

## **IN HIS TENTS**

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(Note: It's a simply written story, that has a deeper look into the System. I like the story line, the concepts of it, and the interesting lines, insight and quotes, as well as words from the Lord to her, sprinkled throughout. I find those parts intriguing. It's not a child's story at all, and won't be to every one's liking. It was basically gotten with the non-Family in mind. It's the story of a woman's struggle to find her place in life, her bondage and break-away from the system, and finding her life's calling—and the unique way the Lord walks her through each place in her life, including her salvation, and final passing to the other side. In the sequel "Gini," is the clearer meaning of this title. This story is as told by her. There are many mistakes, and probably inconsistencies and inaccuracies. But I hope, if or when you get around to peeking at it, you'll enjoy it for what it's worth.)

Woman: Shella (shay-lah)

Chapter one: Road stop

Chapter two: Enchantment and Intrigue

Chapter three: Beginning days

Chapter four: Threshold of bonds

Chapter five: The hard way

Chapter six: Where to now?

Chapter seven: My heart

Chapter eight: Honest love

Chapter nine: Is my life that simple?

Chapter ten: Breaking loose

Chapter eleven: Heaven at last

Chapter twelve: Lovin' life

Epilogue

*(Note from Charity: This intro has interesting lines in it, though seems rather deep and unclear for the most part. But I'm leaving it here for interest.)*

Half parable, half reality, I wish to convey to you the story of my life, the roads I took that led me to this place called home, where I've been a daughter and love to the King of life. I did not always know things so pleasant, there were many bitter days, now gone by. But what kept me nearing the presence of the King, was His love and care for me, though I'd strayed so far, those by-gone days. Here I will unfold to you the happenings of my past, the tears I cried and the joys I came to know in their stead. Each part of my story holds mysteries not fully explained. I hope they will however serve the purpose of showing

you a glimpse of what lies in store for those who choose either God's love or the evil incased in the glitter of this world's lust for power, fortune and fame for one's self.

This will not teach you fully of all there lies in store, but with it I hope to show you but a bit of my life in a book sized capsule. As you read it, may your interest be lead higher to the light above that beckons each one of His children to come abide in His arms. Read on and let me intrigue you, unveil things past human view, and with the words this book contains may you never again leave His tents to the barren shores that lie beyond, to wash you to a salty and tangled grave.

May the Lord of light delight you with all pleasures that are in His hands to give. Truly He is all love, and the depth of His love is past finding out, and the breadth of His love beyond human's scope of sight, the length of it beyond what any could travel and indeed the height above all known matter in the skies. Let His love fill your soul with rare treasure, His wealth beyond count of number, and with joys you have never known till you have loved this King fully. Rapturing your heart and escaping the mind of man, is what power this love may hold for you. Taste and see –and He will be good.

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A slave was I, bought with a price—the price for this world's so-called glory and fame. A slave was I, yet I knew not to whom, for that was kept veiled beneath the glitter I saw, the embellished treasures I reached for. While one seeks after them, they do yet always shine. But shine they do as the sun, that with time sets and light turns to darkness—thus these sought for treasures turned to dust.

My master was cruel, when I could not keep the hours, or the toil made me drear. The scourge of his debt was upon my back, urging me to keep on once more, promising I would see the reward for the things I sought to gain. I thought, in the end these would once again free me from the bondage that I knew. As I look back, I remember that day.

### **Chapter one: Road stop**

“Come one, come all—‘til you have your fill. –Water, rest, food and more” the sign on the window said. It was a hot and dry day, my neck and shoulders sunburned. I just needed somewhere to cool off, so I turned in at this side resting place.

Entering, I found a dear man waiting tables. I sat down. He asked me where I'd come from—it was obvious I'd been on the road for quite some time. I looked up as if to answer, but the sun had been hot on my head and the journey tiring. My eyes were blurred. I just turn and shook my head. I was too tired to even answer,

though I would have loved to chat. I had been traveling a long long way, in body and soul, it seemed—most of the time not knowing where exactly to. Sometimes I, myself, couldn't even remember who I was or where My goals lied, or what it was that started me off on this journey that seemed to be ever going, yet never reaching it's destination.

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I was born and raised in Nevada, where the crops grow, and life can be fair. I had 8 brothers and sisters, and my parents were God fearing souls. Though I didn't always share their beliefs--for their love for God ran deep--still I trusted them to do what was for the good of the family. I knew them to be wise and that they would care for us, even to their own hurt. I went to school when I was eight, leaving high school at 18, because of farm work I late in my education. This never bothered me too much, 'cause learning was a joy, though not always the kind of learning I had to do there at the school.

At sixteen I was well ready for change and adventure. This boyfriend of mine and I would often escape the normalcy of our common lives to get away and explore the nature I felt calling me as I sat in my studies. We'd take off to some place alone, explore ways of loving--of course never anything too risky, for we knew we'd better play it safe and not get caught in too much trouble. We'd read books and do fun things together. But even this adventure wore off in fun and we were on to whatever thing had caught our interest for the time.

Sometimes we were as close friends, and at other times it was as if the other didn't know of our existence. When I was 17 ½ he moved on to the city, and that chapter of friendship end. I carried on in my studies, determined to get out of this mundane rural life style as soon as I would get the chance. I was ready to be propelled into a much faster pace and get to know things that went on outside of our small and humble town.

I tampered with love and the friendship of boys my age when I was just 13. Sitting across the aisle at church every week was a young man, about the age of 14. We'd bat eyes at one another, tease each other in the hall and often play mean tricks just to get the attention of the other. We didn't mean much by these childish displays of affection, if you could call it that, but I was being introduced to those of the opposite sex and I felt I rather liked to get involved with them.

I never did much with anyone, accept with the young man at 16 and 17, and the most we got around to doing was kissing and fondling each other a bit. These times were scary in an exciting way, because we knew if anyone were to find out, they would surely have us grounded. But we were quick and kept our studies up for the most part, and never did we get totally found out.

My mother asked me once, "Have you every touched a man before, Shella? You sometimes have a twinkle in your eyes like you have gone beyond our agreed upon guidelines, that you are to wait until marriage to engage in such things. But I know you wouldn't want to hurt your family or yourself even. So I trust you will keep to yourself until the time you are bound to another." I never really answered, and looked rather puzzled that she would even be asking me such things, but I knew just what she was saying, and she never brought it up again.

When I left home, my mother cried. "It's a big and troublesome world out there, Shella. You know your father and I tried to teach you the way of our Lord. But if you must try out what this world has, the best bit of counsel I can give you is: though the things of this world may try to outshine the love our Lord has to offer, they can never take the place of the real values in life. You'd do best to remember that well."

If only I had written those words upon my heart and lived them! At first those words rang in my ears for the longest time, for I had plenty of time to think, as I traveled. But I, in my youthful desire for something new, with time cast them aside.

I traveled from town to town and came to know many different walks of life. I saw varying degrees of wealth or lack of it, tried my hand at different odd jobs and fell in love a time or two. I spent much time on the road--very much like the road of life, traveling and seeking to find one's place.

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I rested there awhile and ate. I would have then been on my way were it not for a strange man, who had caught my eye. Strange I say, cause he was dressed very different than the rest of the folks around. He seemed rather out of place, but didn't seemed to mind. Being a traveler and not from this area, seemed we had a thing or two in common. I chatted with him while he finished his meal. I was beginning to feel a bit better myself. I'd been here nearly an hour and a half. By the time we finished talking, it seemed like an eternity had past! I had mentally reviewed my life inside and out, and thought I now had a clearer picture of where I was going or what I was now to do with life, my time, my existence as I now saw it.

I wasn't planning on staying long there; now I felt compelled to stay on. Mr. Sean Abuchi, as he introduced himself, asked me what I was doing that night. "Nothing as of yet" I replied. He invited me to come and dine with him in his tucked away suite at the top of a large hotel building.

"I thought perhaps you were a traveler like me. I mean..." I tried to explain. "Oh, you mean these clothes are different than what's most commonly worn, and thought, perhaps I was passing through?" I nodded. "Well, maybe I just knew you'd be here and was trying to

attract your attention.” He said coyly, then let out a laugh. I knew he was trying to turn on the charm for me, a perfect stranger, but I couldn’t resist the pull I felt to learn more about him.

I had no other plans for the night, though was wary of getting so involved with someone I had just barely met. “It’s just one night.” I thought to myself. “If he bids me stay the night, I can be right out of there in the morning, no strings attached, and can then be on my way.”

“About the dinner,” I added abruptly, “Sounds good to me, but how will I get there? I mean, I don’t know this city, and much less how to get to so remote a hide-a-way as you seemed to say you have,” I said with cocky smile.

“I’ll have my limo pick you up then at quarter after 6 at this little rest stop.” He said, sounding confident. Wooing this now independent woman into their barracks was no easy task for any man. I was still on the “single road” journey. I wasn’t planning on anything serious too soon with anyone, for “there’s still the whole world yet to see”, I’d think to myself.

As the time drew near for the appointment with this almost-stranger, thoughts were racing through my head. “Oh, I hope I’m doing what’s best for my future...” I would then snap back into reality thinking, “Really, it’s just this once, and I can be on my way in now time. This isn’t delaying me any, for I’d have had to find a place to rest tonight anyway.”

## Chapter two: Enchantment and Intrigue

As I waited on the step, looking for the vehicle to drive up any moment I couldn’t help thinking back on all the times I’d waited for some man to come and make his glorious entrance into my life. I thought then that it would take all of the struggle out of my life, ease the things that seemed difficult. But after trying at the fount of the love, wishing for men alone to satisfy, I was found yet wanting. I had not found as of yet a thing that deeply thrilled my soul and gave me peace, so the search carried on.

I was left wondering now just how far this engagement tonight would lead. Would it be the key to open up the closed doors within my heart and mind? Or would it too just become another lost cause, a dead end that led no where, from which I would have to turn again and find my way onward in my quest for life and love.

There it was, I saw it now, the car that was nearing looked to be somewhat tattered and well worn in years, but you can never judge by an outward look, I always told myself. Glancing in the window and getting the okay that this was indeed my ride, I took the plunge to go for it--whatever this night might entail. One way or the other, I was sure things were to be better.

I was driven down some narrow and rather windy streets till at last we came to this park-like clearing, with the main building on the left.

My stranger-turned-friend, helped me out of the car, being every bit the gentleman he could muster up. I can’t say I didn’t enjoy being treated like that, I just had to get used to this new situation, among a class I was unaccustomed to.

After giving the driver leave, Mr. Abuchi lead me up the back way. He said it was simpler this way. I knew full well what he meant: Without the prying eyes of others in the lobby, wondering who it was that he was now with--the pawn that he had seized his hands upon, in his own gentlemanly way, and was ushering into his den. He didn’t want to deal with that yet.

Turning to me he lead me up a flight of stairs he said, “You know, there’s just something special about you. I can’t quite place it. You’re intriguing and I’d like to get to know more about you--in time I suppose. Let us go up and dine. The servants have it all prepared and I’ve excused them for the night.”

I don’t know why this scared me. At first I thought there was not more to this encounter than a brief meeting of minds, talking and sharing one’s thoughts. But now this! He wanted to get to know me? Getting close to me was not an occupation of many others, in fact the last time I’d had such a friend with whom I’d shared my innermost secrets with, they’d up and left and carried on their own life style, never to communicate with me again. This hurt me deeply and I knew at that point I only had myself to trust in—or so I thought.

Up we walked. Just as my thoughts were wondering wishing we could have taken a elevator, that this was no way to treat a woman on a first date, I was brought to the present. “I always like to have some form of exercise before dinning. Don’t you? I find it helps to build a healthy appetite—and that’s always important with the food prepared in my kitchen. Only the best, for you, sweet pea.” He said with a smile, brushing his hand against mine.

I smiled then turned away to recompose my thoughts, lest I get swept away so quickly with his ever increasing charm—or rather get swallowed up in it. There was no escaping now.

We approached the door and he rung three times. “I thought you said the servants had been dismissed.” I added, trying to come out again from the shell that his advances had throw me in to. “Aha, but not this one. He is my most faithful aid, much like a friend. He keeps watch day and night over my belongings, tending to business and is there when I need him.”

“Good evening sir.” The man answering the door said as he nodded.

“This is the lovely lady I will dine with tonight,” my companion introduced me as. We stepped inside. I gave my coat to the man. There was more than was met

by the eye, between this man and his faithful aid, as far as their relationship went. I could tell. My intuition led me to believe so, though I acted nonchalant. I tried not to notice the glance or mannerisms that would have confirmed such thoughts.

We entered the softly lit dining area, and there laid out were some of the finest dishes I have ever imagined, in the most beautiful display. I seemed to forget everything for a time while I took it all in. How beautiful it all was. Thinking of the tastes that would soon be filling my senses, and the time I'd have to now rest and relax helped me forget about my worries and struggles of life.

