Is all the elegance, the style, the grace, the aristocratic look of her gone forever from our eyes?

To give up all of this there would have to be a gaping hole in our hearts, a constant painful tugging at our memories. Wouldn't the boys show some signs of a painful interruption in the normalcy of their lives, an awareness of the strange and dreadful ever nearness of death pressed home to them through the insulation of so many years of absolute security? Shouldn't there be an ever present dull agony of loss under whatever exteriors we may wear? Shouldn't the memory of the horror of that phone call in the night be ever behind all other phone calls in the night when the boys are out? Shouldn't there be an increased dread of the boys' growing use of cars?

Shouldn't there be for me who has specialized for nearly forty years in self-pity and who has ever fought that horrid monster, jealousy, shouldn't I be wallowing in my practiced self-pity and be jealous of my friends who have daughters to delight them and to live their girlhood through again? Shouldn't I want everyone to know my loss to be aware of the pain that should be in my heart. Why then is it so different?

Why is this Christmas the greatest one I've ever known? There are no special secrets to be revealed tomorrow, there is no hope of some longed for desire being met on Christmas morning. What is this song in my heart: this great mystery shimmering around everything? What is this security, this new way of living...this new awareness of beauty and appreciation of love? Why do these emotions keep welling up in my heart - emotions of love for God and convictions of His power and love, of eager desire to tackle life with these new revelations?

It is all so strange, I have been tempted to think myself insane. Yet I have never been more sane, more level-headed and more in control of myself. Is this then what the cross is all about? To know that even now she understands so clearly the real meaning of Christmas. She sees the very angels that heralded the first Christmas. How can I be sad when I have this nearest of all links with the One "in whom we live and move and have our being" but cannot see His face. One dearest to me, one who was once a part of my own flesh, and who was part of the everyday things of my life, is actually beholding His face now!!

As I tremble and see and feel with her for whom I felt every pain and joy for fifteen years, as I continue to do this so perfectly normal mother thing, how can there not be this song of angels in my heart, these glimpses of His Glory I've never felt before!! I feel like I understand something of what the Virgin must have felt as she pondered the wonder of the incarnation. I ponder it in reverse: the flesh, my flesh, made Spirit. The joy of my mother heart, this part of me, actually seeing all we know by faith.

My only sadness is that I can't shout these things to the world, that I can't communicate them to others. Perhaps they are too precious and Holy to be shared with any one but Him, and yet I feel as if He would have me communicate what I can of what I see. For Heaven is what I see, and it is the hope of all of His children. It is our home, the place of our citizenship and the more of its realities we see, the more eager we will be to throw off every weight and the sin that so easily besets us and press onward in that tingling expectation.

I feel His love, His power, His intelligence, His absolute control over every detail of our every day life. My life has been radically changed. I stand amazed. Gone is the self-pity, I've seen the love of God! Gone is the complaining. I know now that He orders the smallest detail of my circumstance. Gone is the fear of the unexpected. I know now that the hard places bring forth more such revelations of Himself. I feel the freedom of shrinking self as it is melted by the inflowing of His love.

The promise is surely true, there is beauty for ashes! I can't look back at what has gone, for behold all things are new! Our faith in Him does overcome the world and assures us the victory. Oh, how much of God there is all around us, and we don't see! What more is there that I still can't see!! Oh the things of earth do grow strangely dim in the light of His beauty and grace.

Thank you God for my Christmas present and thank you for Love's.