

SUNSHINE

Daughter of Sacrifice

The Reality of Christianity

If we the bride of Christ are to qualify to rule and reign with Christ we must expect to be more like Christ.

This shocking, True Story commands your attention from beginning to end. Learn the true meaning of being like Christ.

by Teresa (her Mother)

This true story illustrates not only the reality of a nineteen-year-old girl ritually sacrificed by a satanic cult and how the power of the occult has reached even into our government, it is also a mother's story that will inspire, uplift and motivate you to greater commitment and devotion.

Readers say:

“Don't plan on doing anything until you are finished. You won't be able to put this book down!”

“I believe that no one can read this book without having their life changed. It is a true story of happiness, almost unspeakable tragedy, and ultimate victory.”

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Acknowledgements

My loving appreciation to my sister
without who's strength and loving prayers,
undying devotion and solid roots in God
I could not have made it.
Thank you, Sissy, and thank You, God
for blessing me with her.

Thank you
Sara Jane

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INTRODUCTION

This true story not only lets you see the unfailing devotion of a 19 year old girl who gave her life for our heavenly Father, it is also a look into the world in which we live. Specifically, it gives insight into how occult influence has made inroads even into our government, law enforcement and judicial systems. The message is that if we are putting our trust in anything or anyone other than God, we will be in for a rude awakening. There are areas of this book which deal rather graphically with the dark side of evil. Those with sensitive natures who might be offended should be forewarned. Names of some have been changed to protect the innocent.

Ultimately, however, this is a book of victory and encouragement that can change your life!

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FORWARD

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to HIS PURPOSE.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did PREDESTINATE, to be conformed to the Image of his Son, that he might be the first born among brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also JUSTIFIED; and whom he JUSTIFIED, them he also GLORIFIED.

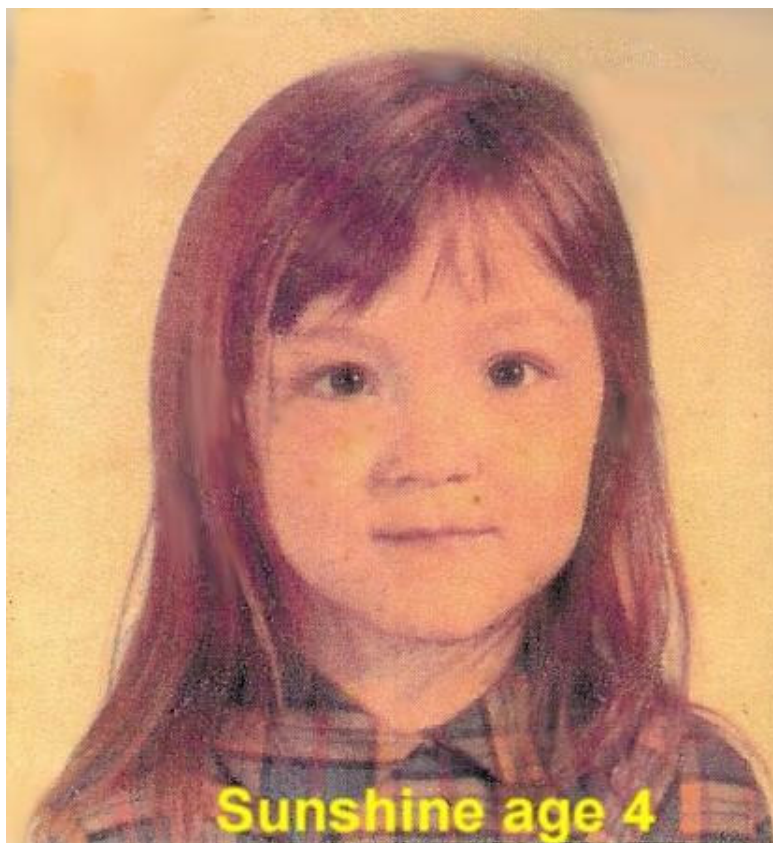
Beloved, my hope and prayer for this book is that you are divinely touched with love and adoration for our heavenly Father, who has done so much for us. When you ask “Why” in times of tribulation, understand that His overwhelming love is there. God, and God alone is in control. He has grand and glorious things in store for you, but He requires your total submission to His will, His guidance, and His control. You cannot accept Jesus as your Savior without accepting Him as your Lord, Master, and your Boss. We cannot make HALF a deal. When you accept His sacrifice for you, you must, in return, give Him yourself sacrificially – knowing that Jesus is Lord *of* all or He is not Lord at all. It is only by dying to yourself completely that you can learn to live for Christ completely.

We have got to deprogram ourselves from the greed gospel that we’ve been deluged with for so long. Throughout the reading of our Bibles, we know were SAVED to be SERVANTS of God. Yet, so many look to God to *just* serve them. We are recruited in God’s army to fight all the evil influences that pervade our nation. This is our battleground. WE ARE AT WAR AGAINST SATAN. If you never meet the devil head on, it’s a good indication that you are walking with him. Beloved, keep your armor on, knowing there’s always another battle just around the corner. (Ephesians 6)

America was founded on the basic principle of God. Yet we have strayed so very far away from the true Christian doctrine. If we belong to God, then we must belong 100%. America needs desperately to redefine and evaluate ourselves as Christians. We need to fall on our knees and beg for our sins of pride, arrogance and disobedience to be forgiven. Then, and only then, will we truly see the spiritual revival that is so desperately needed in our land.

Beloved, we must get deep in our minds and in our spirits. If we, the bride of Christ, are to qualify to rule and to reign with Christ, we must expect to be more like Christ, EVEN UNTO DEATH.

My prayer is that after you have read this book, you are more determined to be more like Christ.



Chapter 1

LUCKY

The knock at the door was insistent. Sunshine ran to answer it. “Wait a minute, Sunshine, I’ll get it.” *It couldn’t be Sissy (my sister and next door neighbor) or one of her kids, I thought. The knock was too loud and hard.* I opened the door. “Yes, sir?” A man with a stern face and a familiar voice asked, “Do you own a sorrel gelding with four stockings and a blaze face?”

“Yes sir, I do. Is there anything wrong?”

“Yes. Your horse got loose during the night. I found him grazing in my front yard this morning. He’s tied up over at my house. You want to come get him?”

“Yes, sir. I’ll be right there.” The man turned away and started back to his truck. “Thank you for tying him, sir,” I called after him.

“Uh-huh,” he answered, without looking back. Lucky, our gelding, must have knocked him off his schedule that morning.

“Okay, Sunshine, let’s get a bridle. Lucky’s gotten out. We have to go get him.”

I got dressed. Sunshine went out to the fence and grabbed a bridle. It wasn’t Lucky’s, but it was good enough to lead him home, and Sunshine and I started up the road. I was seven months pregnant at the time, so I didn’t really enjoy having to make the trip – but you’ve got to take the bad with the good. At the neighbor’s, I put the bridle on Lucky, walked him out to the road and put Sunshine on his back. We began the long walk back home.

“Lucky’s a bad boy, isn’t he, Mama?”

“He sure is, Sunshine. Our pasture grass is much better than what he was eating. I don’t know why he decided to get out. We’ll have to check the fence when we get home.”

“I’ll help you, Mama.”

“Okay, sweetie.”

I tied Lucky to our fence and pulled Sunshine off his back. Sunshine ran to the swingset in the back yard. I went inside for a glass of water and checked on Sunshine through the back door. “I’m fixing to put Lucky in the pasture, Sunshine. Do you want to go?”

“No, Mama, I want to swing. Okay?”

“Okay, sweetie, but you stay right here. I’ll be right back.” I noticed she had taken her glasses off again. The pasture was only about 500 feet from our yard, so I figured I’d only be a couple of minutes. Tired from the long walk, I decided to ride Lucky to the pasture. Sunshine came over to us at the side fence as I mounted. “You stay right there in the yard, sweetheart. I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Okay,” Sunshine said, and went back to the swingset.

As I rode Lucky to the pasture gate, bent down to open the latch, a cat darted out from under the gate and spooked Lucky. He shied off to one side, almost knocking me off I jerked the reins hard to get him under control, and the curb chain snapped. Lucky took off like a house on fire. The more I jerked at the reins, the faster he went. He zig-zagged crazily across the pasture as fast as he could go, jumping over the fence and headed for the cliff. I pulled on one rein as hard as I could to get him to turn, but it was no use. Soon Lucky and I were on the edge of the cliff; I jerked the reins, Lucky reared up, and down we went, tumbling over the cliffside.

It was a long fifty feet, mostly straight down. Lucky went first. I landed a few feet from him, tumbled and bruised. He immediately jumped to his feet. I tried to reach for the reins that were only a few inches from my fingertips, but as I stretched out my arm a

sharp pain went down my back. I couldn't move anymore – I couldn't even feel my legs. It hurt to breathe. I lay there for a few minutes, and then tears began streaming down my face. *Oh, God, I'm so sorry, I thought – this was so stupid – I should've never gotten on this horse. Please, help me, God, please don't let anything be wrong with my baby...please, God, let him be all right.* I lay there with my hands on my belly, hoping to feel movement.

Several minutes passed. The pain was so intense, I was still unable to get up. I started yelling for help. It even hurt to yell. Anyway, I was too far from the house for anyone to hear me. There was no access to this spot. On one side of me was the cliff; on the other side, a few mounds of dirt and the river. I'd ridden this land a lot, but I'd never been to this place. I started to worry about Sunshine. *Oh, God, please keep her all right.*

I knew precisely what her visual capabilities were, because since her birth, I'd been working with her to exercise her eyes. She was born with severe antheopia and retina damage, and for hours every day we did exercises to strengthen her eye muscles. She couldn't possibly have seen Lucky running away with me. *God, help me, I prayed. Please, God. No one ever comes this way – I could be down here for days, weeks, even months before I'd be found. If I was ever found.* I cried out again, "Help! Help!"

Then I thought of Sunshine again. Maybe she'll go over to Sissy's, or Sissy will look out her back door and see Sunshine there alone. What am I thinking? She won't know I'm not in the house. Oh, God, I hope Sissy comes over and sees me gone, and takes Sunshine home with her. Sunshine didn't have her glasses on. She couldn't have even seen which direction I went. Thirty or forty minutes passed and I still couldn't get up. The pain in my back was terribly sharp, and my legs were still numb. I lay there with my eyes shut, praying. *God, help my baby; God, help my Sunshine; and Lord, help me get up from here.*

Then I opened my eyes and looked at the top of the cliff. There was Sunshine's little red head, sticking through the weeds! "Mama, Mama! Are you down there, Mama?"

I was horrified to see her standing on the cliff edge. "No, no, Sunshine, don't take another step. Stay right where you're at, Sunshine. Don't move." God, one more step and she'll fall off! "Stay right where you're at, Sunshine, and listen, this is what I want you to do, okay?" I tried my best to sound calm and not frighten her. I thought, what do I do? How did she ever find me?

"Okay, Mama, what do you want me to do?"

"First we're going to play a game, and you've got to pay very close attention. Okay?"

"Okay, Mama."

"Sunshine, we're going to play Simon Says. It's my turn first. Simon says, Sunshine, take one giant step backwards. Remember, backwards means behind you, Sunshine – one giant step, okay?"

She did so, and I saw her little head disappear from the bushes. “Now, Sunshine, can you still hear me?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“Take two giant steps backward.”

“I did, Mama.” Her voice was getting fainter.

“Do you know the way to the pasture?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“Turn and walk to the fence, Sunshine.” I had to be very careful in directing her. The pasture fence came right down to the cliff.

“Okay, Sunshine, I want you to walk like you’re going home, do you hear me?”

“Yes, Mama.”

I could barely hear her – she was getting farther away. “Okay, Sunshine. Go get Aunt Carol and tell her me and Lucky fell off the cliff and she needs to call the life squad.”

“Okay, Mama, I’ll do it now.”

“Sing a song, Sunshine. Keep a hold of the fence all the way, and sing loud – loud, Sunshine – sing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ all the way to Aunt Carol’s.” I heard her begin singing, and as she got farther away I could tell she was going in the right direction. Oh, God, how in the world did she find me? I’m half a mile from the house. Fifteen, then twenty minutes passed. I lay there praying constantly, *God, please get her home safe*. The fence line was the longer way, although it was barbed-wire, it was safer for her. I couldn’t think of any other way to get her home. I lay there thirty or forty minutes, and finally I heard them coming toward me. I started yelling.

“We’re on our way,” Sissy yelled back. Soon I could see her there with her two boys and Sunshine. I was so relieved I began crying. “My Sunshine did it. My Sunshine did it.”

“What happened to you, Teresa?” Sissy yelled down.

“Me and Lucky fell off.”

“Well, Sunshine came and got me and told me you were down here. I don’t know how she did it, but she did.”

I could see Sunshine was a little upset. “You aren’t going to die are you, Mama?”

“No, Sunshine. I’m a little hurt, but thanks to you I’ll be all right.”

Soon the life squad was there. With considerable effort they got me onto a stretcher and up the cliff where Sissy and Sunshine were waiting. As they put me into the ambulance, Sissy stood at the ambulance door, holding Sunshine’s hand. Sunshine reached over and tugged at the pants leg of one of the ambulance attendants. “Are you going to take my Mama to the hospital?”

“Yes, but she’ll be okay, Little Red,” he said as he brushed the tears off her cheek.

“Well, then, you better take me too.”

“We can’t do that, Little Red, but she’ll be home soon.”

Sunshine looked down at me, fighting back more tears. “Let me hold her,” I said.

“Ma’am, we’ve got to go.”