"Have a seat, my dear," shot me back in a flash to the situation at hand. We were soon enjoying the delights prepared for us.

"I've never tasted food so good! How do they do it?" I exclaimed. "With a wave of their hand and boom, it's there!" He jokingly gestured, being the entertaining host he was. I smiled. I was quite taken by his charm at times.

We amused ourselves telling of favorite past times that we liked to engage in. There was one in particular that he said he liked, that of memorizing people's facial gestures. We laughed and enjoyed his various impersonations and renditions of human expression. I too had an interest in the way people were, the differences of the human race, the similarities as well, that are found in folks the world over, no matter what clan or race you're from. So his interest in studying the features, gestures and expressions of those he's see on the street or meet in person, rung a bell in my own heart.

I really was quite taken with this man, and how he'd swooped me up. Here I was sitting in a virtual stranger's house and home, being entertained—but what for? I wondered. Just why all this façade? There was more to it than met the eye, and I was determined to find out just how far he planned to take me. What was it that he wanted? So there I sat, half in this world of his, being the laughing, cooperative guest that I was planning to be, yet the other half of me sitting unamused, deep in thought, wondering what it all would entail.

I couldn't remain in that state forever. Before I knew it, the plates were gathered, meal was over and we were off relaxing in the adjoining lounge room, with an imitation fire, made to look like we were off in some large villa, alone, with none but ourselves for company. After sitting there for long moment, looking into the hearth, he reached over and took my hand in his, and said with a smile, gazing in my eyes, "My love, the pleasure is all mine." Kissing it, he added, "Having you here has given joy to this always-lonely man. Will you join me in a toast?" We held in our hands a drink. As we toasted and I said, in a most unromantic way, "whatever to?" He withdrew, sitting back with a soft twinkle in his eye, said, "Well, to whatever you wish your life to become. The

places you want this life to take you. Aren't there things you have yet to do, desires to explore and new places to see? You know I could be a chauffeur in this next turn of your walk through life. I could get you started on to new things. You wouldn't have to pay me dues--just yet" he added half joking.

I had been going on with my life, for sometime, and now was a hope, a chance, to reach out to something a bit different—and not have to do it alone. I wasn't sure what he meant by it all, but I knew he had something in mind. I was game to give it a go.

At first something held me back in my heart, something told me this wasn't right. And had I explored those feelings more I would have soon found out that this was not the right way to go—that there truly was more than met the eye. But I was ready for a change, a little adventure to spend my time doing. At first I thought I was just holding back because I'd been going so long on what I alone wanted to do—though I often wasn't sure just what even that was—and thought I was just resisting change. Given better judgement I would have tested the waters longer, kept biting a bit more, 'till I found the hook, line and sinker cloaked in the reeds of the bay I had found my self down in. But no, I was a foolish girl, and putting all hesitation aside, cast a look of interest, saying with my eyes, "You've got me interested, what more do you have to offer."

### Chapter three: Beginning days

I awoke with a start, I hadn't expected to be asleep for so long. *I best get going, I have much to do!* I thought as I managed to find my clothing strewn upon the floor and bed. It had been an interesting night. I managed to look decent enough to pass the servant with a nod of good morning without looking as if I had spent all night languishing in bed, drinking till I could no longer see singly.

Mr. Abuchi hadn't touched me, more than with a gentle peck on my cheek to bid me fair sleep, as he let me use the chambers of this plush and beautiful guestroom. I don't know what he did, as he went on with his night's activities, for I was well spent and retired sometime after midnight—and now it was nearly noon. Time had gone by quick while in the land of the dreams.

And dream I did...

It was twilight, as was unfolded in my dream. I was sitting upon a golden shore. Golden it seemed as the sun had just set, the golden rays had been reflected on the water and back again into my eyes. A peaceful feeling had begun to set in, and as I sat there I saw a shadow of a figure that must have been behind me. It seemed to be waving or beckoning me to rise and leave this place of worship, this quiet zone. I began to awake at that point, not sure what it meant. Half asleep I kept feeling more of the dream then I was actually seeing. I felt like this figure

was nearing to my bedside, whispering in my ear, and again saying, "Come on we've got to get out of here."

Maybe the lingering thoughts from this dreamlike state, the words heard in my heart's ear is what made me wake with such a start and eagerness to get on with the day when full awareness finally hit my slumbering soul. But the reason for my sudden action was not to carry out those words, but rather because I had a funeral to attend. My sister's husband had died in a car accident, not half a week before.

*I must be on my way.* But not without a word to the chef who was on duty, already preparing a beautiful spread for me, anticipating my stirring. I asked him to pack up something for me to take, I'd just have to eat on the go. "Oh" and I added. Tell Mr. Abuchi that I'll be back later this evening. We have some things to discuss. Thanks!" I said, as I slipped out the door, and down the steps quickly.

I bumped into a janitor carrying his clean supplies, he must have been cleaning the windows in the hall between the flights of stairs. "Oh, excuse me." I said, though he seemed to take little notice of me, which I was glad for, seeing I was trying to make a quiet and unnoticeable exit. *He must be used to this kind of treatment.* But before more thought was given, the road side was facing me, and waiting there was a taxi, which seemed to be there for the purpose of escorting me, solely.

"The man said, if I see a little lady, of about your build and height, to take you to where ever you please. He has paid me well. So where to, Miss?"

"Please take me to the town chapel on San Antonio street. There I will meet up with my friends and relatives. See I've got a funeral to attend."

"I'm sorry, Miss. Was it someone you knew well?"

"Actually it's my brother in law. Well, was, anyway. I never knew him too well. I moved away from home-- wanted to see the world and get on with my life. I was born and raised in a small village town, without much to do or see. I had good parents, and my family life was better than most those in the main cities who's split homes formed the normal state of living." I offered, feeling in a talkative mood.

"I know what you mean about split homes and all." He added. I never did really get to live with a family. I mean, I think I did, once over Christmas, when I was a youngin', for about two weeks I lived with my Uncle Tim and Aunt Bretta, but they have since passed away. Well, rather abruptly actually. I heard they caught a flu, when I was ten or so, but I think that was just a cover up. I'm not sure how they passed away. Just one day we received word that they weren't doin' so well, and needed our prayers. Then days later we received notice that they'd gone on to the other side.

Who know's cause they weren't really supposed to be here, ya know, like they weren't here on solid visas

or legal citizens or something. I heard 'em sayin' something in the kitchen one day while I was running the milk through the machine. --They lived on a farm. Anyway, I know what it's like to have lived the other side of the fence, not knowing real family and home, but be in a boy's school and not have a real dad to call yours, and not a mama to fix your breakfast for you. Ha! I never really knew what good breakfast cookin' was till staying with dear Aunt Bretta. A funny woman was she, but she could really cook'er up su'm good. We'd have backon and eggs, toast and all kinds of toppin's. Well, here I go again, boring another of my customers with my tales."

"Oh, it's not really boring," I tried to add. Though I can't say I had been listening all that well either. This was the first day of my new life. In a way, this funeral would be like the burying of my old shell-of-a-life, and hoping I'd see spring forth something new, different and more adventurous, or at least more meaningful.

We arrived at the town chapel, and none too soon. There I saw standing at the door my sister and mother and a cousin I never did know that well. I greeted them, embraced and inside we went for the ceremonies. It's an odd feeling you know, sitting there, looking at that coffin up front, thinking *what if that was me*, and that all that I'd done with my life up until that point was all that was written in the book of my life, and that's where the pages had stopped. I certainly didn't want that happening to me any time soon, I had hope of a new life before my eyes and I was out to make the best of it.

After the formalities were over we had some time to talk amongst ourselves. My sister Anne had a club that she had joined. It was some sort of a community ladies club, where they'd get together twice a month to talk of ways to bring out the best in their town, and share new ideas, recipes or improvement in their home and family life. She was telling me of this and how it had helped her get integrated more into the community and thus more accepted by the society. We hadn't seen each other for nearly five years, so we had much to speak of. She invited me to come see her at the house for afternoon tea, which I accepted. So after all obligations were over with for the day, we drove off to her country side house, on the edge of town.

We arrived there around 4:00 in the afternoon. The surroundings around the house had noticeably been neglected. For the past 6 months or so Anne had been writing a book in her off hours, and thus had spent less time tending to the care of her house and property. She showed me the beginnings of the work on her book. "Traveling to distant lands—while in the safety of your house," was the working title she'd given it. It contained thoughts and stories and advice for those who felt they were going stir crazy with being country house wives, not able to get out and see the world for themselves. It had ideas of things to do with children, how to enhance their knowledge of the world as well as make life more

interesting for the parents or wife that had to stay home and keep fires burning.

I read a bit then went to join her in the kitchen where she was heating up some pie she'd baked the day before. It looked good. We talked long enough for it to be nearly completely dark outside. When I read my watch it was nearly half past seven, and well over time for me to be on my way. She took me to the bus station where I bid her farewell. The bus took me to the part of town where the hotel I'd stayed at the night before sat waiting amidst the commotion of the city for willing customers.

I found my way in the back entrance, and rang the door bell of Mr. Abuchi's suite. To my surprise he had been anticipating my arrival not too long before and had the servants prepare something for our dinner. He knew I'd show up sooner or later, and here I was, as a little sheep, ready to be led to my next life. I entered to find the sitting room set up with candles, the lighting was soft and we had a drink together while awaiting being served a delicious meal. "He sure knows how to entertain guests well," I thought to myself. We talked over the day's events and had small talk till our meal was nearly over.

Abuchi waited till now to give me a few proposals to consider, so I could make some definite commitments. The first one sounded interesting. I was offered to work along side of him in his studio where one of his portfolios was to choose and audition various models that would flaunt on the stage the newest styles. I could try it for six months, he said, and see where it got me. It didn't have to be something totally permanent, but just give it a go. Other options included working with a team of others to design new styles of clothing, come up with basic plans for proposals in that area of work. Or I could just do secretarial work. Somehow that didn't catch me much, and I wanted to go more for the studio work along side of him. The offer was to try 5 days a week, for a minimum of 6 months, at the end of which I could choose to either move on or sign up for a longer commitment to the company--of say 3 years or so as a starting gate.

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Six months had passed, and I was sitting in my apartment—a room I'd gotten in the same hotel where my "boss" was staying, just a few floors down. Time had seemed to go by rather quickly at times, and I'd been kept quite busy. Sometimes we'd stay up working late, going over thoughts and proposals for various fashion designs, or other times we'd just talk. So far there had been no further obligations made on me. I could work at my own pace, have my bills and rent paid, and things seemed to be going quite nicely for me in this new environment of city living.

"Shella," Abuchi called. "Come over here, I've got something to show you, and I need your advice." He'd often asked my opinions on different clothes designs, or what I thought would sell. Sometimes he'd play along with me, other times keeping to his previous leanings in a matter. There hadn't been too many difficult times in our semi-together life. I felt rather happy, I thought, with having a stable job, money, even my life and time being planned out gave me a sense of stability.

After talking briefly about the latest design he'd come up with, he add that there was another matter which needed to be discussed—that of my life and what I wanted to do from here on out. I needed to decide: was this life that I'd come to know, what I wanted to do? If not, now was the time to change, and I needed to make up my mind. He said there were others who wanted to take my place here along side him, but that I still had first choice. He said, that should I chose to move on and explore new and different professions or life styles, that I was always welcome back, for he liked working with me, and would find something for me to do.

I left work early that day, and went to the bay, where I could see the passing tug boats carrying on with their duties. The seagulls that hunted for bits of food seemed more lively to day, and I noticed why. It seemed a storm was coming on, and I certainly didn't want to be caught here in it. I sat for a short while on near by bench, taking in the sights and sounds. I drifted into deep thought, considering the proposals that had been laid out for me. On the one hand I greatly desired, more so than ever, a stable life, someone to be close to—though the boss and I were never close in that way, at least up until this point. We maintained nothing more than a casual friendship, and occasionally went out to eat or enjoyed relaxing activities with one another. But this only happed occasionally. For the most part we were work companions, and I was content to leave it at that.

The clouds were rolling in close, and the sky was darkening. I took that as a sign it was time to move and find shelter. And just as the clouds were thick and ready to give way, so I felt my thoughts were at this point—deep and thick and wanting to be cleared again. I wanted the simple life, the way I came to know it, without worrying about my future goals. This alone was enough to send me further in thought, to when I was a child.

I sat on my mother's knee once and asked, "Do the birds always know where to go when they want to lay eggs and have a family? Isn't it hard for them to make up their mind in which tree to build their nest, especially if there are so many around as there are here?" I just liked things to be simple. Mother answered me satisfactorily, explaining how different birds do better with different kinds of trees. Instinct tells them what kind of branches they need and what materials are best for their particular family. So they just know, it's just within them to know.

*How I wish I could be a bit like a bird, right now I thought, and just know what tree to fly to and what kind of nest I should build.*

#### **Chapter four: Threshold of bonds**

As I turned around to walk the narrow path that led back to the street I was startled to see Mr. Abuchi standing there, not more than a few feet away. He'd been looking for me, and knew I often came to this place for quiet thought. Knowing my inner turmoil he reached out his hand and took my arm in his.

A rain drop fell as we neared the road, and waved down the closest taxi. Once in the vehicle he lay my head on his shoulder and whispered in my ear, "You know you don't have to go, you can keep on working here for me, as you have been so far. But I just want it to be your decision. You may have to work more hours in the day, there may be new requirements or challenges, but it's nothing we can't tackle together. You're a hard worker. So what do you say? Can I count you on my team, or shall I have the place filled by another that doesn't quite know things as well as you do? You know I'd really like to have you continue working with me. Give it some thought, but don't take too long now."

I looked up and said with a smile, "Yeah, I think I'd like to keep going the way we have been. I can't think of anything more that I'd rather be doing. It's something I feel comfortable with anyway, for the time being. You can count in me."

It felt good to have made some sort of decision, though I can't say I was totally happy with it. There was just something about his charm that seemed to draw out of me the will to please and walk this path yet a little longer to see just where it was all leading, though I hadn't thought too much about it in these last months.

As we neared the hotel Mr. Abuchi slipped my hand around mine, and whispered something about having a drink in his room to celebrate our new beginnings, as full-time working partners. Up until this point I'd had a fair amount of lee-way, though it didn't seem like much. I could basically come and go wherever and whenever I pleased, though I had to keep somewhat to the hours laid out, that the rest of the team kept.

He put his arm around my waist and unlocked the door with his right hand. This time, for the first time, I saw the apartment truly vacant. It was dark when we entered, and the rain and storm's low rumbling could be heard. We went into the kitchen to pour a drink, and sat there for awhile telling stories of our childhood, and various times we were caught in cloudbursts, or picnics livened up by sudden change in weather.

Mr. Abuchi left the room for minute and made a phone call, and then I could hear the sounds of a bath being drawn. He came back with only a robe on and asked if I wanted to change into something more comfortable as

well. On the guest bed was laid out a light blue silken robe, with soft slippers beside the bed. I changed and emerged to find what awaited me. The alcohol had taken effect somewhat, and though I wasn't sure if what I was doing was what I wanted to be doing, I didn't mind going along with it. I felt the embrace of this man who had taken me in, while wandering and searching.

I hadn't known this side of him up until this point, though tonight the advances were more than welcome. He kissed my hand and led me into his candle lit room, where I could see through the partially opened adjoining bathroom door, a large bath filling. He wooed me and I accepted ever bit of it. I wanted to be loved for who I was, I wanted to be accepted and cared for, and this was giving me hope that such love existed.

I don't remember much of what happened that night, only that I awoke the next day, lying in his bed, with a rose and a note placed beside me where he once lay. I read it. It said, "Glad to have you aboard, as part of my intimate team. I'll see you in the office at 10:00. Rest until then. -A"

I felt something more than a joining of bodies had happened that night. More than just merely two friends enjoying a tender night together, but I felt a larger part of my life was now in debt to him, and he was given leave to dictate my working hours and output much more so than before.

*I dare not be late!* I thought as I gathered up my clothing and possessions, cleaned myself up and ate a hurried breakfast. It was now 9:45, and my life was no longer just my own. I went down the stairs to where we worked, and as I was opening the door to enter, a messenger or a voice seemed to say in my head, "Get out now, sweet love, while you still have the chance." I shook it off, thinking it was merely my childish hesitance once again holding me back from making for myself a future to be proud of.

As I entered Mr. Abuchi was there to greet me, and tell me his thanks once again for choosing to be on his team. He introduced me to a colleague of his who I had not met before, who he was meeting with then. "Come sit down, and have some coffee", he said with a smile. "We were just talking of you."

"Oh?" I said, wondering what of my life interested them. Why don't you take a look at these papers here, just little forms that say what we've already decided on, and various other minor details. If you'd like to put your pen to paper and sign your name and make it official, that you're in for the long haul, then we can put it all behind us and get on with the real work at hand. So what do you say? It'll only take a moment."

Feeling rather on the spot and realizing that in order for us to get from this point to the next it was clear that I was going to have to sign up. But since, like Mr. Abuchi said, it was things we'd already agreed on. I gave the papers a short glance and was proceeding to do as he

suggested, and put my name down there, thus saying I agreed to keep the various conditions laid out and would adhere to the work hours and mandates spelled out. It seemed pretty straight forward.

I quickly signed it and looked up for approval. I saw his face change from subtle anxious anticipation, to relief and hidden joy. Though I did realize that my life was less my own, I wasn't too anxious, for life up until this point had been bearable enough, unlike many others who walked the streets homeless, hungry and cold.

"I need to finish up my discussion with Mr. Sonyeigo, dear, if you'll excuse us please for a few moments..." I didn't mind leaving and having a few more moments to myself, and leaving that interesting atmosphere, where my life was being discussed by others.

When leaving, Mr. Abuchi tossed a smile my way, which rapidly turned again to seriousness at whatever the matter at hand was. I shut the door behind me. *To my new life* I said within my heart as I enjoyed another cup of coffee, still trying to stir the morning life within me. Today it would take twice as much to get me going, but I was sure I'd feel better soon enough. By the time I was called in to Mr. Abuchi's office again, it was a half past 12, and we were ready to get on with the work for the day. I bid Mr. Sonyeigo good-bye as he left the office.

"I have a new proposal for you, Shella, come sit by me and let me explain it. Mr. Sonyeigo has offered us the use of his apartment, in the place across the street, if you will spend half day working for him. This place will always be your home, and you can consider yourself mine," he said with half a grin. "But you can fill in for his secretary, until he finds a new one, as well as help me in the studio. What do you say?"

"Well, I guess I'll have to consider it, since you've obviously gone to great lengths to work on this arrangement." "It's a done deal then," he said with a voice of finality, tomorrow at noon you will report to Mr. Sonyeigo for work.

"Now, let's go over those plans we'd stetched out yesterday morning, shall we?" With little chance for rebutting, I was whisked along from one thing to the next. Before I knew it the day was over and I found myself settling down for the night, and I was soon taken to the land of dreams.

I found myself once again on the golden shore, that I'd dreamt of before. This time the shadow sat down beside me, I looked up into it's face and saw the loving face, of One who truly knew me. When I awoke the next day, the feeling lingered on, the face, the love, the deep understanding. But like the dream that it was, all impressions soon faded as my life got busier by the day. Taking on what seemed to be two jobs now, I felt as if that's all my life contained, work and yet more work.

There were times in those coming weeks where I felt I just had to get away or I'd collapse, but just as I was to give in, the words would ring in my ear once again, "Remember, you're mine."

There were times when I felt I couldn't even think for myself anymore, but that my every thought, wish and desire were being dictated by some power behind the working companionship that I shared with my boss. Oh how I wanted more freedom, in those days, as a full-time workmate and integral part of the team that I now was. I knew I couldn't entertain such thoughts, as they would only serve to drive me insane, for I had now given my body and mind over to this one who I felt had done so much for me.

Maybe I didn't think deeply enough about the decisions that I'd made in the past. Perhaps I should have gone at things more slowly, but I was ready for adventure and wanted to dance to a new rhythm in life. What had been offered me I had quickly snatched up.

"Oh, soul, where are you, what has your life become? I am not the woman I used to be, but neither do I want to resort back to my days of wandering. Is this all there is in life, to be firstly tossed thither and yon with dreams and ideas, and then to be chained down with such utter stability that one can no longer breathe or live life as they feel they should, or would care to?"

There had to be more, but as I was yet to find out, the road can be long and cruel to the one who chooses the darker path, while seeking the things of this world. In my ignorance I chose a way that led down the path to hardship and bondage, but there was another road. The life I now led did not need to be my permanent home. Sorrow need not always exist, neither frustration in work. There were other choices of dreams to live, ones of joy. But the time was not quite yet, and I had to grow to hate and despise this world and it's system yet more, in order to be abandoned to the joys that would be offered to me in the days to come.

When I reached this city and had given myself over to the hands of the one I came to work for, I was in my twenties, ready to get on with a new and more stable situation, something that brought me something more than a meal for the day, or a little something to help me get by. I wanted something that was more substantial and could fill the need or void within.

Under his rule I knew wealth and poverty. Wealth in that I had all my financial needs met, and extreme poverty and desperation of spirit, which can be so much greater than the volume any riches can fill. This kind of poverty runs deep and nothing can fill the void save the love of our Savior.

## **Chapter five: The hard way**

I awoke one Friday morning, thoughts filling my mind, I just had to get away. I put on my clothes as



quickly. I wanted to get a head start on the day with a breath of fresh air. That always seemed to do me good. As I descended the stairs a thought flashed through my mind, “Why are you forced to carry on, day after day in this grueling work and existence, why not just end it all? Take a pill and be gone.”

I must say this was not the only time I had thoughts like this plaguing me. There were many times when I sat alone in the solitude of my room, milling over the feelings of hopelessness, of being deserted by ones I felt should have loved me more and taken better care of me, and that maybe would have kept me from falling so low into the pits I often was startled to find myself in. It was at those times when I was most in despair that a faint prayer, a soft voice, would reach out of my heart to be heard and seen by some power above. Although I felt and heard no immediate response, there was a quiet reassurance that indeed I was being heard, and it would just take some time till these things deep within all got sorted out.

I was drinking in the morning air, mentally planning the day ahead, for all too soon the rush of it all would be upon me. I turned down a small cobblestone street that I hardly noticed before, wanting to see where it led. There was nothing unusual about it, just a few little shops and houses tightly lined one against the other. I heard again that voice, that sickening voice, come into my heart and mind, tempting to give up myself to the relief of the grave. If it weren't for the shortness of time, and the reality of needing to be at my job, I may have followed that thought awhile longer. But instead I quickened my pace and headed home.

As usual Mr. Abuchi was there, waiting for my entrance to begin our work. With a look on his face as if to say, “you're 5 minutes late”, he then dismissed it with a charming smile and motioned for me to have a seat.

“Today we will interview young ladies, about the ages of 12-16, who which to enroll in our program for young models. Your job, young lady, is to fix them up, screen them a bit and prepare them with the needed paper work before they step into my office. I don't want to have to fiddle with them not having the needed things on hand, nor do I want to look at a bunch of orphans off the street. So though some of them are virtually children off the street, when they come to me I want them to be well presented, decent and worthy of my time.”

We began with coffee, as was our customary morning engagement, and was the extent of my food consumption for the morning, for work had to be done and time was short for a young lady working her way through life.

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The first of the ladies I introduced myself to, had a simple chat with, asking a few questions, looked like she was 16 or more. She had long hair, about down to her

waist, pulled back in a pony tail, her clothes were somewhat mismatched, and she carried a young child on her hip. It seemed her and her younger sister had also come to do this thing together, as life was getting worse all the time for these ones that lived so very beneath the common of society. She and her sister lived in what we'd call “rat holes”, beneath the streets. There they lived, and apparently bred. This young child was hers. She managed to put on a brief smile, though I could see in her eyes the great struggle her very life was.

“Come this way,” I said, motioning her to leave the young one in the care of her sister, while she came to be interviewed. The pain I felt for these poor and abandoned-by-society young ladies--and children really--was intense, and I so wished I could have changed things for the better. I was sorry they had to come to us to give their lives up, instead of being able to learn about the important things they should be taking time to study and learn in, and being able to just be young. But I thought, if our helping them any brings them any joy at all, or makes their life more bearable, then I wanted to be able to give them the best. Though it was really not within my reach to fill their needs, still my heart wished them the best.

So on the day went, bringing them to Mr. Abuchi's office and showing them the way out again. They were just to be reviewed, photo's taken, and to come back the following Monday to hear if they'd been accepted or not. I could almost feel the tension inside their minds, wondering where this bold step was to lead them--and if to fame and fortune, then for just how long till their lives would lie again in ruins, pushed aside by those who seemed to get much farther in life than they.

As I lay on my bed, visions of these girls flashed before my mind's eye. Was what we had to offer them what they really needed? How could work for our system, giving up their bodies for the entertainment and pleasures of others be what they needed. I tossed the thoughts aside at last, as I determined to pick up with my concerns in the morning. Sleep was all I could handle at this point.

“You're concerned about the girls, aren't you?” I was startled from my half-asleep state, as I saw a figure entering my room. I knew who it was, but the eerie way he could read my mind at times is what intrigued me.

“Ah, yeah,” I managed to mutter, while wiping my drowsy eyes. Sitting on the bed he began to explain more about the workings of their—or should I say “our”—company, things I hadn't known about or fully realized existed. He told about their meager beginnings, how he first started out, with his long time friend, making money while pickpocketing unsuspecting tourists. They'd use their gains to buy things to sell, and thereby getting a few extra dollars to begin their “company”. At 14 the two had formed a band of other waifs that had nothing better to do than work on the streets collecting what pay they could for their items of merchandise. They organized the finances, and those that wished to join up with them

needed to pay their dues, to work long hours, keep only a small percentage of their hard earned cash, and couldn't expect to be given much in return. Still for those who had nothing, this was at least a start to their otherwise deteriorating livelihoods.