“Just for a second...” The other ambulance attendant had been listening to my pregnancy with a stethoscope. “It’ll be all right,” she told him. “Let her hold her little girl.” He lifted Sunshine in to me.

“How in the world did you find me, Sunshine? How did you? You found Mama when I thought no one could.” I took her little hand and kissed it. Then I turned it over and saw scratches and punctures on her palm from the barbed-wired fence. I’d told her to hold on to it, and she had been obedient. “Oh, baby,” I said. “My sweet, sweet little Sunshine – you saved Mama’s life.”

A big smile came over her face.

Sissy watched the kids during my three-day stay in the hospital. There was ten-year-old Tinker, Sissy’s oldest; eight-year-old Sonny, Sonya’s age; and six-year-old Katrina, Daron’s age. Only Sunshine was still home with me during those days. Sissy still had two: three-year-old Loren and two-year-old Lukas. Sissy and I had always lived near to each other. After we lost our mother as teenagers, we became closer than sisters usually are. For quite some time, all we had was each other.

I had a ruptured disk, but the baby was okay. Soon I was back home, on complete bed rest. During the day it was just me and my Sunshine, with Sissy dropping by often. My little nurse took good care of me. When she wasn’t getting me a glass of water or bathing my face with a cool washcloth, she would gather dolls and play there on the bed beside me.

Right on schedule, we had our baby boy. We named him Dean. He was perfect. And now I had the family I had always wanted: two boys and two girls.

Four months passed and it was Sunshine's big day. She was now going to be, as she put it, a "school kid." For weeks she had marked the days off on her big calendar and counted up the days left. Then she would come and tell me how many days she had left, how well she was going to do in school and how much she was going to learn. Although the only teacher she had known so far was her Sunday school teacher, she always talked about being a teacher for other school kids.

A few weeks earlier Sunshine had successfully gone through her second eye surgery, and her lens prescription was reduced. With her new eyeglasses she looked much better and didn't mind wearing them so much. The rest of the family had encouraged her with many compliments.

Well, the morning came and the kids woke on their own from the excitement. Sonya was already helping Sunshine get dressed. She was combing Sunshine's hair and putting in hair barrettes when I came to their room. "Good morning, girls. Kind of early, aren't you?"

"She woke me up, Mama," Sonya said. "She's so anxious to be a school kid."

Sunshine smiled from ear to ear. She hardly ate any breakfast that morning. She and Daron sat there going over her school supplies again and again, making sure she would have everything she needed.

I had taken Sunshine to the school two days earlier to enroll her and let her meet her teacher. I explained to the teacher about her vision problems. The teacher was very kind. She went to the back of the room, picked up a desk from the back row and placed it in front of the first row to the left side. "I'll try to do most of my teaching from this side," she told Sunshine. "This will be your seat." And she made a big name tag and put it on Sunshine's new desk. "You'll have the best seat in the room." This made Sunshine happy and very eager to go back.

As the kids walked down the road to the bus stop, Sunshine kept turning around and giving me a big smile. She was so proud to finally be a school kid. I wanted so much to walk to the bus stop with her, but I knew she wanted to be like the other kids, so I stood there waving goodbye with big tears coming down my face. I went into the house, picked Dean up and went back outside. The school bus pulled up and opened its door, and the kids climbed aboard. I missed her so much already; I missed all the kids, but especially Sunshine – she was the most dependent, the one who needed me the most. They grow so fast. My little Sunshine was now a school kid.

The phone rang later that morning. "Ma'am?"

"Yes?"

"This is Mr. Johnson, the principal at the school."

“Yes, sir, is anything wrong?”

“Well,” he said, “I have a little redhead sitting in front of me. She looks so cute, but she has these big tears coming out of her eyes. I wonder if you might like to say something to her to dry those big brown eyes.”

“Yes, sir. Please let me speak to her...Sunshine?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“What’s wrong, sweetheart? Why are you crying?” No answer. “Don’t you like school?”

“Yes, Mama.”

“Then why are you crying, sweetheart?”

“Cause.”

“Cause why, Sunshine?”

Then she broke into a hard cry. “Cause I miss you. I don’t like being a school kid ‘cause I can’t be with you, Mama.”

“Oh, sweetie...Let’s see. Let’s figure something out. Have you had lunch yet?”

Within half an hour, Dean and I were there and met Sunshine outside her classroom door. She told everyone, “This is my Mama, and our baby boy Dean.” It was a little awkward carrying Dean through the lunch line, but Sunshine and I had a nice lunch together. Being a school kid was all right with her after that. She passed first grade with the best grades in her class.

Chapter 2

AT THE CABIN

That July we went on a two-day trip. We rented a cabin from a friend who owned one in the hill country by the lake. We also owned a lot there, but we hadn't built anything on it yet. We rented a boat and planned on doing a lot of fishing. Sissy agreed to take care of Dean for that weekend – he was only a year old then – and the five of us packed our weekend provisions and were off to the lake. It was only an hour's drive away, but the landscape was very different there and very beautiful. Soon we were at the little cabin in the woods, each with fishing pole and gear; we took balls and a badminton set, and several other things we never used. Isn't that how it always is? Even on a mini-vacation like this one, you always pack a lot more than you need. But we wanted to make sure the kids would be able to keep themselves entertained.

There was no electricity in that area, or at least our friend had decided not to connect it to the cabin. But roughing it was what we were supposed to be enjoying that weekend. We brought fuel for the camp stove and packed our cooler with sandwiches and picnic stuff, but of course we bragged about how we were going to have an awful lot of fish to eat. Daron, who was eight at the time, decided he was going to hunt, too – for rabbits, he said. They were in abundance there, and he was going to have plenty of rabbit to eat as well. Soon we were at the cabin unpacking all our supplies. You would have thought we were going to stay a month.

My husband, Gary, Sonya and Daron got the boat off its trailer and they decided that before they did anything else, they were going out in the boat. So that left the task of putting everything away up to Sunshine and me. We took care of that in about a half hour.

There was a rocking chair in the cabin. I carried it outside and angled it so we could see the lake. Sunshine sat in my lap. I put my arms around her and with her head on my shoulder I began singing, "Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy, Sunshine on my shoulders makes me glad."

For each of my kids, I had a favorite song. But for Sunshine, I had several. "Sing 'I'm your Sunshine,' Mama," she said, tilting her little head up and looking into my eyes. I gave her a big kiss on her forehead and began, "You are my Sunshine, my only Sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey..." She knew it by heart and sang with me, but she would sing "Mama" instead of "Sunshine," "You'll never know, Mama, how much I love you. Please don't take my Mama away." She reached up and gave me a kiss. "I love you so much, Mama."

"Me you too, my sweet little Sunshine."

We sat there for about half an hour, comfortable as always in each other's company. Can you see how I had become so especially attached to this child? We watched the boats out on the lake. Soon we could see the others coming back. "I see them, Mama,"

Sunshine said, pointing off to one side. I had seen them long before, but I wanted her to have the joy of being first. She hopped down from my lap. “Here they come!” she cried, jumping up and down. “Hey, you guys, catch any fish?”

“No,” Daron yelled back, “but we saw a lot of jumpin’. There’s a lot of fish out there, and we’re going to get ’em.”

Everyone was hungry. We got out the old camping stove and heated up some homemade soup I’d brought along with the sandwiches.

Soon it started to get dark. The guys got ready for their night-fishing trip. They packed all kinds of stuff. They said the fish eat better at night. Personally, I don’t see why fish would eat better in the dark – it’s harder for me, that way. The girls and I were supposed to find “girl-stuff” to do while they were gone. I’m not quite sure how we were supposed to do this, in a cabin with no electricity and only lanterns for light. But nevertheless, the guys said they’d stay close so they could keep an eye on the cabin. We were to go out every once in a while and give them a wave with the lantern to let them know everything was okay. That evening in the cabin, Sonya, Sunshine and I told stories, sang songs, shelled a large bagful of pecans by lantern-light...we did all kinds of roughing-it “girl-stuff!”

In a couple of hours the guys were back with their catch. Naturally, we had to sit down and lend an ear while they told how-they-caught-’em stories. Daron was very proud. This wasn’t his first fish, but it was the largest he had ever caught. I was so proud of him, too. “You sure did good, son,” I told him as he stood there, using both arms to hold the fish up.

“I’ll bet it weighs twenty pounds, Mom – or at least seven or eight.”

“I’ll bet you’re right, son.” The fish was still flapping.

Soon it was bedtime. There were only two full-size beds in the one-room cabin. The three kids had to share a bed, unlike at home, so of course they bickered for a while after they lay down. “Move over!” “You’re taking all the room!” “You’re taking all the covers!” “No, you move over!” “I can’t! I’m on the edge of the bed now!”

“Okay, kids. Let’s all go to sleep.”

“Good night, Sunshine,” Daron said.

“Good night Daron,” Sunshine replied.

“Good night, Sonya...” Daron continued.

“Okay, you guys! This isn’t the Waltons! Let’s go to sleep. Good night, everybody, and God keep us all.”

Next morning we all woke bright and early. Daron, Sonya, and Gary were soon out the cabin door, but I can be one of those slow risers, given the opportunity. This morning, with Sissy taking care of Dean and no bottles to get, I thought I'd take advantage of the situation and just lay there. In the other bed I could see Sunshine's head just barely sticking out from under the covers.

"Sunshine," I called softly. "Is my Sunshine awake?"

"Yes, Mama," she answered quietly.

"Are you going to be a lazybones like me this morning, Sunshine?"

"I guess, Mama." I slipped out of my bed and climbed in with her. She turned over and put her little head on my arm. "I don't feel good, Mama."

She'd never been a complainer. Just the opposite – I usually had to drag it out of her when something was wrong. "What's the matter, Sunshine?"

"My back and stomach hurt."

"Show me where." She put her arms around to the back of her waist, and then to the lower part of her stomach. I felt her forehead for fever. "You feel a little warm, baby. Let me go get you a glass of water." I got up, fetched her a drink, then went outside to tell the others. Immediately, Daron and Sonya ran back in and sat down by her, each taking one of her hands. She'd had a chronic kidney problem, and during one of the operations, we'd almost lost her.

"You'll be all right, Sunshine," Daron said, patting her hand. Sonya got a cool washcloth and bathed Sunshine's face. Gary was already packing our things and loading them into the car. "We're going to take you to the doctor, Sunshine. You'll be all right." I picked her up and started to the car with her.

"Mama?" she asked, looking up into my eyes. "Do you think the angels tell God when you're sick?"

"Well, Sunshine, I suppose they probably do."

"Well, good," she said. By this time her fever was climbing and her face very flushed. All the way back to town I held Sunshine and prayed to God to heal her, prayed that another operation wouldn't be necessary.

I was raised on the power of prayer. My Grandma was used mightily by God in praying for the hurt and sick. When I was three, I pulled a pot of boiling soup off the stove and got third-degree burns over my face and chest. The doctors said I would need extensive surgery, but by the grace of God and my grandmother's prayers, I was instantly healed under the bandages. That wasn't the first time I can recall God using my grandmother. Many times I watched as a neighbor from her home countryside brought

a family member to her for prayer. I had experienced the mighty power of God many times, for myself and my children. Through my grandmother I knew God could heal. All the way to the hospital I prayed for my Sunshine. *God, why does she have to go through so much? She's the sweetest, most loving, most obedient child, yet she's suffered so much in her little life. I don't understand why you don't just heal her, Lord, and she won't have to go through all this.*

Sunshine's temperature climbed higher. Still, she kept consoling me: "I'll be all right, Mama. Don't you worry."

"I know you will, baby," I said as I carried her through the emergency room entrance. After examining her, they called her doctor and described her condition to him. Then they let me talk to him.

"I'm having them run several tests on her," he told me. "I told them to go ahead and admit her as a precaution. We'll have all the tests back by morning, but I'm sure it's her kidneys again."

Sunshine had been born with a malformed valve between her kidneys and bladder. Despite the first surgery that corrected it, we had been told she would need another in a few years. It hadn't been that long yet. I hated to think she needed the next surgery so soon.

I told the others what the doctor had said, and they decided to go home. I asked for a cot so I could sleep in her room with her. She never whined or complained, but I could see the pain in her face. The doctor had ordered antibiotics for her, but nothing for her pain. She had a hard night, tossing and turning and crying out in her sleep. Despite the antibiotics, her temperature went to 105. The nurses took turns bathing her down.

At eight o'clock the next morning, the doctor arrived. After visiting with Sunshine, he took me out into the hall. "She's a mighty sick little girl. It seems the valve between her kidneys and bladder has collapsed. As soon as we get her fever down, we'll have to operate. We'll give it twenty-four hours, so you can plan on the operation tomorrow afternoon."

So, with her temperature still up, they got her prepared for surgery the next afternoon at two o'clock. I walked alongside the gurney and held her hand on the way to the operating room. "I'll be all right, Mama," she said sleepily. "Don't worry, Mama."

"Sure you will, baby," I said, with my heart in my throat. "I'll be waiting right out here, okay?"

"Okay, Mama. Don't worry." And they wheeled her through the door.

I stood there outside the operating room door until someone asked me to be seated in the waiting room. God, I prayed, she's only seven years old, and already she's been on the operating table four times. I don't understand. Why her?

Finally the doctor came out. “Well? Is Sunshine all right?”

“Yes, but there is some damage to her kidneys. It will be some time before she’s back on her feet. She’ll need to stay in the hospital several more days for treatment.”

“But will she be all right after that?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Can I see her now?”

“You can go to the recovery room, but she won’t be awake for a while yet.”