"So you see, I know what it can be like to start off at the bottom. It just takes time to work your way up. Now I'm a success, and you too, if you keep on working hard for me, will know just what good things this world can offer." There was a cool sort of unheartfelt air to his tone of voice, almost wishing that those who were not of the braver sort and couldn't manage to keep up with the other and more "able" people, like he considered himself to be, were not worth thinking about. After awhile, with a kiss good night, he left me to my thoughts once more.

I sat there thinking about all he'd shared, the fazes our company had gone through, wondering how many people like me had filtered in and out of his manager's grip, and come to know the workings behind the scenes.

Five o'clock rolled around all too soon, and I was up again, ready for the last day of my week. I normally didn't wake this early, on a Saturday much less, but today I was planning on getting my hair done, and getting a new look, or so it was suggested to me. I needed to look more "in", as it was put. No more the simple business executive look that I carried around. Today I was supposed to change it to be more of a relaxed character, looking more like I indeed had made my fortune and was content with life. So off I went, trying to remake the me that I kept getting to know more each day. I never knew just what was around the corner from those orchestrating my life, telling me just what role to play, and how to dance the dance of a struggling minstrel, singing and dancing her way through life.

"Why should I be so concerned with the way I look anyway?" I thought, while I awaited my turn. The week previous Mr. Abuchi and I had come here, made reservation and even chosen what style I was to do. So contemplating the dreamy thought of true freedom, where I could honestly do as I pleased, I was chiding myself into submission, that appearances being mandated shouldn't be a concern, that I was just to follow, and that I was getting all that I really needed, so there was no reason to balk.

I arrived in the work place early and had time to go through some papers and listen to a bit of music on headphones—which I rarely ever did. "You're here early today—and look at that dazzling hair do. If I may say, that looks the best yet on you." Though this was clearly not the me that I'd known up until this point, I smiled, glad to meet the approval of the boss. He carried on down the hall, while I kept my piddling about. There was this one song on the radio that caught my attention, written by an artist who's heart seemed much like mine. The words of

the song rang out, "I'm a wondering..." these right away hit home, and I was hoping that amidst the words of this song the answer would be stated.

Much to my surprise it came to an abrupt end when the announcer came on with news of a terrible storm heading our way, and to whom it concerned, were to prepare, as it looked nasty. Though disappointed, I thought no more of it, but carried on with the next events that took place, and the jobs I was called on to help out with. I never really had a certain steady amount of work that needed to be done each day, but worked closely with Mr. Abuchi to find out what new things he had planned for me. I was just to be there when I was needed, which was demanding enough as it was, with little time for self or quiet meditation. I was to count my lunch hour, or rather lunch "half" as both my lunch and break time, and when I could get out to stretch my legs somewhat. It never seemed long enough, and I was so glad when the weekend rolled around.

One place I loved to go was to a nearby lake house. I often resorted there for Saturday evenings through Sunday night—as long as I was back on time for work come Monday morning. It had several rooms that could be rented for those wishing to just get away from the common surroundings and to breathe a fresh breath of air. This week I was definitely planning to go there, for this week had drawn on just a bit too long.

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As I stepped on to the porch of the lake house, observing the moonlit water surface I felt engulfed in a loving embrace, though no-one shared this moment with me, there by my side. Sometimes these moments by the water made me think of a distant dream I'd have from time to time, something about a stranger coming to me, calling me, and the waters that we met by. It was so vague now, for all the business of life had nearly wiped the last vestiges of those heart warming moments shared when sleeping.

I retired to my room for the evening, and fell so deeply asleep I don't think I rose till noon the next day. I took a walk on the outskirts of the property, and around the lake, resting my mind from it's cares, though one thought kept coming to mind, *come and follow, come and follow*. I didn't know what this meant, but I seemed to have heard it somewhere before, and concluded it must have been some song my mother sang me in my younger years, or perhaps some sign I had read on a church bulletin. So I cast it a side for lighter things, like observing the leaves blowing in the trees, the shades of brown and gray on the ground, and the ever changing clouds up in the sky.

When I returned to my room I was ready to dive into a good book, and there remained till into the night hours, drinking up the entertainment of learning of another's life—though fictional. I went out for a last

breath of the moonlit night air before retiring for the night. I slept well—I always did in this place that was coming to be nearly a second home for me—though the morning came upon me fast, and I was up with the sun, and on with the business of all my life entailed.

## Chapter six: Where to now?

When I entered my work place, there was a note waiting for me, stating the following, “Shelly, meet me in the Café for your lunch break. I’ll be there to discuss some up-coming changes in your schedule. –Don’t worry, you are still employed for me. –A”.

Puzzled and amused I pattered about with filing and various paper work I had on hand, and headed out to my lunch meeting. As I entered I saw him sitting by a window towards the back, with a coffee, reading the day’s paper. He greeted me and motioned for me to join him.

We talked about the weekend, and other small talk, while my order of a cinnamon roll and tea, was being filled. When I was settled with my snack, he was free to take charge of our chit chat, and tell me all that was on his mind. Mr. Abuchi began explaining.

“You know Shella, we’ve been together a long time now. I want you to consider the following. How long as it been since you have taken leave, for more than a few days, and taken off to see somewhere new, somewhere where you may have always wanted to go? You know I have your best interests in mind, and I wouldn’t be making you this offer if I didn’t in some way feel that it was for our good.

So here’s my proposal: the first Tuesday of this coming month you can be free to enjoy some time away. I know you’ve been having a hard time keeping up at times, not because you’re not good at what you do, but I think you just deserve a break. You can be gone for six weeks, and in that time, I’ll get some stand-in help to fill your shoes here till you get back. I want you to enjoy yourself, enjoy a break and see something besides the four walls of your work area. What do you think?”

My first reaction was a great sigh of relief. At first I thought he’d brought me here to tell me that my usefulness was over, I was no longer needed—you know how those things go. But here instead I was being given a wonderful offer. I felt overjoyed, and conveyed this briefly.

“Good, then. A done deal it is. Two weeks from now, the first Tuesday of the month, you’ll be off for some much earned get-away time. You have till then to plan what you want to be doing, where you want to go, and to help me choose a fill-in for your place here at the office.”

Those words “fill-in for your place” gave me the shivers. Somehow it all seemed rather permanent. But I reassured myself with visions of laughing, relaxing and having a good time away. I told myself that I was really

needed here, called upon and could do the work of two or more people, so there was no way I would be shipped out for good. There was much to be done in preparation now, I had so much to think about and plan for. So I was off to get things in order, and continued busily, sometimes till the wee morning hours, finishing up all that needed to be tended to.

I looked in the paper for those looking for work, as Mr. Abuchi suggested, for someone to take my place for this time. I made a few phone calls and held a few interviews. No matter who I picked, my boss, Abuchi always found some fault, why they were not up to snuff, for filling the shoes needed. But time was running out, and I would need to at least be able to share explain to my “fill-in” what work here and being an assistant, entailed--the papers needing to be tended to, and what work for Mr. Sonyeigo entailed, though for the most part, this would be discontinued in my absence. It would be good for the new secretary to be somewhat abreast with this side of the job, would be helpful, for both these bosses of mine worked hand in hand in many aspects.

“I came across someone in the paper,” Mr. Abuchi blurted out the last Friday afternoon, while I was preparing to leave the office. Being well spent on all the happenings of the week that had just passed I was in no state of mind to object, and was quite relieve to hear he’d found someone suitable enough to meet his standards. Though somewhat threatened by this possible intruder, I said I’d meet with her Saturday, and go over what she needed to know.

Seeing that I was now ready to go out the door, he ended the discussion with a simple nod, and I was off.

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I woke with a start, after dreaming so deeply. As the day broke, and the realization of all that was before me came rushing into my mind, I could do nothing but forge ahead, full steam.

Arriving at my work station, I found a short, and not too uncomely looking girl, with brown eyes, and red hair down to her waist, waiting in the entrance. I assumed she was the one I would be passing my work on to. Rubella was her name. I invited her in, politely offered coffee, yet all the while thinking thoughts of how I might be loosing my place now. Here I was being shipped way—stressed I was, yes, but not unusable. She definitely suited the needs. Mr. Abuchi had chosen well, I thought, for someone picked out of the paper.

Lunch time came and though Rubella would have joined me, I just needed to get away. I excused myself, giving some directions where the nearest coffee shop was.

I was met in the hall by none else than Mr. Abuchi. “Leaving alone? May I join you?” He said, kissing my hand. I needed that reassurance, right about then. His charm was hard to resist when displayed so gallantly.

“Uh, sure.” I said, somewhat blushed, and we headed out the door to the nearby park. He already had packaged up some sandwiches for us to eat while enjoying the view. We sat on a bench and talked of my upcoming trip, and how much he was sure I’d enjoy it.

I certainly could use the break. I’d been on the job now for 2 years, and for these last few weeks I’d put in many more hours, stayed up late and had done without my usual breaks, in preparation for the trip. I was physically and mentally exhausted. Perhaps this was all part of the plot, to send me on my way, without much objection, cause I could hardly think clearly enough to do anything else but follow, as some overworked robotic soul. This was the last, semi-relaxed time we’d spend together, till the day I was to go, though we worked together while finishing up loose ends and passing on the business to Rubella.

He was clever and wise and kept his distance from her, passing things on to me to give to her, for the most part. This saved me many otherwise painful moments and feelings of jealousy, though they still did pop up from time to time. I knew this was really the best—to go away for awhile--and I knew I would come back feeling so much better--or so I’d hoped.

## **Chapter seven: My heart**

The plane left Tuesday morning, 8:00, which left little time for rest the night before, as I had scarcely packed till then.

When the plane gained speed, and finally was lifted in flight, I decided I would make the best of these coming weeks. I wouldn’t meet with a stranger in their apartment, upon the first day of knowing them-- learning where the last encounter took me. I was somewhat happy to have found a place in this fast paced, world, and in my mind I was glad I was no longer “globe trotting”, but in my heart, there wasn’t a moment that went by that I truly wondered if I had done the right thing.

Hearing my mother’s words ringing in my heart--the words she’d spoken the day I left home--when the night hours were quiet, made me ponder. It was often those nights, when my spirit was open to receive more from that other realm that seldom finds adequate place in our hearts and lives, that I would receive those mysterious dreams of that mysterious call. But I hardly had time to understand or think about it in the day-light hours.

The last time I truly gave thought to my calling in life, and for what purpose I came, was when I was sitting alone in the park, many weeks earlier. A gentle little sparrow came and perched itself on the back of the bench, it turned it’s head from side to side, let out a chirp, and flew away. I thought he was calling my name, for it sounded so close in tone. I had a sensation of being noticed, for once, by something beyond my immediate work life and co-workers. By something or someone that

perhaps knew things about me that I didn’t even take the time to realize myself. I felt a feeling of comfort. But these and others glimpse into the love beyond, that deep inside I yearned for, were all too soon washed away with thoughts and feelings of the immediate.

How I yearned to be noticed, by someone else who didn’t merely need me for the money I could bring him through the works of my hands. I needed someone who could tenderly care for my heart, and for this I pleaded.

On that plane I came to know things I hadn’t given much thought to up until that point. I came to know my Savior—and how He was always there and close to me, however distant I had strayed. I tuned into the radio music playing on the headset, and the oddest thing happened. One song had begun--that I knew and liked well--but that was interrupted by a song I’d never heard before. It seemed to have been coming through some other source, like someone was fiddling with my channel. But I listened, and as the words came through, tears welled up in my eyes, and I knew the song was directly to my heart.

Oh, how I wept to see the path my life had taken, how I’d gone down the wrong road. I’d been whisked away with visions of success in this world, of being someone that gets somewhere, of being recognized and thought of as quality material, when all along, the one Who truly loved me, was waiting, every moment of my life, to fill me with His ever abiding love. I saw how much of life I’d missed by allowing the passing things of this world to reach out and grab everything that I had to offer.

Now I had come to the end of myself, feeling I had no strength. I felt the things that had meant the most to me--though I’d wanted them dearly--were leading to the erosion of my mind and heart, sapping me of vigor and leaving me nothing in it’s place. I didn’t know what to expect on the horizon, but I knew I’d made a commitment: the contract I’d signed

Oh, what was I do to! I felt as a trapped animal in a cage, having gotten the choice piece of food it desired, that it knew others dreamed to one day find, and saw that it was not enough. The bars now surrounding were simply keeping it from the life and freedom it could be enjoying. Oh, things were not as they seemed, from a young girl’s perspective, as she sat on her mother’s knee, in their humble home, thinking that the rich and the powerful were the most blessed, desiring in her heart to be one of them and move on from the humble and more menial lifestyle. It all cost something, I now saw. Each sparkle that glittered in my young eyes, from the world I’d wanted to be part of, in reality I now knew was but a vacuum, a sucking emptiness, designed to suck the very joy and life from the veins of my soul.

I drifted off to sleep with the words to the mysterious song ringing in my head, and I was once again

taken to the land I'd visited those many times past, and here and now I'd come to know what it all meant.

"Come," He spoke a His loving and deeply warm tone of voice. I turned and gazed into the most compassionate eyes I'd ever seen. His eyes seemed to express that He knew the most intimate things known only to me, and yet loved me the more. As He looked deep into my soul, I knew the Master's love. It came into my soul like waves, lapping on a beach. His love, like a refreshing body of fresh water, was so vast, so wide and deep, and I was as a parched soul in need of a drink. He washed over me, and I imbibed Him. I wanted His love to calm every troubled spot in my weary soul. I wanted His love to wash me of the filth I had seen and experienced in the world I worked for. I wanted to be truly set free.

I felt the bonds wrapped around me as tentacles of some evil, lustful creature, wishing to draw each bit of life out of me to feed its greedy and dark self.

When I looked into the face of this one I knew to be total love, I felt the constraints that held me captive begin to loosen their grasp. It was now my choice who I would serve, what I would give my life for, and the light was ever captivating. I chose then and there, to give myself over to His loving arms. Excepting Him deep within I was set free in spirit.

"Coffee. Coffee, anyone?" The stewardess was saying, as I awoke, still a bit dazed from the mysterious experience. I knew we were nearly at our destination, so I packed up my belongings and tidied myself a bit.

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"Rubella, bring me another pen, this one doesn't seem to work. Thanks, dear." Mr. Abuchi sat ready to sign a contract with the owner of the vacant lot across the street. He was planning to sell it to be turned into a playground for the near-by apartment house dwellers. But the offer, nearly doubling the price, by Mr. Abuchi, tempted him far too much.

"What will we need this land for, Uncle?" Rubella asked in her girlish way, the way she always managed to get information out of him.

"Ah, nothing much, I assure you. Just a bit of elbow room for the time being. We'll put it to use in good time. For now, I think it's time for lunch. Shall we be off?"

Seeing she wasn't getting very far, Rube complied, acting in her "I'm not so interested anyway," type of way.

What she and most others couldn't see, however, were the dark clouds looming above--not in the sky, but on their business--that were threatening to steal away whatever bit of stability they had. New businesses were rising, and Mr. Abuchi wanted the land next door to be his, while he still had the means to purchase. He feared going out of business, finding himself bankrupt, or worse, in a lawsuit for the sly ways he'd treated customers, the under payment his workers had received and the way he'd

stolen from the pensions of his long-time, trusted colleagues. His day would, come, but just not yet.

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"Miss, you'll have to adjust your seat, we're preparing to land." I had gotten into looking at a brochure of the Virgin islands, and was thinking about what I'd do with myself for 6 whole weeks.

When we landed I had not much trouble collecting my bags and was off in a taxi for the Hotel awaiting me.

After paying the taxi fair I as escorted by the baggage man to room 22, and was settled in before long.

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I awoke from a nap around 5:00 in the afternoon, ready for some entertainment. I felt so alone even in this place—a Hotel that was supposed to be a place of fun and enjoyment for those wanting to get away and rest a awhile. I was away from the job that had become so much part of my life. My friends weren't around. I was in foreign surrounds, though nice. I decided to try and get my mind off what I could see I didn't have, and try to have some fun. I went down to the lobby to see if there was to be any entertainment later on that night. There was. A man by the name of Larrell Smith was to be singing there. I hadn't heard of him before, but it would suit me for now.

I took a taxi around a bit, saw the immediate surroundings, bought a few groceries, and headed back in time for the evening festivities--if you could call them that. I sat by a man, around my age, who's eyes seemed to have a certain twinkle in them. We struck up a conversation, and I came to know a bit about him. Rustle was the name, and he was here as a salesman, hoping to start a shoe selling business. He has a ways to go before things would get solid, but I could relate to his struggle trying to find his place or niche in the big world, and trying to make a life for one's self.

I was happy for his companionship that evening, and we bid each other good night, promising to meet again for lunch the next day. He was easy to be around, and I didn't feel intimidated by his questions. He was seeking for peace and a place to call home, just as I had been, at what seemed so long ago.

The first week came and went rather quickly and without incident, other than the occasional trip to the bar, stumbling home late at night, or the one time I nearly got stabbed by a drunk beggar. Thankfully I was able to slip into the waiting taxi and drive off before things got more intense.

As I was lying in bed one Sunday morning I got to thinking. My thoughts were first of home--home as in the childhood place I'd grown up. I thought of my mother,

bless her soul. She always did care for us so patiently. I thought of God. I guess being that it was Sunday was a good opportunity for ones thoughts to be triggered in a heavenward direction. I thought of what He now meant to me, and I regret to say, that I hadn't spent much time, since my salvation on the plane coming here, in thoughts of Him or in prayer. I recalled the times in the past when I had felt His presence beckoning me to come closer, or the voice of His safe-keeping urging me to go here or there or avoid some danger.

So many times I had failed to heed that inner voice, but now that I had chosen His way, with my heart and deep in my soul, I now had no choice but to strive to follow Him more closely. I don't know how I knew this, something just seemed to tell me that I was indebted to this giver of love and life, and I was to give more of myself over into His hands.

The following day I bought a New Testament, I had been told enough from my mother that I knew this was the first step to take. I spent much of the afternoon reading the words of Jesus and imbibing of His pleasant nature. I loved the story of Nicodemous, of his search for answers to life and how he could get closer to God. I understood his dilemma of not having an outward show of Christianity, for I too knew were I to display much sentiments in that area of life, I would not only be frowned upon, but taken advantage of and may loose my place altogether. For it wasn't considered the strong or "in" way to be. But all that aside, I enjoyed, in my own inquisitive way, reading this beautiful book. Someone must have been praying for me—perhaps my own dear mother—for I was beginning to find my way home, in heart and soul, though my physical path was to take me elsewhere.

## Chapter eight: Honest love

The first three weeks were nearly spent. I had been out on a walk and I was returning to my room, around midnight, when I met Rustle in the hall. He had been visiting a friend. I invited him for a drink. Our relationship had been pretty simple. We'd talk from time to time, but nothing intimate had transpired. This time I was in the mood and would have been ready for more to come of it. But after talking for a brief while, instead of helping himself to the drink I had poured he instead pulled out something from his jacket pocket. It was white and dust like and had a funny smell to it. He offered me a whiff, saying it would help me sleep better that night, and would relax me some.

Now I wasn't completely ignorant of such things as drugs, but I just hadn't come in this close contact with them before. I decide to go for it. I must say, had I been more informed of the dangers, and hadn't been caught so

off guard, I would have turned down his offer and headed to bed alone, as drear as that prospect seemed at this point. I so badly wanted the company of another I was willing to give a go at what form of entertainment he'd chosen for this night.

I can't remember all that happened after that, it was all a bit of a blur the next morning when I found myself sleeping on the couch, with a blanket pulled over me. I was too groggy to worry about it, and just wanted to take a shower and clean up a bit.

*FYI:*

*(Jesus speaking:) the reason she yielded to the enemy at this point in her life, though she had received Me and was on her way to a better life was because she hadn't fully committed to being Mine, but was still undecided in her heart just how far she was going to go for Me. Though saved, there comes a form of commitment that each one must make that helps keep them more under the shelter of My wings. So this one was trying the boundaries, and the enemy was able to get her off course because of it. (End of message from Jesus.)*

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Back at the business front things seemed to be going fine, or so it seemed when Mr. Abuchi had called about a month after I had been gone.

"I just called to see how you were doing, and to let you know everything's under control here. Nothing to worry about."

"And how's Rubella fairing?" I inquired, hoping for a glimpse into what role she was playing in his life. "Oh, she's a brilliant and smart girl, the two of us get along without to much trouble. She's my niece, did I mention that to you before? I took care of her several years back when her both her mother and my brother were out of work and needed some time to collect their wits. But she's fine and the business is holding up."

"Oh, oh, that's great" I said, trying to remain calm, though I felt a bit shaken to think this man, who I thought let me in on most important details of our life and work, had failed to mention this one important point of interest. What else was he scheming or hiding from me that I was unaware of? Well, no time for that now, I had a dinner engagement with the salesman friend I was coming to know, and I needn't be late.

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"I'm sorry about the other night" Rustle said, with his warm eyes peering into mine. "I hope you were okay that I just sprung that on you."

"Oh, I was fine. Please don't worry about it. I'm not used to trying those sorts of things, but I enjoyed your company nonetheless."

"You know, Shella, I was going to say, if there's ever a chance, before you leave, and you want to have a

simple dinner together in your quarters, where it's just the two of us, I'd quite enjoy that. But that's only if you like or find the time to."

Without much thought, I confirmed I would enjoy that very much as well, and so we set a time, next Thursday, 7:30, my place.

Our evening meal ended with a brief kiss and I was soon off to bed to think about his offer. "This will be fun," I thought. "I could set it up real nice, maybe play some music, and see what it leads to next." I thought of the menu I would cook, for I did enjoy doing that from time to time. I'd make steak, with baked potatoes and a salad on the side. Since neither of us were vegetarians, this would suit us both fine.

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Thursday night came, and the table was almost set when the door bell rang. Wiping my hands on the nearest towel, spraying on a dash of a cologne as I peered in the mirror for one last examination, I went quickly to open the door and found a very handsome man waiting to enter.

"Please come in," I said, with a hint of nervousness in my voice. Though we'd gotten to know each other rather well, we'd never shared a real intimate moment--such as this night had potential to be. It was good to have something to do together—like eat the meal that I was pleasantly surprised in its outcome.

Before long we were relaxed and began to talk of past experiences, childhood friends, and dreams of our future families.

We sat on the couch for a while, listening to a radio station I happen to find that had something decent playing. Rustle then took my hand, stroking it, commented on its size and softness. I took this as a sign that he would enjoy the touch of my hands more places than resting in his. We began to kiss, each of us having gone a fair while without the comfort of another's embrace.

In that dark living room I felt his hands slowly and tenderly unbutton my blouse, and slip around my waiting breasts. It felt so good, so warm to feel a man's touch. He turned me around, and I sat between his legs, resting my head back into his chest, with his arms around me. He whispered in my ear that he wanted me to feel comfortable with him, and only wanted to go as far or do as much as I was willing to. I reassured him that I was fine to go with him all the way by firmly caressing his upper thighs, and turning around, meeting his lips with mine.

I stood and let my blouse fall to the plush carpet below. He stood and we continued our time of intimacy. When there was not much left on either of our bodies, we moved to the bedroom to culminate our passion. It was a beautiful night and I was not about to end it here. There were no concerns in the way, thinking of past loved ones,

or even what our future might bring. We were simply here with each other, and that's what mattered most.

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The sun kissed my cheek as I awoke Friday morning, my face feeling as warm and joyful as my body. Here was a man I'd barely known, at least not in the intimate quarters of my room, and yet we shared such a sweet time of tenderness with one another. I knew God was somewhere, and wanted me to know that He saw and cared about me. I talked with Him that morning of what He wanted me to do with my life, now that I'd come to know Him, and had found a man I enjoyed much being with.

I knew Rustle wasn't going to be here for long, and my time was near a close as well. But I wanted to make sure I was indeed following the course that would bring my life the most happiness to me and to Jesus. I prayed, committing my life into the hands of my Creator. I knew there must be a plan, but what it was I was unsure.

Rustle came by later on that morning, around noon, and we thanked each other for the wonderful evening we'd spent. It was a bit awkward at first speaking of it so soon, and I was unsure of how he'd feel, or if would come by at all, knowing that I'd shared an intimate part of myself with him. I was glad to see him again. We spoke briefly over a cup of coffee. He then told me of his future plans. I was rather shaken, as I'd hoped to come to know him better in the short time I knew I had left. But he came across a deal in another city and had an appointment the next day, so was to leave later on in the evening. He promised to say good bye before heading off.

I was somewhat saddened by this sudden change, though I knew it was the inevitable. I reminded myself I had my own life to attend to and wasn't to get too into his, unless God saw for our paths to cross again some day. And I hoped they would.

I saw him off at the airport, as I had some other business to do there. As I faced the elevator alone, while heading back out of the building I heard a voice saying to me "It wasn't meant to be. But stick with me and I'll show you something better."

I knew this voice, for I'd heard it before. And I was determined this time to follow the direction it was calling my heart to.

## **Chapter nine: Is my life that simple?**

I sat on the bed, of what had become my home, peering out the open curtains I prayed, "Lord Jesus, I know You are here, I know You are with me, because I have prayed and have You in my life. I need to know what You want from me. What am I to do with my life now. Am I to go back to that God forsaken job, or do You have other plans?"