In the recovery room they directed me to Sunshine. I could see her little form under the covers. Only her head and one arm were out, with needles and tubes attached to her from an I.V. She was still unconscious. As I approached her bed, I cried out to God in my spirit to please spare her from any more pain, spare her the need for any more surgery. I picked up the little hand with the I.V. tube leading to it, and touched her face gently. “Sunshine,” I whispered, bending to kiss her forehead. “Sunshine, Mama’s here; can you hear me?”

She turned her head and whispered faintly, “Mama, are you here?”

“Yes, sweetheart, I’m here.”

“Where did he go, Mama?”

“Who, baby?”

“The big man, Mama.” She must have meant the doctor or an orderly, I thought. I attached no further significance to it.

“He left, sweetheart. It’s only me and my Sunshine in here.”

She smiled. “He was so nice, Mama.” And she dozed off again. I sat there holding her hand, looking at her sweet face. How blessed I am to have been given the privilege of being her mother, I thought. How blessed I am, indeed.

Back in her room, she seemed to be feeling much better. She visited with the other children, telling them about her surgery and how the doctors told her funny jokes before she went to sleep in the operating room. She handled it all very well.

Chapter 3

NO FREE LUNCH

Sunshine joined a Brownie troop. She was very proud of the patches she earned. She particularly liked being a Brownie because it was something she could do without any help from the rest of the family, like Sonya, who was now a Girl Scout. The troop leader would stop by and pick Sunshine up, and she went off to her meeting on her own. Then she would tell the family all about what happened at the meeting. She had friends there who were only *her* friends. No one else in the family knew them, and it made her happy to talk about them. She had become a lot less dependent on the family.

There had been a third eye surgery by this time, and Sunshine's vision was now 40% in the left eye and 60% in the right. To her great joy, her doctor said she didn't need to wear those terrible glasses anymore because they were no longer helping her. She was delighted to throw them away.

At her birth, we weren't given much hope that she would ever be able to see at all.

Lately I'd noticed that Sunshine was coming home from school hungry, even though I packed her a nice big lunch every day. She had asked a few weeks ago if she could stop buying her lunch and start carrying it instead, so I had obliged her, and each morning she left for school with lunch in hand.

One afternoon, I had an appointment with one of Daron's teachers to discuss a new program they were starting. Daron's teacher mentioned how sweet Daron was, and that she especially appreciated how he looked out for Sunshine. She had noticed Daron protecting Sunshine on the playground several times. "Yes," I agreed, "he's her self-appointed protector." Even though Sunshine's vision had improved, Daron's protection was unflinching. Sonya's was, too, even though she had gone on to middle school.

After I left Daron's room, I dropped by the cafeteria. It was time for Sunshine to be eating lunch, so I thought I'd surprise her and sit with her while she ate. When I entered the lunchroom, Sunshine wasn't standing in line or sitting at a table. I recognized some of her classmates and asked one of them, "Where's Sunshine?"

"I don't know," the child answered.

Nervously I scouted the room for Sunshine's teacher. Mrs. Grant was sitting with the other teachers at the far side of the room. I hurried over. "Excuse me, Mrs. Grant," I said. "Do you know where Sunshine is?" She heard the panic in my voice. I only felt secure just as long as Sunshine was where she was supposed to be. Now she wasn't.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Grant said. "She's okay. I can see her from here, Teresa, she's okay." She pointed out the window.

“Sunshine asked if she could eat outside with Gail, and I told her it would be all right.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “Please forgive me.”

“Sunshine and Gail have been eating their lunch out there every day for a couple of weeks now.”

“That’s fine,” I said. “Thank you, Mrs. Grant.” I went outside and made my way around the building to where Sunshine and Gail were sitting. They were under a big shade tree. Although there was a picnic table right beside them, they had chosen to have lunch on a slab of cement that looked like a foundation for a small building. “Hi, girls,” I called to them. “You sure picked a nice place to picnic.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty here, Mama. Come on over.”

I looked at the slab between them and saw, spread out between them on a newspaper, what I knew to be only Sunshine’s lunch.

“This is Gail, Mama. She’s my friend, she’s in my class.”

“Hi, Gail. I’m glad to meet you,” I said. Gail was a bit untidy and dressed in worn-out clothes, but she was a cute little girl with long, pretty brown hair. “It’s nice you-all are having lunch together,” I added.

Gail dropped her head. The school had no free lunch program, and it became clear to me that Sunshine had been sharing her lunches with Gail. I could see, too, that the two of them went outside to eat so that Sunshine could share without any embarrassment to Gail.

“Is this enough food? Are you-all going to get full?”

Sunshine answered, “I think so, Mama.” I sat down, and we visited until it was time for them to go back to their classroom.

That afternoon, when Sunshine came home from school, I asked her, “Why didn’t you tell me you needed lunch for two? This explains why you’re still hungry when you come in from school. You’ve been giving half your lunch to your little friend.”

“I know, Mama. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, no, baby. Don’t be sorry!...Let me tell you a little story about your grandma.”

Sunshine and I sat down on the couch. I put my arm around her and began telling her a true story about my mother, whom Sunshine hadn’t known. It dawned on me that I’d never spoken much about her.

“This is about your Grandma Vivian, Sunshine, and although I’ve probably never mentioned it to you, you remind me a lot of her. In fact, that little mole you have above your lip – well, your Grandma Vivian had one just like it, and her mother did, too. In fact, at least two other grandmas before her had that very same mole above the lip, right around where yours is.”

“Where’s yours, Mama?”

“Well, sweetheart, I guess for some reason I got left out. But you have it, and that makes me very happy because it makes me think of my Mama, and I loved my Mama very much.

“Anyway, when I was a little girl nine years old, just like you are now, we lived in Charlotte, North Carolina. My mother and father had just gotten a divorce, and we were having it very bad – you know, no money, no food. We were really poor. My mother had been a nurse for several years, but at this time she didn’t have a job. We’d eaten all the food we had. There was only a little flour left. Your Aunt Carol and I went to school that morning without any breakfast, and we were very hungry. Mama told us to come home for lunch, and she would fix us some fried bread. So of course at lunchtime, Aunt Carol and I walked home and up the three flights of stairs that led to our attic apartment. Our mama was waiting for us with our four pieces of fried bread.

“Just as we were about to sit down and eat what we knew was our last food, someone knocked at the door. Mama told me to answer it. When I opened the door I saw a beggar standing there. It was kind of unusual – they rarely came up to the third floor. Well, Mama asked this beggar man if she could help him. He said ‘Yes, ma’am. I haven’t had anything to eat in three days. Could you please give me something to eat?’

“Mama got big tears in her eyes when she looked at me and I could tell, by the way she looked, what she was asking. ‘Go ahead, Mama,’ I told her, ‘I ate yesterday.’ Then she looked at Aunt Carol, and Aunt Carol said yes, too.

“Well, we sat and watched that man eat what was supposed to be our lunch. Our tummies sure did groan when we saw him eating, but we knew our Mama hadn’t eaten anything in three days, either. The beggar got up and thanked us and Mama. Then Mama asked him if he knew the Lord. I’ll never forget the look on Mama’s face when he answered her.” “What’d he say, Mama?” Sunshine asked, fascinated.

“He said, ‘Yes, ma’am, I do, in a very personal way.’ Then he left. Your Grandma started crying and praising the Lord. I asked her why she was so happy, and she told me that the man we had just given our last bit of food to was no man at all, but an angel.”

“Was it, Mama? Was it an angel?”

“Well, you tell me what you think, Sunshine. All I know is, he sure didn’t seem like an ordinary man. He seemed so sweet just to look at him. He seemed so nice. And somehow I felt like he really loved us – even before we gave him our lunch. But the best

part was the next morning. When I opened the door to leave for school, the whole doorway was so full of groceries I couldn't see over the top of them."

"Did the angel leave them there, Mama?"

"He was the only one that could have. I asked all over the neighborhood. Besides, Mama had said the night before that God would not let her deed go unrewarded, that He knew her girls were hungry and He sent that angel to test her faith."

"God sure did show you guys, huh, Mama?"

"He sure did, Sunshine. He sure did. So, when you ask me if I'm upset because you shared your lunch without asking – I'm sure you know now I'm proud of you, so very proud of you."

I don't want to give you the impression that Sunshine was some kind of child saint. She was a normal kid that got into mischief and made mistakes like any other kid. But when she did do something wrong, she would feel so much remorse that I didn't think I had to keep after her about it. She simply learned her lessons as they came to her.



Chapter 4

NEW BEGINNINGS

Now that the kids were all in school and more or less reliable, I went back to work. I decided to follow in my mother's footsteps and became a nurse. After being a mother myself for nineteen years, I guess my nurturing instincts were at a peak. Dean was now ten years old, Sunshine fifteen, Daron sixteen and Sonya nineteen. Just as my mother had done, I went to work in a nursing home. I've always loved and deeply respected older people.

There was a shortage of nurses, and I'd pulled a double shift that night. Usually I worked from seven to three, but when the head nurse asked me to work the three-to-eleven shift, too, I said yes. Extra money was always welcomed. It seemed there was never enough to go around, even though Gary and I both had good jobs. You know how

it goes – the more you make, the more you need. It seemed the harder I worked, the more the kids needed, and the more I wanted to give them. I was always hoping our priorities weren't out of adjustment.

I had plenty of time to think while driving home that evening. It was around 11:20, so the streets were pretty quiet. I had accepted Christ as my savior as a child, but I hadn't been a true Christian for several years. That night, my quiet time turned to prayers for my kids. This life is so hard for them. There's so much drugs and loose morals and simple everyday pressures. In some ways it's even harder than I had it. I had a sweet feeling of peace as I prayed for my children. Please, God, look out for them.

I was always in a hurry to get home after work – especially after a double shift. I'd called home at about seven that evening and everything was all right then, but I was worrying anyway.

I thought of my Mama, my dear sweet Mama – so petite, so cute. Of all the kids Sissy and I had between us (Sissy was now the mother of ten, so there were fourteen kids), it was Sunshine who reminded me most of my sweet little Mama, the same facial expressions, the same cute, pouty little mouth...Sunshine looks more like my mother than I do.

They never knew each other. I adored my little Mama, and lost her when I was a teenager. She was a spirit-filled Christian and the daughter of spirit-filled parents, yet she was a victim of suicide. She was deeply depressed over the death of her own mother. My grandmother, who was used so mightily by God in healing others, died a lingering, painful death. I'm sure Mama suffered over why God hadn't healed my grandmother, who had served him unflinchingly to the end of her days. A few weeks after my grandmother died, my despondent mother took her own life. She died in my arms.

I missed her so much.

And I think, because I was told within minutes of her death, "YOU CAN'T GO TO HEAVEN IF YOU KILL YOURSELF," I had held it against God, not really serving Him as I should have. Though I had always been very active in church, taking the kids every Sunday when they were young, that practice had fallen off quite a bit in the past few years.

Hoping to find everything was all right, I stepped into the house and looked in the living room. Much to my joy, I could see Sunshine kneeling in front of the television, crying and praying with a Christian lady on TV. She didn't hear me come in. She was saying, "Come into my life, Lord," repeating after the lady on TV. "Forgive my sins, Lord. Be the Lord of my life, and everything I am is Yours. I love You, Lord, and from this day on I will serve You with all my heart, all my soul. I'm Yours."

I walked up behind her, crying silently. I was so touched. Sunshine turned to me and said, "God wants you, too, Mama. He won't let you down." She reached up her arms

to me. I went down on my knees, and arm in arm with my Sunshine, I accepted again the God of my childhood.

After our prayer, we hugged. While I still held her, Sunshine suddenly gave a loud, joyful cry. “Mama! Mama!” she shouted. “Mama, I can see, I can see perfectly! Look over there, Mama!” She pointed to a small picture on the wall, one she had never been able to see from this far away. “Mama, I can see that picture perfectly.” Then she pointed across to the other wall. “I can see that perfectly.” She leapt up, grabbed my hand and pulled me outdoors with her, jumping and dancing around. “Look up in the sky, Mama, look at the stars. Oh, Mama, look, they’re so beautiful – the whole world’s beautiful! I can see, I can see perfectly!”

Then she turned around to me and took my face in her hands. “Oh, Mama, you’re so beautiful.” I hugged her and cried with so much joy I felt I couldn’t hold it all.

I didn’t quite believe my eyes and ears. We ran back into the house, and I got a newspaper. “Let me check you, Sunshine. Read this.” She held the paper at arm’s length, not right up to her face as she had always done, and began reading. My God, I thought, it’s true! Then I handed her a postage stamp I knew she hadn’t seen before. She held it at arm’s length and described every detail of it. “My God, my God, you can see perfectly!” We praised God for hours. Sunshine now had what we’d been praying for all her life: perfect vision.

I can’t tell you how happy we were – the whole family. A few days later, we went to have Sunshine’s healing verified by her doctor. After an extensive examination, her doctor shook his head in amazement. “She can see. It’s just like she says. She does have 20-20 vision in both eyes. Although I don’t understand it, she can see perfectly now.” A few months earlier his prognosis for Sunshine had not been good at all. Because of her weak retinas, he told us she would be totally blind by age 30. So he, more than others, realized what a miracle Sunshine had received. He even noted it on her chart. As we left, Sunshine looked at him and said, “I’ll say goodbye forever, Dr. Grims. I’ll never need to come back. I’m healed.” She was indeed healed. She had perfect sight for the first time in her life.