As clearly as I'd heard His voice before, I felt Him speak within saying that one beautiful word that He'd beckoned with before, "Come."

I knew then what I was to do. I could no longer go on life and business as usual. For how could I know His love, and receive of it more, while giving my life over to this world and the infectious system that it was, that oozed with it's own greed, had bleeding sores from picking on it's weaker parts, and had the foul smell of the dead--for all that went therein began to die a slow and painful death.

Perhaps I will take you back to my work at the office and show you a deeper glimpse at the evils behind what appeared to be a normal paying job, with extra benefits from time to time. Surely to any onlooker it doesn't appear to be a dungeon of rotting souls caught in the tenacious grasp of a blood- and money-thirsty ruler.

The evils of the System, as I now view them are as different as night and day, as love and hate, as purity and utter filth. Let me take you on a journey now, to my past where you can view things from a very different perspective.

Here I was a young lady, needing someone to care for her. It looked as if someone did, but what you don't see, is the greed behind those very eyes that put on a show of compassion. Within the hearts of those that seek to obtain material gain, that seek to revel in the pleasures of this world's system, and make it big, there is a vacuum that is large and big.

The vacuum is there, and those who seek God, find Him, and find that His is well able, and more than able, to fill every void of the human heart. But those who reject, or don't come to know him, this void only gets deeper. More and more they try to gain the things they think their souls need--a new car, a beautiful new house, a lovely wife or handsome husband. And they use every means possible to gain these things they wish for. But they are as weights tossed into an empty air bag, it only causes to stretch it out yet more, weighing down the heart and making the void wider and the vacuum stronger.

Beware of those that seek to better their own ends at the cost and expense of others. They will be found woefully wanting and in need, without a friend, for the lusts of their own flesh have been their closest companion. When they have spent all, they are left more than wanting, not only filled with emptiness, but heavier in heart than the day they had nothing.

I, too, know what it's like to be in a state of woe, for I was the brunt of many acts of greed. When something needed to be done to better the ends of my company, more often than not I was called upon to do it and carry out the plan. I tried not to think much about it, saying that if I hadn't done the deed--passed on that letter, fired a poor worker, took money from someone's account, looked up and researched dirty information on an competitive company's president--then someone else

would have done it; that it wasn't my fault. In a way it wasn't, for I was held in a tight noose--maybe not in the flesh, but my soul felt it. I knew that if I was to jerk too quickly this way or that way, or take off with some brand new idea I'd come up with, question the authority a bit too much, I would be putting myself in shaky ground, and I could not only lose my place and job, but would be left highly in debt.

Already I began to feel the cost of the job when I'd been there working but a day, and I merely presented a thought I'd had. I guess I didn't say it in the right way, but a cold and disapproving look was returned, reminding me that the boss was the boss, and what he said was what I was to follow. I was not to come up with new ways to reform or do things.

I learned quick that in order to keep my place, as the right hand secretary I had to put aside what I even felt to be right, to do my job. I had to choose between my body and the place I felt so important to my existence, or my spirit and soul. I took the payment of what it cost my body to survive, from my soul and inner being. I spent the joy I once had, and my heart was left empty.

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When weighing up the pros and cons, of what it took to follow my Jesus, I determined, then and there, that in many ways the costs were far less than those I can be willing to endure, and the reward and pay back so much greater. In comparison a worldly life was nothing when held up to what service to Jesus would offer.

I gazed at the stars, looking at their beauty, and I knew, that as long as the ornaments hung in the sky above, there was a God, and His name was love, and He would watch over me.

On the last day of my vacation I sat there pondering what to tell my boss, my former company, those who seemed to depend on me. But depend on me for what? To better their own means, not the needs of others. Better their own houses and friends, not to care for those struggling to maintain a decent life, but who had none to look out for them. I would cast that life aside, putting my soul in the hand that had formed it, and trust in His precious Word that He would complete this new life He was creating of my battered one.

## **Chapter ten: Breaking loose**

It was not as easy as I thought, marching in to my old stomping grounds. Feelings, thoughts, both good and bad flooded into my soul. First I was reminded of my contract, how it was a legal, binding document, saying I was in their grasp, and was there to do whatever they'd ask me to do. I was reminded of the times of intimacy that Mr. Abuchi and I had had. Though they weren't often, still I had enjoyed being cared for and looked out for, or so it seemed. I was reminded of how good it felt to have a



sure place to rest at night, knowing that because I'd done my part and given every bit of my health and strength, I was worthy of accepting these gifts in return.

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A car was sent to pick me up at the airport upon my arrival back home. I didn't see Mr. Abuchi till I reached the apartment. He sat there awaiting my arrival and greeting me with a kiss on the cheek. We were to go out to eat that night, but I was just so exhausted, I didn't know if I could make it.

"It's now or never," I thought, as we entered the dimly lit Japanese restaurant. "I've got to break the news to him, or I may never. Oh, God, give me the courage to follow You, no matter what the cost!"

"So have you heard about the new proposal the company wants to present to you, dear Shella?" He said stroking my hand, as he held it on the table. "Well, let's get our food first and we can talk of work afterwards." He added, when noticing the tired expression on my face. He wanted it to be a time when we could be together and I could feel secure in his care. He had much he wanted to me to do, but he knew timing was important. I nodded, and we began to talk of my trip, the climate and simple things.

"You know, there's something I want to tell you," I finally stated bravely. Just then the waiter came with our food and we were distracted by the sight, smell and taste of it.

"What was that you were going to say," Mr. Abuchi asked, after a good ten minutes had gone by.

"I was thinking about my life here, and how you've been so good to me, you took me in and treated me with care."

Mr. Abuchi blushed a bit not knowing quite what to say. "Go on." He knew there was more.

"Oh, well, maybe some other time, I'm sure we'll have more time to talk later on."

"No, please, I want to hear what's on your mind. Something's different about you. I guess all that rest under the shining sun has done you some good."

"Yes, I do feel very much different than before. I have had some good rest, and made some friends also. The biggest change in my life, and the reason I have a wonderful inner happiness is because I have met the Savior face to face, in a special way and I have received God's love into my heart and life, and I will never be the same again."

These words put Mr. Abuchi ill at ease. He felt what he had feared when he first saw me after the trip. The grasp of my soul tightly around him for my source of well being was loosed and nearly non-existent. He needed me to be there to help him in his work; most of all he liked

to be needed. And now I had found a form of happiness that was beyond his control, this unsettled him.

Mr. Abuchi calmed himself and put on his charming smile. "So you're not your usual quicktempered, moody self anymore? I'm glad to hear that. I'm sure we'll have a better time working with one another now that you've got a happy side to you, regardless of where it may have come from."

"There's more that I've got to say, you see, I don't feel I can work with you on the business anymore. It's just not my place. I've learned lots, though most of it I wish I hadn't come to know. I just can't keep it up working under the conditions I've been under, and I'm going to have to go. I'm grateful for the time you've invested in me, the time you took to explain things that I didn't fully understand, and I do appreciate the care you've given. Don't get me wrong. It's just that now that I see I have a greater purpose in life to fulfill. I can no longer keep going down the path I was before. I have new visions, new joys and new commitments. Please understand."

"Well, I certainly didn't expect this coming from you, but I do understand that you are young and have new things you want to try. This religion thing has gone in pretty deep I see. But I think we can cope with it. There have been some changes in the way things are run. I know I worked you pretty hard. But we can change and rearrange things. Why not give us chance? See if you like the new ways we are doing things. Rubella can work for you and you won't have to take on such a strenuous load. What do you say?"

"I know this sounds hard, but I just don't see how that can work. See it's not just a religion, but a way of life. I owe my life to another, He has given me everything and I can only hope to repay Him for but a fraction of all He's done for me," Shella added, with a heart of emotion.

"What?! Who's this man that has stolen your heart and life? What could someone have done for you in so short a time that I have not been able to do ten times over in the time we've been together?"

"It's Jesus, I'm talking about, Sean. He's given me back all that I had lost, and given me purpose once again in living. I've promised my life to Him now, and I just can't go back on my word."

"He rips you out from my arms, the arms that have helped you out when you were lost and forlorn and didn't know where to go. These arms that have been there for you when you needed them. And you talk of promises, what about your commitments to me and to your work. I have written proof of that promise. You simply cannot go until your time is up. I'll try to make your accommodations be pleasant, but you have to fulfill your contract. I'm sorry." Mr. Abuchi, with a hint of a sneer.

"In that case, I see no further purpose in communicating on this matter any longer. I have made up my mind, my heart is sold to the One Who has given me

everything I could wish for in the ways of happiness, and a purpose in life, real stability and knowledge that I will always be cared for, no matter where I am. I am married to Him, and am in His debt alone. The debts you say I hold with you I leave you to work out with my new Master. For He paid a bigger price for me, and I now will serve Him alone.”

With those stirring words I left the building, with Mr. Abuchi pondering deeply on all that I’d told him.

## Chapter eleven: Heaven at last

I embraced Him more tightly than ever before. I clung to His breast as the tears rolled down. I felt truly home at last. As I gazed up into His eyes I felt such love warmth emanating from them I could not help but feel like I was falling in love with His love—more than ever before.

This is the dream I awoke with that Saturday morning. The tingly feeling of having been in the presence of my new Master, to Whom I had now committed every last part of my heart and life too, still lingered on as I arose and picked up my belongings. I would be on my way shortly, for the time had come to leave this the place I had called home for the past two years. I took with me only what I could carry. I left a note of farewell on the kitchen counter. Mr. Abuchi would see it and know that I was long gone.

Freedom was mine, but not without a fight, a fight to free myself from the grip the world had on me. In my heart I had joy, though I was not without a sense of uncertainty where my life now would lead. I decided to head to the park, as I had done many times before, when at the point of some decision to be made. I knew and loved the Lord, though I was only beginning to grow stronger in my new found faith and freedom.

And elderly man stopped by to observe my feeding of the pigeons that had now gathered, as I fed them crusts from the sandwich I was enjoying. He smiled and motioned if he could come and join me on the bench. I moved over, indicating he was welcome, and there we chatted about life, about his children, about the situation of the world and so on.

After what had been nearly an hour, he said: “I’d like to ask you a question, Shella. What would you do if you knew you only had months left on your life?” I looked away, wondering just what was on his mind.

“Months, huh? That’s one worth thinking about. I always did consider it worth remembering that at any time any of us could be called away from our lives here, and take that leap into the eternal. Thankfully, I’ve recently renewed my relationship with the Savior, and I feel in better terms now than ever to join Him above--were that to be what He had in mind. Do you also know of Jesus?” I asked. This gentleman’s eyes lit up at the sound of the

most beautiful name on earth to me. Tom, as he introduced himself, was also a believer.

“Yes, I love Him dearly. My mother taught me well. And though I’ve often strayed, or sought other paths to fill the needs of my heart, our wonderful Lord has welcomed me time and again back into His arms. He’s the only one that’s been there for me, many a time. And now at times like this..” I could see his eyes begin to tear up, as he looked at the ground, “He’s really all I’ve got to hold on to.”

“Why do you say that, are you having hard times in your family life, Tom?” I ventured. This time the question was his to answer.

Tom nodded and proceeded to explain what he’d been through that day.

“You see, I always felt that when you love someone, they should be there for you, when you really need them. That love is the greatest force that holds this world, and our own personal lives, together. You know what I mean?”

I nodded, saying nothing, not wanting to break his line of thought.

“Well, three weeks ago I found out I was dying of a rare and painful form of cancer. I’ll spare you the details. But now I’m having to face this almost alone. My wife, who has faithfully been beside me for nearly 40 years, has decided to move out and get an apartment of her own. She says it’s been hard enough living together, getting old with our many health difficulties. But she just doesn’t think she can stand to see me dying slowly and painfully.

“I thought our love could have seen us through anything, and that these things that our bodies go through are not nearly as important as what are souls feel for each other. She visits me every now and then, so it’s not quite as hard as it could perhaps be, but still just the fact that the person who has been so close to you, for most of your life, is no longer there, and you face an empty side of the bed. Sleeping alone. Eating for the most part alone. I just don’t see how I can make it.

I saw the doctor just this morning, and he informed me of the state of my body. I’m the one who has only a matter of months left in this body that has sure given me its share of trouble.”

“I’m so very sorry, dear Tom. That must have been quite a blow to your already saddened heart. I know Jesus knows each thing you think, and will continue to be there, right along side you, in each and every lonely hour. I’ll pray for you now, if you’ll let me.”

“Sure, go ahead,” with a touch of hope in his voice, glad to have found someone with faith in His Lord and maker, as well.

When the prayer was over, Tom smiled and chuckled a bit. "Ha!" He added, as his usually spunky personality shone through again. "What am I weeping about! Here I have the great God of love, always at my beck and call, I can talk to him any time I wish. I've even found a new friend. And besides all the goodness He gives me while I'm here, I've got treasures awaiting me up Yonder. I should be looking forward to that day when I can gaze into the face of the one Who has gone through so much for me, and to Whom I owe everything. Thank you, little lady, for helping to restore hope in this old man's bones again.

I don't remember if I asked you, but where did you say you lived, or are you just passing through this town?"

Taken back a bit by the sudden shift to me and my life, "Oh, well, in a way I guess I'm just passing through. See, as of this morning, if you don't mind my honesty, I'm out of a job, and am looking, and well, I guess, praying about what I am to do next. I don't really even have a place to stay right now. Got any ideas of apartments for rent?"

"Hmm, well down about a block from my house there're these new buildings, just put up, you might try there, though I can imagine they'd be pretty expensive, and may already be booked up."

"Okay, well thanks anyway. I'll take a look around. It was nice talking with you and I enjoyed the company."

"Say, what do you say about dinner at my place sometime. I'm not much good at cooking, since dear Elise has moved into a life of her own. I'm getting darn good at making top-notch sandwiches." Tom said with a straight face that turned into a charming grin. "You don't have to feel obligated, but if you'd feel like companionship, I can supply the ingredients, if you'd supply the culinary talent.

"That's a wonderful offer. Let's make it tomorrow, shall we? I'll probably spend most of the day looking for housing of some sort, and will be pretty spent come evening. But if you're game for Sunday evening, I'd be happy to come on by. Where did you say your house was?"

He wrote out his address, and added a scribble of a map on how to get to it. I could catch a cab there easily, or so it seemed. We bid farewell, and I was off to find some place to stay, till I found out just what I was to be doing with myself. Now that I had no job, or steady income, I knew I best be finding work, or some small paying day job, that could help pay the rent. I had a big day ahead of me, and I best be going. With a prayer on my

lips I headed out to catch the bus to the main part of the city.

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"That's the best spaghetti and meat balls I've ever tasted." Tom said, wiping his mouth with a napkin. "It's true, though. In moments like this I can see it more clearly."

"See what? How much you like meatballs?" I said teasingly.

"Ha! Yes! But no, that's not what I was going to say."

"Then, what can you see so clearly?"

"The amazing effects that true love really does have. I was getting so despondent, over the love that my wife and I had, thinking it had brought to an end all love for me, and that that was the end of it. But it's held me together all those years: love for each other, for our children and for our Lord. And now I sit here, with someone I don't know well. But because of the love we both hold for our Lord, it's brought us together to feel a special touch of His tender caring hands."

"I've enjoyed the time spent here too, Tom. You know, as the saying says, you never lose by giving, and what the heart gives away is never lost, but is kept and cherished in the hearts of others. So keep loving and reaching out to others, just as you have to me, and may these days be the happiest yet for you, with many friends and joys of the heart.

"I guess I should be going shortly, I have a room at the hotel, about half hour's bus ride away, where I've checked my belongings into. It was wonderful getting to know you better, and I hope to meet you again sometime."

"You know where I live, you're more than welcome to drop by any time. Just give me a ring and I'll have some sandwiches ready!" He said with a chuckle.

"Okay now, sleep well and sweet dreams."

"To you too, little lady. I'll be seein' you around."

\* \* \*

The next few weeks were busy ones. I secured a room that was up for rent, in someone's apartment, and got a job at a gas station. At night I would spend time reading my Bible and praying for new openings in life that I could commit myself to, to follow the Lord Who now guided my steps.

I was reading the paper one day when a thought struck me. There'd been a blizzard, highly unusual for this time of year, crops were freezing over and dying, and it looked like it was going to be a bad year because of it.

*I wonder if there is some place, where disaster has struck, that could use a simple person like me to help*

*out. Oh, I'd just love to do that. Maybe I'll talk with Tom about it, and see if he has any thoughts or ideas that could help me out here. I'd just love to help other struggling people to find a bit of comfort in this life, and come to know the love of Jesus.*

"Come on over!" Was the cheerful and enthusiastic response, when I rung him up, after a long day. I shared my sketchy thoughts and plans and was ready to hear what he'd have to say, when the door bell rang. We both had a look of "who could that be" flashing across our faces. He arose to answer and found it to be the neighbor who was asking if Tom had an extra bottle of gas, 'cause he'd just run out, and since he was alone with the kids, couldn't go and get one. They were about to make a special snack and needed something to cook with.

"Sure, no problem. I've got one here. I always like to keep one on hand--for times like this I guess. You're welcome to stay for a cup of coffee, if you like, but I s'pose you've gotta get back to those young ones of yours, eh?"

"Yeah, I best be going now. But I'm very grateful for your help. You can count on me paying you back sometimes real soon. Thanks again. See you then."

With that he left the two of us alone again. We settled on the couch and continued our discussion.

"Well, there's one place that I know of, that could use a girl like you to help spunk things up a bit and give them something worth livin' for, and that's the town I visited last summer, down south, near Mexico city. They need all the help they can get. It won't be easy, and you sure won't have all the accommodations that you once knew while here. But if you are looking for purpose in life and a thrill, perhaps you could try there, and see what turns up.

You could stay here and try to help the poor on the street. But as far as I can see, those poor down there could really use some Savior in their lives. I'd go with you, you know, but I'm much too frail now. I'm sure, if that's what you want to invest your time doing, you'll find it well worth the cost. I've got some friends, and a dear sister, who might be able to help pay your way there. Give it some thought. I've got a hunch it's what you'll do well at doing."

"Mexico! Well, I never quite considered that before. I'll think that over for sure, since you seem to be so keen on it. But I don't know... Well, it's rather late now, guess I best be on my way then. Thanks again for your time and thought. I know the Lord has something in mind for me, just not quite sure what yet."

\* \* \*

Rustle, that dear and friendly man, I met and loved with, not too long back, had been in my thoughts lately. Sometimes I wished his path would cross mine

again, but I chose to put that out of my mind, for he had his dreams and ambitions and I had mine.

One morning I awoke feeling rather lousy, sick to my stomach and with a slight headache. I wondered just how much a part of me he had become. I decided to take a test.

"Positive!! Can that really be so?" I thought, completely taken back. "Oh, boy, I just don't know if I'm ready for this. I don't even have a steady life to bring a child into. How can things be happening so quickly all of a sudden. I don't know how I can keep up. I guess there's only one thing that can be done, and that's to pray that my life's work will sort itself out soon and quick, for with a little one on the way, I've got to get my life together. Oh, Lord help me!" I cried, pouring out my soul to the truest friend I had.

In the proceeding weeks I went through such inner turmoil, not knowing what I was supposed to do. Abortion was out of the question. I knew God had given me this little life, though I couldn't understand what for. After much thought and tears, praying for the spiritual guidance I needed, I determined to just try and make the best of it. I now had more than just myself to look out for; I needed my Lord's strength and support more than ever before.

\* \* \*

The months past by, and Tom's health had made steady downhill progress. Once when I visited him, he was lying on the couch listening to some old classical music. He looked so weak and in need of help. I determined that someone had to care for this dear old man. Elise would drop by from time to time, and tend to his most immediate needs, but wouldn't stay for long. It was just too hard for her to see him go this way. We'd spoken briefly and had come to an agreement that I would stay in the house, in order to be more available to help Tom in his last days on earth.

One morning I awoke with the words in my head, "Three weeks and you're out of here. Better decide your path now, before it gets too late."

I knew Who's voice that was, and I figured I best be making a move on things. I was now nearly 4 months along in my pregnancy, and was still keeping up at a pretty steady pace, with my job during the day, and with helping to care for Tom in my off hours.

Elsie helped to give me good advice throughout this time, what things to eat, and various tips, since she had been through this three times before. I appreciated her motherly care. Through it we formed a friendship. In some ways it was hard for her to see me helping with the one she'd loved and cared for through so many years, still she was glad that someone could be there, helping with what she didn't feel capable of.

I realized that morning, more than ever, that my days here were numbered, and I took note of the "Three weeks" whisper in my head.

\* \*

A few mysterious things happened that week for me that surely helped me along. The more I prayed, the more I saw the loving hands of my Master work on my behalf. The first amazing event happened one morning on my way to work. I was chit-chatting with a young man sitting next to me on the bus, he was telling me about the good business he was involved in, and that for once things were finally seeming to work out for him in his life. I was telling him about the Lord and so on, when a pamphlet had blown down the aisle and stopped on the floor right beside where we were sitting. On it was a colorful tourist type photo with the words "Welcome to the hot spot" with the address in Mexico city. It was advertising some new buffet or restaurant there. Though that held no interest, just the fact that it had landed right here beside me, with the word "Mexico" on it at all, sent chills down my back.

The next, sign, I guess you could call it, happened when I was nearing the door of Tom's house, it sounded like a whisper in the distance, only this time it was in Spanish. I knew some Spanish, having grown up with a friend of Mexican decent, and we'd play with his friends from time to time. The voice said "Come, we need you!" I knew there was no one out on the street then, and I certainly didn't recognize the voice being anyone that lived around here, though I hadn't gotten to know the whole neighborhood yet.

I tried to shrug it off as nothing much. As I went about my evening, however, fixing supper, watching a little news and caring for Tom before heading to bed, these pulls in my heart were intensifying. I was starting to wonder much more seriously if Tom really had something there in this idea of going to help out in that town down south.

I was restless that night, and dreamt strange and troubled dreams, mainly because I was unsettled in my heart about what I wanted to do. It was a new experience sleeping with the ever growing child within, as well, and took some getting used to. Finally around 5:00 I sat up and decided to get down to serious prayer. I knew I couldn't go on much longer in this "valley of in decision," as Tom put it.

"Lord, You have provided for me when I was destitute and without work. You have given me a home to stay in, friends to care for, and most of all You have blessed me with a new life, that keeps growing more each day. I don't know what it is that You want me to be doing, where it is that I am to go, but I do pray that you'll lead me--and soon-- to the place I can be the most useful to You, show me now, is Mexico where I am to go, or do you have other plans for my life?

"I don't know how much longer I can stay here. Tom's soon to pass on, or so it seems, and I'll probably have to move out. You've got to help me with this."

He heard and answered my simple but desperate cry that night and sent comforting words to my heart. As I sat there in the dark I felt Him speak these words to my heart. "Dear one, you know I have not brought you along this far to just leave you abandoned. I will continue to care for you all the days of your life. I have told you time and again I will not leave you nor forsake you. So trust Me as I say it again once more. You ask Me where it is that I want you to go, what it is that I have planned for you. Tomorrow you will see the final sign of My direction and leading. Trust Me for it. By this time tomorrow you will be sure of the direction that you are to take."

With that I lay down and found sweet sleep. I overslept my alarm and had to make a move on the day. When I woke I didn't remember what had happened the night before, until I was riding the bus, and the thoughts came back to me once more. The whisper echoed in my heart, "Tomorrow you will see the final sign." It made me recall the sign I'd gotten with the pamphlet, as well as the voice. I was beginning to see His leading and direction so much more clearly. Truly He had led all along in answer to my daily prayers for guidance.

The day came and went, busy as always, though with a bit more joy added to it, for I had the hope of what was to be shown me that day. As I was closing down work, my boss called me over, handing an envelope to me he said, "A gentleman came by here today while you were having a break and said for me to pass this on to you. I'm not sure what it is. He said you'd know and understand what it was all about."

I opened it with curiosity and to my amazement I found a check in it signed with a name that was hardly legible. It was made out in my name, with a note attached that read, "Thought you could use this in your up and coming venture. --A friend." I nearly leapt for joy, for I knew of only one such a friend who could have known where I was and would give me this gift of \$3,000. I pondered deeply on this as I rode home from work, at times feeling like I was nearly going to burst. At last I knew where I was headed--or at least the general direction--had a start, fund wise, to make preparations for it, and wanted to go home and pack as soon as I could.

I nearly flew in the door of our humble house if it wasn't for Elsie standing in the way with a grim look on her face. "Today.." she started, bravely trying to hold back the sob she held deep in her throat. "Today.. he.. passed away. I... I..."

I held her, knowing how hard this had all been for her. Then I too began to cry. Tom had been a dear friend to us both and we were going to miss him terribly. We made preparation that evening for the funeral that would come the day after next. I stayed with Elise that night, not wanting to remain in the bare and empty house, that Tom's cheerful words and expressions had always kept pleasant.

We spent the next day together, just talking, eating and taking a walk down near the waterfront, where she said Tom and her had first met. She told me secrets about her life and I about mine, between the tears that would well up and were bravely wiped away.

The next day we'd face family, friends and relatives, and I was introduced as a friend, to her family. When the service and all the formalities were over, we settled down with a small group of ladies and talked about plans we each had of things we always wanted to do.

"And what of you, young lady, what do you have planned to now do with your life, I hear you have plans to go somewhere where it's perhaps a bit warmer?" Elsie suggested, wanting to leave me room to explain myself, and out of motherly concern perhaps gain some help and support from these others who had nothing better to do than dream of the days when they, too, were young enough to take on new adventures, such as the one I was dreaming of.