Sunshine’s sweet friend Tammy had been praying for Sunshine to receive the Lord. Now Sunshine asked if she could go to Tammy’s Christian school instead of public school, so I enrolled her there. She grew tremendously, both academically and in the knowledge and love of our Lord. She said she was learning the true joy in life. As she put it, “JOY in life is J for Jesus first, O for others second, and Y for yourself last.” She went to pass out tracts and witness with her friends at the mall, or wherever the Lord led them. I’d go with her as often as my schedule would permit. At Christmas, as well as other times of the year, Sunshine would organize the neighborhood kids and go around singing Christmas carols, or whatever the occasion called for. She was becoming so beautiful, spiritually as well as physically.

Seven weeks after her healing came Sunshine’s sixteenth birthday. The family racked its brains trying to think of a present for her. It came up that Sunshine had never

had occasion to fly, and had recently spoken about flying to see things from “a God’s-eye view.” I know it sounds extravagant – and it was – but your baby girl only turns sixteen once. I found a pilot who would charter a flight for Sunshine at a reasonable price. We would have her party and give her her other presents fairly early in the day. The plane ride was going to be the piece de resistance.

She was suspicious about the earliness of the party, but she enjoyed herself. Then Dean and I asked her whether she’d like to go for a ride with us. “Sure,” she said.

I drove to the airfield, and the pilot came out to meet us. “Happy birthday, Sunshine,” he said to her with a big smile.

“Mama, how does he know?” I just shrugged. “How did you know it was my birthday, sir?”

“Let’s just say a little bird told me.”

“A bird?”

“Yes, a little bird up there,” he said, pointing up to the sky. “You want to go ask him?” He opened the door of his two-engine plane. “Step in.” He extended his hand to Sunshine.

I said, “Happy birthday, Sunshine! This is your big present.”

Dean got in first, and sat behind the pilot. Then I got in behind Sunshine. She turned around in her seat. “Mama, this is so neat, it’s the best present I could ever have gotten – I’m so excited!”

“Well, where would you like to go, birthday girl?” the pilot asked.

“Over my home and school, sir.”

“Okay, tell me where.”

Sunshine gave the pilot directions to our home and then began looking out the window again. She turned and peered between her window and the seat at me. I could see tears in her eyes.

“Why are you crying, baby?” I whispered.

“Oh, Mama, I’m so happy. Not only did God make this beautiful place, but now I can really see it all, and I’m so grateful to Him for that.”

The pilot dipped the wings back and forth, up and down. He made a sharp turn, then a deep dip, then another turn in the other direction. This brought oohs and ahs, sometimes even yells, out of Sunshine and Dean.

The pilot then asked Sunshine if she wanted to guide the plane. Timidly she took hold of the wheel, then tilted the plane one way and another, delighted.

“I’m really flying, Mama, I’m really guiding this thing!” She laughed, and looked at the pilot. “Oh, thank you, sir, you’ve made this the best birthday I’ve ever had. Thank you.”

He smiled and nodded. Her enjoyment was obviously as gratifying to him as it was to me. We flew around for our full hour, and soon our time was over and we were landing.

“Thank you so much, sir,” Sunshine said again as we touched down on the landing strip. We came to a stop at the same place where we had taken off. Sunshine and Dean jumped out of the plane and went to the car arm in arm.

“Wow! Wasn’t that neat, Dean?”

“Yeah, did you see how small our house looked?”

“This was the best birthday I’ve ever had. I’ll never forget this one.”

I got out of the plane, thanked and paid the pilot, and ran to catch up with the kids. All the way home they talked and talked about their airplane ride. Sunshine must have thanked me a hundred times.

The following winter Sunshine, now 17, was out of high school and in vocational school taking a business course. After she and Dean left one morning for school, since it was my day off, I decided to go to the mall. I needed some new white hose for work, and the mall was the closest place to buy them.

I rarely went shopping by myself. Usually Sunshine or Dean or Daron or all of us would go, but this day I was all alone. Since I wasn’t pressed for time, and the mall wasn’t very busy, I had plenty of time and space to look in every window. I was really enjoying my leisure day. It was January, and the stores were having their after-Christmas sales. Although, heaven knows, Christmas had wiped me out that year. My little kids and their \$5.00 gifts had turned into big kids and \$50.00 gifts. So I hadn’t expected to buy anything that day except hose.

Then I saw a beautiful red and white imitation fur jacket. I stood and looked at it, thinking how beautiful Sunshine would look in it...It was on sale.

I walked in the store and asked the lady to get it down for me. The fur was so soft and beautiful. Sunshine had a little plaid coat she’d been wearing for three years. It was still in good shape, but she would look so nice in this one...I was arguing with myself.

I knew I couldn’t afford it, but I wanted Sunshine to have it so badly. “Could I put this on lay-away?” I asked the store clerk.

“Sorry, no, ma’am,” she answered, “It’s on sale, and sale items can’t go on lay-away.” So I opened my checkbook and studied the balance. No matter what, I wanted her to have that coat. So I went ahead and bought it.

Sunshine asks for so little, I rationalized, and we didn’t have a big Christmas at all. I knew I’d have a lot of sacrificing to do, but she would love this coat.

I couldn’t wait until she got home from school that evening. I had hidden the coat in my room. When she came in, I greeted her, “Hi, Sunshine, I love you...Wait a minute, stand right there. I have a surprise.”

“What is it, Mama?”

I started into my bedroom. “Stand there, hold out your arms and close your eyes.”

She was so anxious. “What is it, Mama, what is it?”

I came quickly out of my room and laid the box in her arms. “Okay, Sunshine, open your eyes.”

She opened her eyes. “Oh, my goodness, Mama, what is it?” she said, going to the couch and sitting down. She untied the large ribbon, then looked up. “Mama, you shouldn’t have.”

Then she yanked the lid off the box and opened the paper. Her eyes lit up as she took the coat out of the box and rubbed the fur against her face.

“Oh, Mama...it’s so beautiful!” She jumped up, pulled on her new coat and ran to the mirror. “Oh, Mama! How could you afford it?”

“I just did, baby girl.”

She didn’t know she was wearing my lunch plus some other extras for the next several weeks. Oh, well. I needed to lose weight anyway; besides, she did look beautiful in it.

A few weeks later while Sunshine was passing out Christian tracts she saw a girl sitting at a bus stop bench.

“Where are you going?” Sunshine asked the girl. The girl shivered from the night cold. She didn’t even have a sweater on.

“Nowhere,” the girl replied nastily.

Sunshine stood there a few seconds, saying nothing. Then she took her new coat off and put it on the girl’s shoulders.

“I hope this will keep you warm until you get there.”

Much later, Sunshine and the girl came back to our house. The girl was about the same age and size as Sunshine.

“Mama, this is Linda,” Sunshine introduced the girl. “Linda’s been on her own for four months. Now she’s accepted Jesus, and would like to talk to her mother.”

I hugged Linda and asked her if she was hungry. When I noticed Sunshine’s new coat on her I glanced at Sunshine. She came over and hugged me and whispered in my ear, “She was cold, Mama, and she didn’t have anybody.”

I was a little disappointed, to tell the truth, because it had been a sacrifice to buy the coat for Sunshine. But it was also a sacrifice for her to give it away like that. That was my Sunshine.

Linda called her mother. She told her about all that Sunshine had done for her, and how she had accepted Jesus into her life. She explained all she had been through the past months, and told her mother that she was going to stay with us for a little while.

Sunshine shared her bedroom with Linda. I could hear them staying up into the night, reading the Bible. Linda would ask Sunshine question after question. They were getting along like two sisters, laughing, brushing each other’s hair, and singing. You’d think they had known each other all their lives.

The next morning they came out of their room shouting, “Praise the Lord!”

“Good morning, you children of God,” I greeted them as they walked into the kitchen. I was amazed at how much better Linda looked after a good night’s sleep. They both shouted back to me, “Good morning, Mama!”

Then Linda said, “I wish I could stay with you all forever, but I’ve got to get home. My mother and brother need me and they need Jesus, too. I’ve never felt as happy as I do right now. I have a lot of family who need to know what I know now.”

Sunshine and I looked at each other. We were so proud of Linda’s sincerity.

Linda went on. “My mother drinks real bad, and I know she leaves my little brother alone a lot.”

“How old is your little brother, Linda?”

“He’s seven, no, eight now. That’s why I ran away – I just couldn’t stand to see her drunk anymore.”

“Well, Linda, you can be the light in her dark world,” Sunshine said as she stood behind Linda with her hands on her shoulders.

“I don’t know, Sunshine. She never listened to me before. We used to argue all the time.”

“You never had Jesus before, Linda. That will make all the difference – I’m sure of it.”

“You’re right, Sunshine. Maybe I can help change her.”

“Just love her, Linda, no matter what. Just let her see Jesus in you. Help her forgive herself, and then she can see that you and Jesus have forgiven her.”

Linda thought about this for a minute. Then, as though surprised, she exclaimed, “I do understand what you mean, Sunshine, I do.”

Linda was, of course, wearing some of Sunshine’s clothes. Sunshine, now five-foot-three and tiny, only wore size two slacks. Linda was a little bigger than her, so Sunshine’s clothes were a little tight on her. I asked Linda if she had any belongings in this town.

“No, not really. I lost everything I had.”

“What are you girls going to do today?” I asked, as they sat down for breakfast.

“Linda says she’d like to go to school with me today. I know they’ll let her. She was saying last night she’d like to go back to school.”

“Yeah,” Linda said, “I was thinking I might like to take a business course, like Sunshine. She said I might even be able to get a grant to pay for it. I don’t know, though – I haven’t been to school in almost three years.”

“That doesn’t matter, Linda,” Sunshine said. “You can get a G.E.D. We’ll help you. Right, Mama?”

“Sure,” I said. “If that’s what you want to do, we’ll help you all the way. Well, you girls need to hurry up and get to school.”

Linda laughed. “I haven’t heard that line for years!”

“You better get used to it while you’re here. I know my Mama, and she won’t let anyone sit around and do nothing,” Sunshine said, as she went to the hall closet and pulled out her old plaid coat.

“What are you girls going to do after school?” I asked.

“What’s on your mind, Mama?”

“Well, I was thinking, why don’t I drop by after you get out of school and we’ll do a little shopping for Linda. Is that okay, Linda?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, then I’ll see you all shortly after three.”

That afternoon I picked Sunshine and Linda up and we went shopping. We got her two new outfits and a few personal items. After going to school with Sunshine, Linda wanted to continue her education and would start by getting her G.E.D. So Linda and Sunshine went to the college and picked up the books Linda would need. Night after night, she and Sunshine studied together. Occasionally, Linda would say, “Oh, I’ll never learn all this stuff,” but Sunshine would encourage her, and soon they would be at it again.

Within two weeks, they felt confident Linda would pass her tests. Linda was very nervous, but Sunshine promised she’d stay and pray the whole time Linda was taking the exams. So, with Sunshine sitting in the hall, Linda passed all her tests. We celebrated with a little graduation party that evening. We were all so proud of her accomplishment. Linda decided then that no matter what, she was going on, and would take a business course.

The next week, after several calls to her mother, we got Linda a bus ticket home, and she was reunited with her mother and brother. Linda wrote us several times to tell us of her progress. She did get a grant and enrolled in a business college. Although it took some time, her mother accepted the Lord, stopped drinking, and her little brother was going to church with her and had accepted the Lord. Then in another letter, Linda told us that her mother had taken her aunt to church with them, and the aunt had accepted the Lord.

When I remember how hurt I was that evening – when Sunshine brought Linda home and I saw that she had given Linda her new coat – I feel foolish about concerning myself, even a little, over it. What a small price to pay for the end result. There’s no telling how many Linda, her mother, her brother and her aunt will touch.

Chapter 5

GOD'S CHILD

A few weeks after we saw Linda off, a Christian friend invited me to her church. The service was on Wednesday, and since our own church had no services on Wednesdays, I agreed to go. Sunshine agreed to go with me. That Wednesday, I drove down to her school to pick her up. She wasn't outside waiting, so I went in to look for her. I'd been there often and knew most of her friends. First I went to her room; not finding her there, I stopped a girl in the hallway. "Do you know Sunshine?"

"Oh, yeah. You're her mother, right?"

"Yes."

"She told me if I saw you to tell you she's across the street at the convenience store. I saw her go over there just a few minutes ago."

"Thank you." I went down the hall, and as soon as I stepped through the back door, I saw Sunshine sitting on the step by the side of the store. Her back was to me, but I recognized her long red hair. She was talking with a man in a wheelchair. The man looked up at me. Sunshine turned and saw me, and said, "Hi, Mama. This is Joe. He was in the Viet Nam war and lost both his legs." Although she was always tactful, Sunshine never hesitated to ask people about themselves.

"Hi, Sunshine. Hi, Joe. Glad to meet you."

"Mama, Joe needs a ride home. Can we take him? His car broke down."

"Of course we can."

After Joe showed us his car and what was wrong with it, we put his few things into our car. Little did I know at that point that Joe lived almost a hundred miles away.

But the trip was nice, and we really got to know Joe. We had a good time talking and singing. Joe said he had gone to church and been a Christian when he was a child, but as he got older he had drifted away from the Lord. Although we ministered to Joe, he wasn't quite sure he was ready. We usually kept a few Bibles in the car for such opportunities, so Sunshine reached back and got a Bible out for Joe. "Do you have a Bible, Joe?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Well, why don't we give you one?"

"Sure, I'd like that, Sunshine."

“Okay. I’ll even dedicate it for you, Joe.” And Sunshine opened the front cover and wrote on it, “To our special friend Joe, from Sunshine and her Mama.”

Soon we were at Joe’s home. We helped him out of the car and saw him to his front door. “Thank you so much, ladies, for a special trip and the Bible,” he said. He offered us some money for taking him home, but we refused, and asked that he just pray for us on our trip home instead. Joe smiled and nodded, and we drove off.

We arrived a little late at my friend’s church. There was a lady sitting at a table in the foyer. She welcomed us warmly. The service was already in progress. While she and I chatted, Sunshine went to the door of the center aisle, and suddenly we were aware of a deafening silence. The lady and I went to the side door to see what was going on.

Through the open door I could see the pastor looking down the center aisle at Sunshine, who still stood there waiting for me. The whole congregation turned and looked at Sunshine. Why?

I went to her. She grabbed my hand, reached for me, and whispered, “Why are they staring at me, Mama? Did I do something wrong?”

“No, Sunshine, I’m sure you didn’t...” But I was wondering too. I tried to make light of it, and joked, “Maybe the pastor doesn’t like people being late.”

“It’s not that, Mama.”

“I know, sweetie. I don’t know what it is.”

We went in and slipped into a pew, trying to be inconspicuous. Sunshine leaned over and whispered, “Mama, I felt it – when I was standing there in the doorway, the Holy Spirit was all over me. I’ve felt something like this before. But what amazes me is that the other people saw it.”

“What exactly did you feel?”

“I don’t know exactly how to explain it, except I felt totally engulfed by God and His love, totally surrounded and enclosed. For a split second, it was like I wasn’t here, but there with Him – a part of Him... Mama, it was like nothing I ever felt before. So intense, so totally intense.” She smiled and settled back in the pew.

We tried to listen to the pastor. All through the service his eyes kept coming back to Sunshine, not just glancing but staring, studying. Whatever he saw when she stood in the doorway, it had certainly made a powerful impact on him. He brought the service to a close in a hurry. He did give an altar call, but you’d have to be an Olympic runner to have gotten down there before he said, “See you Sunday morning.” He stepped off the dais and quickly made his way toward us. We stood as he approached, both anxious to hear about what he had seen or felt when he first saw Sunshine standing there. Sunshine grabbed my hand and squeezed it nervously. The pastor introduced himself

and asked who we were, clearly impatient with the formalities.

Sunshine, being her kind, direct self, spoke up. “I’m Sunshine, and this is my mother. What did you see when I was standing in the doorway? Why was everybody looking at me?”

The pastor looked to me. “Where are you all from?”

I answered him, wondering why he avoided Sunshine’s direct question. “We’re from here. We go to a church on the south side, but a friend invited us to visit you tonight.”

Sunshine asked, “Is there something wrong, sir?”

“Wrong? No, not at all. You’ll have to forgive me, but I’ve got to tell you – when you walked in, I’m sure you noticed I was pretty much taken. I’m not sure what it was, but I saw a light, a radiance all around you. I’ll tell you the truth, at first I didn’t know whether you were an angel, or a person, or what. But I know that the Holy Spirit was upon you.” He took Sunshine’s hand and lifted it to his chest. “I don’t know, child, but God has something great in store for you. I just sense God has a mighty work for you.” Then he turned to me. “Prepare yourself; ma’am. God has an anointing on this child, and I know He’s going to use her in a mighty way.”

Cold chills came over me then. But I felt such a sweet peace. I knew it too – I’d felt it for quite some time. Most who knew her recognized, in some way, God’s anointing on her.

We talked with the pastor for a few more minutes, and he said a brief prayer for her. Most of the congregation was still in the halls and foyer of the church, and as we walked out, several people stopped us. It seems the pastor was not the only one who had seen this light surrounding Sunshine. One precious lady came and put her arms around Sunshine and began crying really hard. “Oh, child, you sweet precious child of God, God has a mighty work in store for you. Be prepared, child. Prepare yourself in every way,” and she began praising the Lord. I couldn’t help noticing how similar her words were to those the pastor had just spoken to us. Totally in the Spirit, the lady started dancing with her arms raised, and another lady rushed up and took Sunshine’s hands. They cried and hugged, and many more came over to Sunshine and spoke words of encouragement to her. I was so amazed by their response to her I could hardly take it in. Even as we went out to the parking lot, people were stopping us and hugging us.

In the car on our way home, we rode for several miles in silence. Sunshine was looking up into the night sky with tears flowing. I knew she was asking God in her spirit what this evening was all about. I knew I was, too.

Softly I asked her, “Are you all right, baby?”

“I guess, Mama. I just feel so humbled by all this. I know what they’re saying is true. Although I don’t understand it – I’ve always known.”

I, too, felt humbled. I could hear Sunshine humming “Alleluia” very softly, and I began humming with her, both of us flooded with tears. Sunshine took my hand and squeezed it. “You’ll be proud of me, Mama, I know you will. Don’t worry. I’m God’s child too.”

Her words touched me deeply, imprinted on my very being. I looked over at her, and as if for the first time, I saw not only my Sunshine – my sweet little Sunshine, my beautiful baby girl – but this wonderful loving person, so blessed, so precious to God, so anointed by our heavenly Father. And I felt an overwhelming peace, humbled not only by the events of this evening but by the mere fact that I was her mother. It’s so hard to describe the love and joy, the sweet overpowering peace that was with us that evening.

We moved back out to the country, just across the road from Sissy and her family, and returned to all the pleasures and benefits of country life. Sonya was still in Tennessee, Daron was 20 and taking an electronics course, Sunshine had just turned 19, and Dean was 15 and in junior high. I had given up my job just after we moved, and we were enjoying projects like planting a garden and a small orchard. It was good to be living across the road from Sissy and her kids again. The kids had always been close.

Sunshine was looking for a job in the newspaper. An unusual ad caught her eye, so she called and made an appointment. That afternoon I took her there to put in an application. Sunshine asked me to go in with her. I usually did; it might seem over-protective, but I wanted to know personally who she was working for. I tried to be inconspicuous by just taking a seat while Sunshine went up to the desk and got an application. To our surprise, the lady gave Sunshine two applications and said, “You-all fill these out, and someone will be with you shortly.”

Sunshine came over and said, “I have one for you too, Mom. Please?...It would be so nice to work together.” As usual, her sweet little smile melted my heart, and though it wasn’t in my plans, I sat there and filled out an application along with her.

Then we were being interviewed together. Sunshine told the interviewer what she always told prospective employers, “I want you to know, first and foremost, that I’m a Christian, and I won’t do anything that would jeopardize my relationship with the Lord.” The interviewer replied that she respected this, and within thirty minutes we were both hired. I walked out of there very surprised, but happy. I know God already had this all worked out, and I’m so glad he did. We were excited over the fact that not only would we work together, but our desks would be right next to each other.

Sunshine and I loved our jobs there and did well. Our fellow workers were as much fun as the work itself. It was a construction company that did houses, commercial buildings and home improvements, and we worked in the advertising department. It was a well-run office. There were about thirty employees, so Sunshine and I had a lot of new friends.

One afternoon we were about to go to lunch when the phone rang. While I took the

call, I could see Sunshine and the other girls out in the hall. Sunshine was talking with one girl we'd been praying for. We'd had a real burden in our hearts for her from the day we met her. Now Sunshine was putting her arm around her shoulder. They were bowing their heads, and Sunshine was leading the girl in the sinner's prayer with five other friends around them. At that point I lost all track of what the customer on the phone was talking to me about – my motherly pride was overwhelming me. How I admired her holy boldness and sincere, loving spirit! Without thinking, I said, "Oh, thank you, God," and the man on the other end of the phone line said, "What?" Then he went on, "Well, see you guys Thursday."

"Yes, sir," I said, and hung up. I hoped he hadn't said anything important that I'd missed.

A few weeks later on a Friday afternoon, Sunshine and I had planned to walk a few blocks to a restaurant for lunch, instead of going to the park with our packed lunches. About halfway there, we crossed an alley. We both stopped, took two steps back, and looked down the alley. Sure enough, both of us had seen him. About two hundred feet down the alley a man was sprawled on the ground, clutching a liquor bottle to his filthy clothes. We joined hands, said a short prayer, and started toward him. Within a few feet of him, I called, "Sir?" No answer. I spoke again, louder, and still no answer.

"Oh, God, I hope he's not dead," Sunshine said.

"I don't think he is," I said, reaching over and touching his neck to find a pulse – for her sake as much as his. Sunshine had never seen a dead person, and I didn't want this one to be her first. "Oh, yes, he has a strong pulse," I confirmed. "I think he's really just drunk, Sunshine."

This seemed to aggravate her. She began shaking his shoulder. "Sir...sir! Can you hear me? Why are you lying here on the ground?" As she shook harder, he let out a loud roar.

"Mama, this isn't right," Sunshine said. "What do we do? Sir, listen to me! I want you to get up from there, please. Right now."

The old man, more alert now, jerked from Sunshine's grasp and hollered, "What's the matter with you, girl? Get out of here and leave me alone."

"No, sir, I will not. I want to know what you're doing sleeping here on the ground."

"Mind your own business!" he snapped, and lay down again.

Sunshine pulled on his sleeve again. "Sir, get up from there!" To tell you the truth, I had to keep myself from laughing. I'd never heard Sunshine yell at anyone like that before – except maybe her brothers – but she was quite serious and very disturbed by this man's condition. It wasn't that she'd never seen a drunk before, but for some reason she wasn't going to let this one alone. She shook him even harder. "Okay, sir, I want you

to sit up and talk with us right now...please!" she yelled.

I reached over to him. "Sir, would you please sit up and talk with us for just a moment?"

He pulled away from us. "Looks like you-all won't give me any peace until I do." He sat up, very annoyed. "What do you want?"

Sunshine squatted on her heels beside him, leaning on the brick wall. "Sir, we don't want to make you mad. We really care about you. Why are you sleeping on the ground here? Don't you have a home?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure, little girl. I have a penthouse suite, but they're remodeling it right now," he replied sarcastically and tried to lie down again. Sunshine hauled him back up into a sitting position.

"Sir, I'm so sorry. I know you probably don't have a home, but why, can't you work? Don't you have a job?"

"Yes, I can work, and no, I don't have a job." He still sounded sharply sarcastic.

"Well, why?"

"I guess because of this." He tilted his bottle up and took a drink.

"Well, sir...quit. Can't you quit?"

"NO! I guess I can't!" he shouted, lowering his head.

Sunshine bent closer, looking him in the face. "Could you quit with help, sir?" she asked quietly.

He shook his head no, then looked at her. "What kind of help are you talking about, girl?"

She put her hand on his. "My help, Mama's help, and most important, God's help. Do you know Jesus loves you, sir, just like you are right now? He loves you. He died for you, and that's why I'm here right now. We love you too, sir." With that, Sunshine in her little yellow dress put her arm around the man, and looked into his face. With tears in her eyes, she said, "Please, sir, don't sleep on the ground any more. Let us help you. Please."

Tears came into the man's eyes, too, and we began to talk. He was only in his late forties, but with his long, tangled hair and peppered beard, he looked much older. While we were talking he'd point at Sunshine and say to me, "She looks like an angel, ma'am, a sweet little angel." And, of course, I would wholeheartedly agree with him. After a while, the man (whose name was Bill) accepted Christ as his savior. With me on one side

of him and Sunshine on the other, he repeated the sinner's prayer. When Sunshine asked him whether he felt better, he took our hands and said, "I sure do, girls. I sure do."

"That's great," Sunshine said. "Now let's go and get you looking better. I'm sure there's a handsome guy lurking under there somewhere."

I wondered how we would accomplish this marvel, since she and I each only had about five dollars. What did she have in mind?

"I saw a place just a couple of blocks from here," she continued. "I think it might just fill our Bill."

We helped Bill get up. He was still a bit wobbly, so Sunshine and I walked on either side of him, and off we went out of the alley and down the street arm-in-arm, singing, "When the Saints Go Marching In."

When we got to the thrift store, Sunshine said, "Here we are," I said, "Perfect." and went in and started shopping. Sunshine and Bill picked out a yellow shirt (Sunshine's favorite color). We found a pair of nice brown dress slacks that fit him perfectly, a nice brown belt, and then we went on to the shoe section. The soles on the shoes he was wearing were patched with duct tape, and even the tape was worn through. By this time, we were all having fun. Sunshine and I pretended we worked there and that Bill was our royal customer. "Sir," I said, "could I interest you in this pair of black shoes imported from Italy?" Sunshine said, "Look, sir. This brown pair here matches your ensemble." Bill sat in a big velvet chair while we waited on him with the shoes, helping him try them on. He laughed and laughed, enjoying the silliness. With a pair of socks, his whole outfit only cost \$7.50.

Then I went to the household section. Aha, I thought – a pair of scissors for a dollar: hair-cutting time. I also found a towel, a washcloth, a comb, and even a handkerchief with a B on it.

We'd already told Bill that this was on us. We hoped we hadn't miscalculated our funds. The cashier, who had been watching our progress, said good-naturedly, "Is this all, or would you-all like to play some more?" The total came to \$9.35. We got sixty-five whole cents back!

Outside, Sunshine took the change and told us to wait for her. She ran across the street to the drug store, and a few minutes later she was back with a trial-size bottle of shampoo, a disposable razor, and three cents. I saw a bench on the other side of the street. Motioning Bill toward it, I said, "Sir, would you step into my barber shop?" As we crossed the street Sunshine told him, "It's okay, Bill. My Mama gave my father and brothers haircuts for years and years. You don't have to worry." Bill seated himself on the bench, and I wrapped the towel around his neck.

"How would you like it cut today, Your Highness?"