I told them briefly of my plans and ideas, explaining how it was Tom's idea originally, and how he'd wanted me to go there, and thought it'd be good not only for me, but for those there also.

Tom's passing had softened even the toughest heart there, and they felt in the mood to help a struggling soon-to-be young mother make something of her life. Though they didn't approve of my life style or what had brought me to this point, fatherless with a child and all, still they took pity on me and pledged to donate supplies and funds towards helping me complete this dream of ours –Tom's and mine.

That was the last time I remembered sitting around enjoying quite moments with friends, for there was much to be done, many things to pray and work out, and I wanted to be on my way as soon as possible, fulfilling new dreams and away from old memories. Three weeks, almost to the day, from the time I'd heard that soft voice within, I truly was off and away. Watching the cloud formations as the plane landed in Mexico city gave me a new thrill. It's almost as if I could hear the words being spoken to me, "Just as I have painted the clouds in the sky, your life will become a master piece if you leave it all in My hands." The plane touched down, and my new life began.

## **Chapter twelve: Lovin' life**

"Come, let's have a picnic while I read to you from this wonderful story book", I called out to the children I was spending the day with. They were virtual orphans, by day, as their poor parents had to work long and tiresome hours at the factory. These street inhabitants were becoming my friends and companions. The supplies

that the ladies had sent for me, and which some continue to send, was a tremendous help to my work here.

At times I wasn't sure what I was doing, but every time I sought God's help and guidance He reminded me once again that it was He who was leading me and had brought me along this far and would complete in my life all that He wanted to--so long as I did my part and gave to Him my all.

I continue to teach and help these youngin's, in anyway I could and they gave me reason to get up in the morning. In time we had a new school house set up for those too poor to attend the local school. I taught some days and enlisted the help of others. The children enjoyed their learning, for the most part, as it gave them something to do with their time, other than the boring routine of looking for food, playing mischievous tricks on the neighbors and spying on the old man who seldom exited his front door.

\* \* \*

"Oh!" I felt it at first mildly, then a bit stronger, the pains, the contractions, the signs that the young one within was anxious to come out and see the world she'd only been hearing, while staying hidden within her own little abode.

That night, Michelle Sherice was born. —Otherwise known as my little Virginia. That's what I took to calling her. The time on the islands is where she first became part of my life.

Gini and I were best of buddies, from the moment I laid eyes on her golden curls I was thrilled to have a child of my very own. The dear little children that I had taken care of these past months were becoming more dear to me, and now I had one to call my own. I taught her as best as I could the ways of the Lord, as my mother had done for me, and she had that special twinkle in her eye that made her seem as if she'd come down straight from the Heaven above--which I knew she had.

Gini had her rough moments though, and it was a tough go for a while there, managing in the little room I had rented on the property of an old farmer. There were times I would have just loved to have the company of another, to support me in the wakeful hours when Gini wanted only to talk, in her loud baby's way, and be rocked, and wanted nothing to do with sleep. But in time I came to know a dear gentleman, who took care of me and my little one.

This farmer, who's land on which I stayed, had a son who would visit from time to time, checking on him to see how he faired, and helping him with the crops each year. Spring time came, and Fernando showed up. When I first laid eyes on him I felt a warmth from him and we became fast friends. He didn't stay for long, but he promised he'd return, and asked if there was anything I needed. I told him of my work with the children of the village, and how things had changed now with a little one in my life. He said with a twinkle in his eye, he'd see what

he could do to get me better accommodations and the help I needed during the day with Gini.

Three more months passed, and Gini was starting to demand more attention, wanting to know so much more about the world around her. I was happy to spend my days teaching her, learning along side of her the mysteries about these sweet people we had come to help. My heart also went out to those who had no mother to hold them when they scratched their knee, who were bored with staring at the workmen building new houses for the rich. I needed more help and was praying for a miracle, and it came, none too soon.

Fernando rang at my door one Sunday morning, as I was struggling to wash the clothes, feed the baby, and clean the house all at once. My hair was unkempt, my apron stained, but a big smile lit my face as I heard about his offer.

“My mother in law has heard about you and your work with the neighborhood children and has invited you to come and stay in our house, if you wish. She misses having children around, now that her’s have all grown up. And, I.. well, my wife passed away last year, and so we’d appreciate the laughter of a little one in our house, and if you will, we’d love to have your company there with us too. Please don’t feel you have to take me up on this offer, but if you want to, we’d care for you as part of our very own family. What do you say?”

At first I was taken back and could hardly believe the love, for a near stranger, that they were reaching out to me with. But with a smile, and full faith that this was the answer that I’d been praying for, I exclaimed, “God must have sent you to me. I have been praying night and day for help not only for my daughter, but for me and my work here. I’m humble and with great gratitude accept your generous offer. I can be ready to go the beginning of next week, if you’ll take me then.”

“Oh, my mother and I and our family will be so glad to have you with us. You are kind natured and have a love for all. I will come then, the next Monday and bring you to our humble abode.”

With that he placed a kiss on my cheek and squeezed my hand and in his.

I had one week to prepare. I didn’t know just what I was going to be walking into, but I felt a bit of nervous excitement within. I felt that this was going to be a wonderful time in my life, knowing true and close friends, having a family to call my own, and being able to focus more attention on the many who needed someone to care for them.

I lived simply, with this family, without deep involvements with any man, till Gini reached her first birthday. The mother, who I called “Mama”, out of respect, and she was almost like a mother to me, helped during the day to care for little Gini. She was beginning to speak Spanish even, in her own childlike way. It was so

cute to see her learn to walk, to crawl, and to wave and blow kisses. She was beginning to give cheer to this corner of the world in her own simple way.

I was able to teach and instruct this family with the message of the love of Jesus, and they gladly received Him into their lives; though they were somewhat a Christian family to begin with.

When Gini was a year and two months old, I was watching her out doors as it was getting dark. Fernando came to talk with me, as we seemed to be doing more and more frequently. He was in need of companionship, and I could always use the support of a man in my life and in the care of Gini. I’d tried to keep my distance however, somewhat, knowing the heartache he so recently when through, and wanting him to move into relationships at his own pace.

“Shella”, he broke the silence with, after a pause in talking about how our day had gone, and what more needed to be done for the school that was up and running quite well now. “I think you are a kind woman. I have seen the way you care for the children, and I would be pleased to make you my wife, if you will take me.”

“Fernando, I have always loved you. From the first moment I saw you I knew you were a child of God and I felt a special closeness to your heart. Let us get to know one another more closely and see how we feel about it as time goes on. It may be that God does want us to live yet more closely to one another’s heart, and in each other’s lives. I will bring the matter before God, and if His will permits it, I will gladly accept.”

I kissed him deeply then for the first time, and he held me close.

We began to get closer to one another, sharing more secrets and special moments, while Mama looked on with approval. She was happy to see his tired and troubled heart finding more joy, and she was glad to gain a new daughter, through the marriage of her son.

In time we were wed, in a casual setting, where we said before God and each other our promises of dedication and love to one another.

It was a beautiful time getting to know this man, who’s heart had known many sorrows, and seeing him change yet more through coming to know more dearly the Lord I loved above all.

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“I will be gone for one week,” I tried explaining to my now nearly three year old daughter. I have to take a trip, but I’ll be back and we’ll have some fun together then. Daddy will be here with you, and Grandma, and I bet you’ll make some yummy treats with her. Be good now and try to make Jesus happy by being kind to the other children and being a helper to Grandma, just like Samuel was in the temple. Remember? And Jesus can speak to you too, just like he did to Samuel.”

She cried a bit and we prayed together, and then I was off to do business in a few different towns. I was going to ask for help, supplies and school equipment, and hopefully bring back some of the things we needed, and make contacts for future donors.

The trip was a success, mainly due to the many prayers being prayed by the dear ones at home base. Clothing was donated, books and pencils, as well as toys and food.

We decided to have a thanksgiving type of dinner to thank the Lord for all that had been done for us over these past few years. We prepared a banquet, with many of the old Grandmothers baking and donating something to this large display of food. My father in law even brought some bread he'd baked and a bottle of good wine. We had music playing and games for the children. It was a town event, and a joyous time for all. Though it certainly was exhausting. But I was happy at all that had been done in each one of our lives.

"Fernando," I whispered, before we fell asleep. "You've been one of the best gifts to me. I love you." He place his arm warmly around me as we drifted to the land of dreams.

\* \* \*

"Shella," I turned around to see my Master looking at me, eyes filled with love, yet with a trace of sadness, looking as if He had something rather difficult to explain to me.

I held out my arms to Him and He held me tightly. We sat down and he began to explain. Tears filled my eyes. I was unsure of what He was asking of me, of us, but I knew best to trust Him.

Truly all would be made clear in that day when we'd join our friends and loved ones again in the realm above. But here on this earth it would be hard for the ones I'd come to know so dearly, to understand the reason why things must be the way they were to be. I knew there was no reason but love itself that would cause my Master to ask of me and my dear ones this nearly impossible hardship to go through. Then He showed me something that I will never forget.

"I want you to enjoy for a moment what I am about to show you, dear Shella." He filled my heart and mind with memories, dreams of times past, and things that I didn't realize had happened to me. All was before me in a flash, one quick instant.

He explained, "All that I have brought you through has been for a purpose. You have longed to live for Me, you have given your very heart and life to Me, and I will reward you greatly for each and every sacrifice you have made for Me and for those you live to bring closer to Me. I would not ask this of your friends, child, and husband, if I knew it weren't for the good of all.

"Fernando will find joy again, don't weep for him, my dear love. And Gini, that dear daughter that will

be yours always, will become the jewel I have dreamed of her becoming. Are you willing to go with Me one step further? Can you walk with Me now through the doors of eternity, leaving time behind and entering a new dimension where all is made right, and where I can use you to help many others in a new and challenging way?

"Oh, sweet daughter, it's a tough choice, but I knew you love Me enough to trust in My guiding hand. For as I lead you through each turn and hard spot of your life, and safely to My arms time and again, so will I do for those you care for. What do you say My love, will you walk with Me now?"

Tossing and turning on the bed, I broke out in a sweat, I mumbled something to Fernando, which he interpreted to mean I wanted some water. As I drank I could hardly see clearly, I felt terribly feverish, and fell back again in to a deep sleep, where the dream continued.

"My Lord," at last I said with a brave heart, as I grasped His strong hand that was around my waist. "I will not have it said of me that I gave only part of my heart and life to the One who has given me all, and only wanted my love and life in return. I will go with You, though this journey be hard. I will trust that all will be made right and that You will make perfect each thing that is a concern to me, for I love you more than life."

With that I felt the deepest and most tender kiss I'd ever felt, and woke to find myself being cradled in the arms of my dear husband, who was praying for me.

My body continue to weaken over the next few days. I knew that my time on earth was coming to a close. How thankful I was to have had the opportunity to live, what years I had, among these people, and to be of some help to those who needed to know they were loved-- by Jesus and me as well. I left this world as I slept, but not before bidding my darlings good bye.

How they wept, and it tore at my heart. I so much wanted to be there to comfort them, but it was my time to go, and I would have to leave their hearts within the hands of the One who had made them and promised to keep them always.

## Epilogue

Fernando never did marry again, but in the years that followed learned to be a teacher and carried on the work in the village that I had begun. He passed away in his 50's after having a stroke. Here is our account of meeting one another again.

"Shella, My love, the time has come for your darling Fernando to join us here."



“It has seemed but a brief time, my Lord, for every day with You has been pure pleasure. My life up Here has been a rich and joyful time, and I am so glad I can now share what I have learned while in Your arms with one so dear to my heart.”

“Walk with Me now and I’ll take you to him.” As we walked along the pathway children ran and tugged on our garments. They were going to have a picnic in the park and wanted us to join them. We promised we’d return at another time, after playing a simple game of hide and seek.

Jesus always has time for each one of His creations. I marvel yet at His undying love.

He slipped away, and I saw my husband, sitting on a bench looking in the water where the ducks were bobbing and splashing.

“Fernando!” I called out. He turned, looking more handsome than ever. I was by his side and in his embrace faster than one can blink an eye. We had so much to talk of and much catching up to do. We talked a while and then our loving Master joined us. We three had been close friends for long now and it was so good to see one another face to face, at one place at last.

We enjoyed a wonderful time exploring the beauties that were opened for us--like presents that had been waiting till Christmas. Some rewards were given to me upon my arrival; others that were for Fernando alone, were given to him when he saw his loving Lord and Master face to face. Yet others were waiting to be given when the two of us where reunited again. And these we enjoyed, as we reveled in the amazing and eternal love of the dear One we’d both given our brief lives for. Truly all had been made right, all tears wiped away, and we knew total love.

Gini too would come to know in time, the depth of this love, and we were to help her now, as she faced the most difficult time of her life. A new challenge was being opened to us and we were willing and ready. Life for the Lord kept going and getting more exciting, more thrilling with each moment we lived.

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