Bill raised one hand, striking a royal pose. “Oh, cut it any way you want, but do remember I have an important engagement this afternoon.” We laughed, and I began making my way through all that hair. He said he hadn’t had it cut in four years. I cut it very short, smooth and neat, and trimmed his beard short.

Sunshine picked up the cut hair and put it in the shampoo bag. When I was done, she held out the bag to Bill. “Would you like to keep this, sir?”

“Oh, no. That’s the old, drunk Bill.” He stroked his new short beard. “This is the new, Christian Bill.”

Next, we went to the filling station on the corner, and Bill took the bags into the rest room with him. I took this opportunity to call the office and apologize for our lateness. I didn’t really know what to say. I didn’t think they’d understand. The secretary answered, and I started by just saying, “I’m sorry Sunshine and I are late...” “Before I could say more, the secretary said, “The boss wants to talk to you. Hold on.”

Uh-oh, I thought. Time to look for another job. The boss got on the phone. “Teresa?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I saw you and Sunshine out there giving ol’ Bill a haircut.”

Oh, no, I thought, is he angry? I was surprised he knew Bill. (I found out later that Bill had been panhandling in that area for years, and that a lot of people knew him.)

“I guess you-all have gone and given him religion, too.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m surprised ol’ Bill hasn’t pickled his brain by now, with all that booze,” he continued. “Well, you and Sunshine hurry up and get back to work.”

“Yes, sir, we’ll be right there.” I was stunned. He sounded rather happy, and I had looked for him to chew me out.

“Oh, Teresa . . .”

“Yes, sir?”

“If ol’ Bill’s got his act together, bring him back with you. I’m sure I can find him something useful to do, to earn his keep.”

“Yes, sir. Thanks. We’re on our way.” I went and told Sunshine what the boss had said. And in a few minutes, out walked Bill.

Boy, did he look good. His hair was washed and combed, he had a good clean shave, and he wore his new clothes. Our mouths fell open.

“Bill,” I said, “you look like a million bucks.”

“You sure do. I can’t believe my eyes,” Sunshine added.

“Okay, girls, where do we go from here?” Bill offered us each an arm.

“Well, Bill, how would you like to work?” Sunshine asked.

“Work? I ain’t worked in six years. But if you point the way, I’ll give ’er a try.”

“Okay,” Sunshine said. “Our boss just said he’d hire you if you’re willing to work.”

Bill hadn’t expected such a ready answer. “What?” After a pause, he said, “Well, okay. I’m ready, willing, and now, able...” And finally, “Take me to your leader, girls.”

Our boss couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw Bill,” and hired him immediately as the janitor. That pleased Bill tremendously. The boss also let Bill occupy a small room we had been using for storage, so he wouldn’t have to sleep outside anymore.

That was Friday afternoon. The following Sunday, as we’d promised, we brought Bill to church with us. Sunday night when Sunshine and I packed lunches for work, we were happy to be packing for three.

Monday afternoon the three of us went to the park to have our lunch. An old friend of Bill’s came by, and Bill introduced him to us. Then Bill told him, “These are the girls I was talking about. Sit down, and listen to them. They can help you.” How forcefully he said it!

So Bill’s friend sat with us, and we talked to him about Jesus. He was sincerely interested, and said he’d like to come again the next day and hear more. He couldn’t believe how much Bill had changed in such a short time. That evening as we were making the next day’s lunches, Sunshine remarked, “Mom, just in case Bill has invited another friend, let’s make sure we have enough and pack for five.” The next day in the park the four of us were joined by two more of Bill’s friends. We shared as well as we could, and sang, and studied the Bible.

Day after day our luncheons grew larger, and our friends in the park grew in their love and knowledge of our Lord. In the second week, we were packing about thirty-five sandwiches every night. By now, some of our friends were people even Bill hadn’t known.

We asked Bill if he would like to share his testimony. He had never done this publicly. First Sunshine shared her own testimony, telling how God had healed her eyes

and given her, not only earthly sight, but a new vision and a true reason for life. Then we sang, and I gave my own testimony, and then I introduced Bill. With a little encouragement, Bill stood up in the crowd of about thirty people. He asked Sunshine if she'd stand with him.

We used a picnic table as our speaking platform. He and Sunshine came and stepped up onto the picnic table together, her arm around his waist. Bill told the story of how Sunshine and I had seen him lying in the alley, and had picked him up and made him "feel like a king – but more than that, they introduced me to the King of Kings. And now I've gone three weeks without a drink. And guess what, people? I don't need one." The crowd applauded loudly. He went on, "I was praying last night. I didn't know they were going to ask me to do this today, but I told God that if I ever got a chance to tell my story, I wanted to tell it." Big tears came into his eyes. He looked at me and said, "I love you." And to Sunshine, "I love you too." The three of us hugged and cried. We were so proud of Bill. Several gave their lives to the Lord that day.

Time passed and our luncheon group grew to over a hundred. God used Bill greatly. Soon he was buying tracts and Bibles with his paycheck and handing them out. He made a lot of new friends, and brought them to the luncheon, too. These were people he had personally led to the Lord. He had really become a mighty warrior for God.

We were now using one of the large pavilions in the park for our gathering. One day, while Sunshine was leading the singing from the picnic-table platform and I was talking with one of the newcomers, I became aware of a young man leaning against a tree nearby. By his appearance I could see he wasn't a street person. He seemed to be enjoying the singing very much, so I approached him. "Hi," I said, "I'm Teresa. Would you like a sandwich?"

"Oh, no thank you. I was just enjoying the music." He offered his hand, and we shook. "My name is Steve. I really admire what you-all are doing here. How often do you do this?"

"Every weekday, Steve,"

"Could I help – could I in some way be a part? I play the guitar. Could I come and play for you-all?"

"I'd love that, Steve."

The next day Steve was there, guitar in hand. He played for us and helped in every other way he could. After a few days he brought some friends from his church to help, too. Sunshine and I were very thankful.

Sunshine had begun making plans to build a home for our luncheon friends on our property in the country. She wanted it to be a place where they could not only find shelter and food, but really learn and grow in the Lord, get help finding jobs and get back on their feet. She talked with social service agencies and shelters to get pointers from them. We all got enthusiastic about the home, especially Bill. He wanted to help in every way, and who knew more about it than he?

Chapter 6

PSALM 43 AND THE ANGEL

Monday morning I awoke at the usual time. I got my husband off to work and Daron and Dean off to school. Sunshine and I didn't have to be to work until ten o'clock, so we still had some time. We had packed lunches the night before and gathered some more clothes, too, for our luncheon-group friends.

Sunshine was sleeping rather late that morning, so I went to her room and knocked softly on the door. "Are you awake, Sunshine?"

I heard her turn in her bed. "Yes, Mama, I'm awake." I opened the door and went in. She lay there with her head half-covered. "I don't feel good this morning, Mama."

I sat down beside her on the bed, pulling the covers down to see her face. "What's wrong?"

"It's my back. It hurts real bad. My stomach, too."

Oh, no, not again, I thought. I could tell by the symptoms it was her kidneys. It had been such a long time since she'd been bothered by them. We'd really hoped the last surgery had taken care of it. I felt her forehead. "I don't think you have a fever, Sunshine. What do you want to do?"

"Just wait a little, and see how I feel later. Give me an hour or so."

"Okay. I'll go get you something to drink. Are you hungry?"

"No, Mama. Just bring me some ice water."

I brought her a glass. "If you need anything else, I'll be in the kitchen, sweetheart."

After a few minutes, she came out to the living room and lay down on the couch. "Are you feeling any better, Sunshine?"

"No, Mama. I don't think I can go to work today. I just feel too bad."

"You want me to stay home with you?"

"No, I'll be all right. You go on in. You've got to take the lunches, anyway."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure, Mama. You go ahead. I'm going to call work and tell them I can't come in."

I brought her a damp washcloth. “Here, baby, wash your face. I’m going to call Aunt Carol to come over, and we’re going to pray for you before I go.” It was so good having Sissy just across the road. Not only did I have a sweet sister to enjoy things with, I also had a great prayer warrior to call on in times of need.

In a matter of minutes, Sissy was there with her little bottle of oil. She sat down beside Sunshine on the couch. “What’s the matter, Sunshine?”

“I think it’s my kidneys again, Aunt Carol.”

“Well, let’s pray.” We knelt beside the couch next to Sunshine. Sissy anointed her and began to pray for her healing.

Soon I had to leave for work. I hated leaving without my Sunshine. Sissy reassured me. “I’ll be here if she needs anything, and if I have to go home I’m just a phone call away, so don’t worry, Teresa.” With that comfort, I went to work. I called home several times during the day anyway.

By the next morning, Sunshine was feeling a lot worse. I don’t know why God didn’t miraculously heal her. We sure prayed hard enough. I know we’re all in God’s will, but that morning I decided Sunshine needed me more than the office did. I took the lunches in and gave them to Bill for him and Steve to distribute. In the evening Sunshine was feeling still worse. When I asked whether she wanted to go to the doctor, she said, “Not yet.” But by the third morning she was running a fever and in a lot of pain, and she finally agreed to go. At the hospital they admitted her immediately. They thought they might have to operate, but put her on antibiotics and waited to see how she would do.

It had been years since Sunshine had a serious problem, and now she was back in the hospital again. I hated to leave her that night. She kept telling me, like so many times before, that she would be all right, that she was in God’s hands and there was nothing to worry about. I kissed her on the forehead. “God bless and keep you, baby girl. I’ll be back in the morning.” I prayed for her healing constantly on the long drive home. I asked God to let her come home soon. We had spent so much of our time together. It was hard for me to imagine the office without her, much less home. I thanked God fervently for the time we had together. It was so special to both of us.

As soon as I got home, I called Steve and told him about Sunshine’s condition. “Don’t worry about a thing, Teresa,” he said. “Bill and I will take care of the luncheon for you. You know, it’s funny – I was just telling my pastor today about what you and Sunshine are doing, and he asked me to get with you and see if our church could get involved. I told him it must be taking most of your pay, and Sunshine’s too, just to buy the food for the lunches.”

“You’re right about that, Steve.”

“The pastor said he’d like our church to pickup the tab, and he’d even go over there in the afternoons and preach sometimes. He said the church needs a blessing too.”

“Steve, your pastor’s timing couldn’t be better. Tell him he and your church are welcome to do whatever you-all feel led to do. Sunshine and I really appreciate it. It looks like with you, Bill and your church, everything will be taken care of until Sunshine and I get back. God bless you, brother.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow.”

I felt relieved, knowing everything was taken care of there.

The next morning I returned to the hospital. Sunshine wasn’t doing much better, but the doctor seemed optimistic. She just needed a little time, there was probably no need for another operation, he said. I was thankful. I saw that God was indeed taking care of everything – maybe not the way I thought it would be, but His way is always better.

That afternoon Sunshine wanted to do a Bible study on heaven, so we read Revelations 21. We studied each verse, word by word. Sunshine wanted me to check out any library books I could find about heaven, especially a book about precious stones, to see and understand the different foundation stones and the different levels of heaven. I left for about an hour and returned with the books. We were excited about the new things we were learning, and heaven became more real to us than ever before. We read in the Bible about the foundation stones of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony and emerald, and then found pictures of them in the gem book. It was fun – we even drew diagrams. We marveled at the fact that someday, even though undeserving, we’d share in all that beauty and glory. It was a special day.

Driving home that night, my mind kept going over the things we’d studied. Heaven must be so beautiful that our carnal minds couldn’t conceive of it. How very much God must love us to create such a place for us to live in, not for a day or a year or even a century, but for eternity. I felt so very loved.

The next day, after doing the chores and getting the guys off to school, I called my boss again and drove out to visit Sunshine. As I came up the hall, a nurse stopped me. “Are you Sunshine’s mother?”

“Yes.” I could see by her smile there was nothing wrong.

“You’ve really got a special girl there.”

“Thank you. I sure think so. But why do you say that?”

“Well, I took her breakfast in to her this morning, and she started telling me about heaven. She got me so fired up that on my break, I went back to her and spent the whole time taking notes and reading her Bible. She really loves the Lord, doesn’t she?”

“Oh, yes,” I replied, “she sure does.” I went into her room. “Good morning, Sunshine. I hear you’re spreading the good news here, too.”

She smiled. “I guess so, Mama.” I told her what the nurse had said. She smiled again. “I could hardly sleep last night, thinking about how beautiful it all must be, and how lucky and blessed we are. I want everybody to go, Mama.”

“Me too, baby.” We spent another wonderful afternoon together. Steve and Bill dropped in to surprise Sunshine after they had fed the luncheon group. I had to go back home that evening to fix supper for the guys. The doctor had said she was coming along just fine and would probably only need a few more days of hospital care. She did seem much better. Naturally, the whole family was elated to hear it.

After serving supper, washing the dishes and spending some time with the guys, I went to bed. I was exhausted, but relieved because I knew Sunshine was getting better. It seemed I had only slept a few minutes when the phone rang at four in the morning. My heart sank. Oh, God, don’t let it be the hospital. Don’t let it be something bad about Sunshine – I grabbed the phone hastily. “Yes?”

Her sweet little voice said, “Mama?”

“Yes, Sunshine, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, Mama – listen, you won’t believe what happened to me tonight!”

“Well, what is it, baby?”

“Oh, Mama!” She was so excited she could hardly speak. “Listen, Mama, listen, I was just visited by an angel!”

“A what?”

“An angel, Mama, an angel, right here in my room!”

“Oh, Sunshine, are you sure you weren’t dreaming?”

“No, Mama. It wasn’t a dream. It was real, believe me. A real angel! Oh, Mama, it’s so wonderful!” And she described the events of that night. After her supper she watched TV for about an hour, read her Bible, started praying and soon fell asleep. In her sleep she heard God say, “Wake up, Sunshine.” She awoke briefly and dozed back off. Again she heard God say, “Wake up, Sunshine.” Again thinking it was only a dream, Sunshine fell asleep.

The third time, she felt her bed move as if someone bumped it hard, and she heard God say, “Wake up, Sunshine. I have something to tell you.” Shocked and very alert, Sunshine sat up. There at the foot of her bed stood the angel. He was tall and dressed all in white, and Sunshine felt an immense love emanating from him.

Then the angel said, “Psalm 43, Sunshine. Psalm 43. That’s for you, alright?” and before Sunshine could answer him, he was gone.

“How did he go, Sunshine?” I asked.

“He just disappeared, Mama, right while I was looking at him. He disappeared...”

“Are you sure, Sunshine? Are you sure it wasn’t a big nurse or something?”

“Mother, please, surely I know the difference between an angel and a nurse. Please believe me. It was no nurse.”

“I’m sorry, baby. It’s just so hard to believe,” I said.

“I know, Mama. It would be for me, too. But you can’t believe in God without believing in the supernatural and in the Bible, and the Bible speaks of angels. So why wouldn’t one visit me tonight?”

“You’re right, Sunshine. Tell me, what did Psalm 43 say to you?”

“That’s it, Mama. I’ve read it twice now and I still can’t figure out what God is trying to tell me. Listen, Mama – let me read it to you, and you see if you can understand what God is trying to tell me.”

“Go ahead, baby. I’ll try.”

“Okay, Mama, here it is: ‘Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.’”

“Mama, I don’t understand what all this means. I know it’s all my future, but I don’t understand it.”

I sat there for a moment, shaking my head. “I don’t understand it, either, baby. It’s heavy. It’s really deep.”

We went over and over Psalm 43 trying to figure out what God was telling us through it. We prayed and sought God’s guidance. We looked up other scriptures on angel visitation throughout the Bible, to find a reference or a precedent for what Sunshine had experienced. We rejoiced and agonized over what had happened for about two hours. Then Sunshine called Sissy and explained the night’s events to her, hoping Sissy would have an insight for her. But, like me, Sissy could only tell her that in time she’d know. God would reveal it to her.

That morning Sissy came over to my house, Bible in hand. She seemed worried as she entered my living room.

“Good morning, Sissy.”

“Good morning,” she said.

“What did you think of Sunshine’s call this morning?”

“Well,” she began, “it sure was a strange conversation for so early in the morning.” She paused. “But there’s no doubt in my mind Sunshine was visited by an angel, and no doubt that he gave her Psalm 43, either. But what I don’t know is why that particular chapter or those particular words.”

She shook her head and went on. “What does that have to do with Sunshine? I don’t know, I just don’t know.”

She asked me when was I going to visit Sunshine.

“In about an hour and a half, Sissy, why?”

“Well, let’s pray before you go. I really feel a burden about this,” she said. So we knelt right then and prayed. Sissy prayed so hard and was so concerned that she was crying when we got up. “Tell Sunshine that her Aunt Carol really loves her, and I’ll keep praying she gets an answer.”

She left, and in an hour and a half I was walking into Sunshine’s room. She had a really burdened look on her face. My sweet, bubbly, high-spirited little encourager looked so disturbed – it was odd to see her like that.

“What’s wrong, baby?”

“Mama, I just can’t figure all this out.”

“Well, stop worrying about it. God will reveal it to you in His time. Just consider yourself lucky...how many people get visited by an angel?”

“Yes, Mama, you’re right. I do feel very fortunate that an angel visited me. But I wish I could understand his message.”

“Sweetie, you look so worried, like the weight of the whole world is on your shoulders.”

“I’m all right, Mama. I guess it all just needs to sink in. In time, I’m sure it will.” She turned and looked out the window. I pulled a chair around between her bed and the window and rested my arm on her bed. She took my hand and squeezed it.

“I love you, Mama.”

I squeezed her hand back. “I love you, too, Sunshine. I just know everything’s going to be all right.”

“I know, I know,” she said. We both just sat there, looking out the window. Several minutes passed in silence. We just sat there, watching the clouds go by.

Then Sunshine, speaking softly, said, “How far was it from our house to the cliff, Mama?”

I was somewhat taken aback by her question. “My goodness, Sunshine, you mean when me and Lucky fell?”

“Yeah. How far was that?”

“I don’t know, baby. I’m surprised you still remember it. You weren’t more than four or five. That was fifteen years ago.”

“I know, Mama. How far was it?” she insisted, still staring out the window.

“I don’t know – maybe ten, twelve city blocks, about a half mile. Why do you ask?”

“Did you ever wonder how I got from the house to the cliff, Mama?”

“Only a million times. Why do you ask?”

“Do you remember – when you came home you asked me how did I find you.”

“I sure do remember. I thought about it often.”

“Well, I told you then, a man helped me.”

“I vaguely remember you saying that, Sunshine, but I thought you were just making that up. I know I didn’t see any man, and Aunt Carol didn’t mention any man.”

“Well, there was, Mama. I remember it like it was yesterday. It all just came back to me. I was swinging, and this man came up to the fence and said, ‘Come, Sunshine, your mother needs you.’ So I took his hand and he led me all the way to the cliff where you were.”

“But...I didn’t see him, Sunshine.”

“He was there, Mama.”

I sat there a few seconds, shaking my head. “But, Sunshine, your hand...it was covered with puncture wounds from the barbed wire fence. Why?”

“Because you told me to keep a hold of the fence, Mama, and I did. I didn’t need to, though – he had my other hand. He led me all the way to Aunt Carol’s gate, then he told me, ‘Go tell your Aunt Carol what your mother said.’ When me and Aunt Carol came back out, he was gone. Mama, that man was the same one who visited me last night. He was the angel.”

Chills went from my head to my toes and back again. Dumbfounded, all I could say was, “My word, Sunshine.”

“It’s the truth, Mama. I knew last night when I saw the angel that I had...I had...It’s like I had known him all my life. I knew I had seen him before, but then I was confused because I knew I had never seen an angel before, but he was the same...the same angel who visited me last night. He was the man who took me to help you. It’s like he’s always been there, Mama. It’s like somehow I’ve always known he was there.”

I was stunned. I sat back hard in my chair. As I thought through this, I told myself; Well, yes, I believe in the supernatural. God is the supernatural, and I know He’s real. Yes, I believe Sunshine; she wouldn’t lie.

All those years, I’d never understood it. It never made sense to me how a five-year-old girl, so blind she couldn’t see her hand in front of her face, could walk half a mile to find her mother that she couldn’t even hear yelling, the mother who had fallen off a cliff that Sunshine didn’t even know was there. What other explanation was there?

I got so choked up I began to cry. I wasn’t even a Christian back then – not a real Christian – but God still thought enough of me to send an angel to Sunshine to rescue me. And I never even knew it, or ever truly thanked Him.

I looked up. Sunshine was crying, too. “You might have died then, Mama.”

“Yes, I sure could have. How many thankless times has God been there to help us?”

“Yes, I know what you mean, Mama. I guess we won’t truly know ’til we get to heaven.”

I hugged Sunshine and sat back down. Soon both of us were just staring silently out the window again, reviewing the events of the past. I kept thinking over and over, *How many times, God? How many times?*

As we came slowly out of our spiritual awe, we talked of all the times that we could have, and should have, been hurt or killed. Each time, we’d considered our good fate to be just luck. It was no such thing. I’ll never again be so presumptuous as to attribute my life to anything other than God’s mercy and divine plan.

Soon Sunshine was well enough to go home. Her first day back, she asked, “Do you know what I’d like to do, Mama? I want to go to the park to see our luncheon friends. I miss them all so much.”

The luncheon had always been between two and three o'clock, and it was just about two then. "Honey, you just got out of the hospital today. Why don't we wait till tomorrow? We'll call Steve tonight before he goes to work."

So that evening we called Steve. "How's it going, Steve?"

"Real good. Every day we grow bigger and bigger."

"Sunshine got out of the hospital today – she's feeling so much better. She's biting at the bit to go back to the park, to all you good people."

"Thank God," he said. He and Bill had gone up to see Sunshine that afternoon and found she had checked out.

"Her doctor said she still needs a lot of bed rest, but she still wants to come to the luncheon tomorrow."

"Great! So many people have asked about you-all. We'll be glad to see you."

"Okay. It's still at two, right?"

"Yeah. It's still like you girls set it up originally, except it's a little bigger now."

Sunshine was so excited the next day about going. She loved those people so much. As we were driving into the park, we could see the crowd at the pavilion from a long way off.

"Boy, Sunshine, look at that crowd. There must be over a hundred people there."

"I see, Mama," she said excitedly. "It's quite a group."

As we pulled up to the pavilion, heads started turning. "There's Sunshine and Teresa!" I heard one lady yell, and before we were even out of the car, they were running over to us and we were surrounded by our friends.

Bill ran up, grabbed Sunshine and hugged her. "It's so good to have you back. Look!" he said as he took a step backwards, "Remember this, Sunshine?" He pointed to his shirt. "This is the shirt you bought me the first day we met."

Sunshine smiled. "And you still look handsome in it, Bill."

We tried to make our way up to the pavilion. So many people stopped and hugged us, and told Sunshine how glad they were that she was better, that they'd prayed for her every day we were gone.

Steve stood on one of the tables in the center of the pavilion. "Everyone," he yelled, "listen, everyone. I want your attention." The crowd quieted. "For the few here who

don't know them, these are the girls who started this whole thing, Teresa and Sunshine. I want everyone to show them and God how much we appreciate them."

He started clapping, and then everyone joined in. They shouted and whistled. Sunshine looked at me with big tears and a big smile. So many came over and hugged us. Then Bill got up on the table. The crowd was still applauding, and he raised his arms.

"Listen, listen, you guys," he said, and the applause settled down. "Listen, I want to say something," he continued. "Since I've been here from the beginning, and I remember when it was just Teresa, Sunshine and me having lunch and studying the Word, I want to give these two sweet girls a present. I know it'll make them happy."

He motioned for Sunshine and me to come up on the table with him. We stood on either side of him and he put his arms around us. "Girls, I want to say how much I love you both." Then he said, "My special gift to you is this: yesterday I decided to enroll in Bible seminary." Then he shouted, "I'm going to be a minister!"

The crowd applauded wildly. Sunshine and I both hugged Bill. "Thank you," Sunshine said. We were so proud of Bill and so happy that he had made that decision.

"Thank you, Bill. We love you so much," I told him. That indeed was the best present in the world. And that alone truly made all the work worthwhile.

We got down from the table and talked with our friends, new and old. We met Steve's friends from church, who had come to help in our absence. They had laid out quite a spread for the luncheon. It was so nicely prepared and arranged that it looked like a banquet. I met each of Steve's helpers and thanked them for sharing their time and effort. Sunshine and I helped serve the banquet.

Then like before, while everyone was eating, Steve grabbed his guitar and started playing and singing. As people finished their meals, they joined in. Steve and Sunshine got backup on the table, he playing guitar and she clapping and singing. Then one of Steve's church friends handed Sunshine a tambourine, and soon the whole pavilion was jumping with God's praise in song.

I took the hands of two standing beside me and started dancing, making a big circle around the pavilion. Soon everybody was dancing, holding hands, weaving in and out of the tables. What a joyous time we were having!

Then it was time for Bible study. Steve and his friends passed around copies of their Sunday school lessons, from which they had been teaching. It was a great idea. Everyone could follow along in the lesson being taught, and they could take it with them, too.

Sunshine and I each took a seat. Before, we had always done the teaching; this time, we sat in the front row. Steve asked Bill if he would like to read the lesson that day.

“Sure,” Bill said. As Bill began to read, I watched him. He was so confident and assured. My mind went back to the day, just a few months earlier, when Sunshine and I found him lying in the alley. He hardly looked like the same man. How awesome is the mighty power of God! Bill was truly a new creation.

Later we talked with Bill for a little while before he had to go back to work. He had gotten an apartment, and two of his luncheon friends were living with him. He was helping them get on their feet. Before we left we found Steve again. “You’re doing a great job here, Steve,” I told him.

“Well, you and Sunshine started a great thing. I can’t tell you how this has blessed me, as well as my church. We’ve really had a miraculous turning in our church since we’ve been involved in this outreach.”

“Well,” Sunshine said, “that’s what God promised – that He’d bless those who bless others, and He sure is doing it here, Steve.”

During the drive home, Sunshine was very quiet. Then she said, “Mama, I really feel like our work at the park is over, isn’t it?”

“I feel so, too, baby.”

“Mama, do you feel like God used us to get it going, so Steve and his church could see what to do and then build from there?”

“Yes I do, Sunshine. I think that’s it exactly.”

“In a way, I’m so proud God used us like that. But in another way, I feel kind of sad it’s over,” she said. “But you know, Mama, I really have a feeling God is moving us forward to even better things.”

“Yes, baby, I agree. I know if you’re in God’s will, there’s no such thing as standing still. I can’t wait to see what He has in store for us next.”

Chapter 7

THE ENGAGEMENT

Sunshine had known Rick for some time. He lived in the neighborhood just around the corner from us. They were very good friends. Since Sunshine came home from the hospital, Rick had been coming over a lot more often. Because she still needed some recuperation time, and I didn't want to go back to work without her, we both officially quit our jobs. Rick and Sunshine were obviously getting pretty serious about each other.

I had no objection to this. They're such a cute couple, I thought. They have the same goals, the same standards, the same interests – and most important, they share a strong desire to serve God. Rick was 21 and managed a shoe store, but he and Sunshine were like a couple of little kids together. Rick would push Sunshine in the backyard swing, or they'd go out on our little road and play baseball.

One Saturday afternoon we were digging a new garden. Daron, Dean and Sunshine were out in the back when Rick arrived. Sunshine heard his car pull in and ran around to meet him.

“Hi, Rick. Are you ready to go to work?”

Rick had come straight from his job and was wearing his shirt and tie. “Doing what, Sunshine?”

“Well, Mama wants more garden space. She's got us out here digging, so come out back and help us.”

Rick's house was close by, so he ran home to change clothes and was back within a few minutes. He started in with the others on the new garden. By this time, Rick was part of the family, and he would help out wherever it was needed.

It was around two and I knew they were all hungry, so I fixed lunch, and called out the back door. “Anyone hungry? Lunch is now being served in the main dining room. Come and get it.”

There were cheers from the yard as I went back in and finished setting the table. Daron and Dean came in, washed their hands at the kitchen sink, then sat down to wait for Sunshine and Rick. “Mama,” Sunshine called jokingly, “help!” Standing at the back door were two creatures totally covered with mud. It was Sunshine and Rick, and they burst out laughing. I had to laugh too. “What in the world did you guys do?”

“I started to rinse off with the garden hose, and the more I rinsed off, the more Rick put back onto me. Then I threw some at him...and here we are.”

“My goodness. You guys can't come in here like that. Go and get cleaned up.”

Sunshine turned to her fellow mud-creature. “Oh, Rick, she don’t love us anymore. Let’s just go get hosed.” They slogged away and returned, clean but dripping wet. They ate lunch like that, as dignified and proper as could be. Such a pair.

A few more months passed, and their fondness and love for each other had grown deeper, so it was no surprise when one evening the two of them came hand-in-hand into the living room and asked Gary and me for our approval to be married. After questioning them briefly, we gave it. Rick and Gary stood up and shook hands while Sunshine and I hugged. Then I hugged Rick. “You’ll take care of my baby girl. I know, because I plan on being there a lot!”

Rick smiled. “I’m sure of that, and you know, Mom, you’re always welcome.”

“Have you set a date?” I was thinking they were talking about an engagement of a year or two.

Well, Mama, we’ve talked it over a lot, and we’ve decided on August.”

“August. Which August?”

“This August, Mama.”

“Sunshine, that’s only two months away. That’s too soon! You all need to wait a little while longer to be sure.” I value Sunshine’s judgment well enough, but this was more than I could take in all at once. “Why so soon? I’m not sure I’m ready to give you up that soon.”

Sunshine put her arm around me and kissed my cheek. “Oh, Mama. You’re not giving me up...”

I looked to my husband. “How do you feel about this, Dad?”

“I think they’ve both proven their maturity. It sounds all right to me.”

Rick said, “Ma’am, I’m sure about this. I’m sure. I’d make Sunshine my wife today if I could, but she says we have to wait ’til August to do it properly.”

“Do you plan on having a formal wedding, Sunshine?”

“My dear sweet Mama, as formal as you want. I do want a big white wedding gown.”

“Well, okay, I guess. What day in August?”

“The twenty-fourth, Mama. That’s when Rick gets his vacation, from the twenty-third to the third of September. Two whole weeks for a wedding and a honeymoon.”

I held her hand. “Oh, baby, I’m so happy for you. I know you guys love each other. But two months – that’s not much time.”

“Please trust me on this, Mama. I’ll soon be twenty, older than you were when you got married. Please, Mama, don’t be unhappy.”

“I’m not unhappy, baby. I knew it would come someday, but I just didn’t think it would be so soon.”

“I want a big wedding, and you can plan it all, Mama, okay?”

“Okay, sweetheart, a big wedding you’ll have.”

Later, a very relieved Rick went home, after affirming over and over that he’d take good care of Sunshine. She and I sat on the glider swing in the front yard and talked for hours. She’d asked Daron for his approval. She’d never even dated anyone Daron didn’t approve of, and this had been a tense moment for her. Daron has always been not just her big brother, but as she put it, “her hero!” After a long talk, he reluctantly gave his blessing. His chief objection was that they hadn’t dated long enough, and of course I understood what he felt. But all of us have had a problem being overprotective of her. She was so dependent on all of us as a small child because she’d been blind. “I think it made him a little sad, Mama, but he said he was happy for me. I’m so blessed to have a big brother who loves me so much.”

The next day we called Sonya in Tennessee, and she came on the next plane. The girls talked for hours about Sunshine’s wedding plans. Sonya had also had a large formal wedding and planned it herself. She had plenty of suggestions for Sunshine, and even offered Sunshine her own wedding dress, but Sunshine wanted me to make hers. Sunshine chose, from bridal magazines and store gowns, every last detail of the dress she wanted as well as the veil and bouquet. She wanted the sleeves from this one, the bodice from that one, the train from another, to make a white Chantilly lace gown. Her bouquet would be made of yellow roses and little purple flowers. I was to make it all in secrecy – she wanted to be the only one to see it before the wedding. Quite an order, I thought. We began by buying the material.

Friday evening after supper I was out in the glider swing when Rick and Sunshine drove up. “Good evening, you-all. You’re home early. It’s only about eight-thirty.”

“Rick has to go in to work real early tomorrow to do inventory,” Sunshine said. I chatted with Rick for a while before he went home. Then Sunshine sat beside me and put her head in my lap. I stroked her hair. “Sing to me, Mama. Sing ‘You Are My Sunshine.’”

I began singing, but I choked up. I looked up at the sky, fighting the tears, thinking, my baby girl, my sweet little Sunshine, is going to leave me. Things will never be the same.

She sat up, sensing something wrong. “Oh, my dear sweet Mama, I love you so much. Please don’t be sad about this, Mama. I know what you’re thinking, but we’ll never be separated. No one will ever keep us apart. I love you too much. Please know

that, Mama. No matter what, I'm a part of you and you're a part of me. Nothing will ever change that, not time or distance. In spirit, no matter what, we'll always be together. God has seen to it. He gave me to you and gave you to me, and that's forever, Mama."

"I know, Baby. It's just I'll miss you so much."

"Rick and I were talking about the wedding again tonight, Mama. I guess we've got everything planned. I've got the whole family included. There's a part for everyone. Of course, Dad will give me away. It's going to be so nice."

"It sure is, sweetheart."

"I want my bridesmaids in pale yellow. And yellow roses with baby's breath and little purple flowers on each pew. Does this sound too extravagant, Mama?"

"No, sweetheart, it sounds beautiful," Tears began to form in my eyes again. "My baby girl, my beautiful baby will soon be a bride...it's still hard for me."

"I know, Mama." She got up. "I want to talk with Daron and Dean now. Are they in the house?"

"Yes, baby, they're all going fishing in the morning. I think they're getting their fishing gear ready."

Sunshine went in the house. I stayed there on the swing, tilted back my head and looked up at the beautiful, starry Texas sky. I remembered our study on heaven.

All that beauty, all that love God has waiting there for us. I'll see all the loved ones that have gone on ahead of me. Some I've never met, like my grandfather – my mother's father, who died when she was a child. He was a true man of God who claimed for God's service and glory four generations of his children's children. Four generations – he sure was a man of faith. I did well to pray for all the ones Sissy and I had; and now Tinker had four and Katrina had one boy. That was a lot of claiming my grandfather did, whether he realized it or not.

And now Sunshine's getting married. The way she loves children, she'll probably have a lot of them; yes, she'll probably make me a grandmother many times. That thought sounded pretty good. *Oh, Father God, I prayed, let me take this time to claim for your glory my grandchildren, all that may come, and especially for Sunshine and Rick. Give them a good life together. Let them be mighty warriors of Yours, and let their seed be as the sands on the beach, too numerous to count.*

At that moment, as I was praying in my spirit, God spoke to me. "Teresa," He said, "take all your family and go to Florida. Leave as soon as you can. There are some who won't go. Don't force them."

I shook all over when I heard these words. God, what are You saying? Leave, leave here – leave now? This couldn't be. No, God, you can't mean it, I can't believe this. No, God, this can't be real.

I sat there a while longer. I knew it was God who had spoken to me, but I was very confused by what I knew He told me to do. I kept wanting to argue with it. No, God, you can't mean that. The timing is all wrong. God, I am so confused by all this.

I got up and walked up and down the road. God, I prayed, if this is You, I've got to have a sign – a strong and undeniable sign. I've got to hear it in another way. You've got to make it clear to me. This is too big a move. There's too many lives at stake. I can't be alone with this.

After about an hour of walking, I saw Sunshine standing at the end of the driveway. I was about 300 feet down the road and she called, "Mama, is that you?"

"Yes," I hollered back. She ran down the road to meet me.

"Why are you out here alone? I thought you were at Aunt Carol's. Is there something wrong?"

I had already decided I wasn't going to say anything to anyone about what God said to me until I got my undeniable sign, my confirmation to this incredible notion. So I answered her, "No, Sunshine, nothing's wrong. I was just praying."

Sunshine took my hand and started praying aloud. "Oh, my dear, wonderful Jesus, hear my Mama's prayer and give her peace. Let her know, sweet Jesus, you've got it all under control."

She went on with her prayer as we went back towards the house. After finishing, she asked, "Are you ready to go in, Mama, or would you like to walk and pray some more?"

"Not quite, baby, but you go ahead. I'll come in soon." Walking alone again, I asked God, Please, so I'll know for sure, give me a sign. Something that leaves no doubt in my mind. I have to know it was You.

A few minutes later I went back into the house. The rest of the family were in their own rooms, except Dean. I could hear Sunshine praying in her room as I passed her door, praying for God to give me peace and help me. She has no idea, I thought. If she knew what God had just told me to do...I can't tell her, not yet. I have to have my confirmation.

Dean was in the living room. "We're all ready to go fishing, Mom," he said cheerfully as I walked past him.

"That's good, son, I hope you catch a lot," I replied, hardly hearing myself. As I started to close my bedroom door, I realized I hadn't been very attentive to Dean. I returned to the living room and sat down beside him and took his hand.

“I love you, son. I hope I haven’t been neglecting you lately.” I pulled his head over onto my shoulder. “We’ve been so busy with Sunshine’s wedding and stuff...Tell me about your plans for tomorrow. Are you guys going out in a boat or fishing from the banks?”

I tried to listen to Dean talking about their plans, but my mind kept drifting to what God had said to me. Oh, God, how can I tell him? How can I tell any of them? No one will want to go. No one will accept this.

Soon Dean and I said goodnight and went to our rooms, he anxious for his next day’s fishing trip, and me anxious for my sign from God. I picked up my Bible and began reading. Maybe this is how God will reveal to me what He meant. Maybe He’ll speak to me through His written word. God, I’ve got to know.

I went back through all the reasons why this move was so wrong. Sunshine’s wedding, God, What about that? Then there’s Daron’s college, Dean’s school, my husband’s work – he couldn’t quit his job. He just got a good promotion, one he worked so hard for.

And then there’s Sissy...what about all of them, God? Her husband wouldn’t want to leave. He’s the city treasurer – a position hard to come by. He’d never leave on a “God-told-me-to” from me. Sissy wouldn’t, either. She loves her place. They’ve worked hard to get it as pretty as it is. It’s like a park over there. She’s often said that this was her little corner of the world, and nothing would get her out of here except the rapture.

And there’s our church, our pastor and his wife. Cliff and Betty were like family to us. We all loved them and would have to leave them behind.

I fell asleep that night thinking of all the negatives, all the reasons not to make this move, and I couldn’t think of one positive reason.

Chapter 8

THE UNDENIABLE SIGN

The next morning the three guys left very early in the morning to go fishing, and Sunshine and I were alone in the house. I was glad of it, too, because I was not in a mood for conversation at all. I was so depressed and confused, still asking God why, while I was putting in the daily load of washing. Sunshine came out of her room.

“Good morning, Mama. Feel any better this morning?” She’s always so sensitive to my moods.

“I’m all right, Sunshine.”

“Why don’t you go back to bed, Mama, and I’ll fix you breakfast and bring it to you.”

This was something she’s done so often, not only for me but for my husband, for Daron and Dean. It was her way of saying “I care.” She truly has a servant’s heart, I thought.

“No, Sunshine, that’s not necessary. I’m all right.”

“You know,” she said, “we’re singing a special in church tomorrow. Do you want me to go and see when Aunt Carol can practice today?”

“Sure,” I said as I sat down at the kitchen table. Sunshine went out the side door to go to Sissy’s.

Sissy and I have sung specials in churches since we were only five and seven. We sang in the old tent revivals of Oral Roberts and pastor A.A. Allen. It was a true joy when Sunshine started singing with us. We’d been going to our little country church for quite a while. The congregation was small, but the joy and blessings were bountiful. There was so much love. We felt as comfortable there as in our own living rooms.

Soon Sunshine came back. “Aunt Carol says she’ll come over as soon as she finishes the breakfast dishes, Mama.”

“Good,” I said, still feeling somewhat removed from conversation.

Sunshine reached out her hands to take mine. “Let’s go, Mama. I don’t know what’s bothering you, but I know God does, and we’re going to go pray that He’ll lift this burden from you.”

We went into my bedroom, where we usually prayed together, and Sunshine prayed long and hard for God’s leading and guiding in our lives. It seemed she knew exactly what my dilemma was. “Oh, God, show Mama so there’s no doubt in her mind what You’ve asked her to do.” After a while we heard Sissy knock at the door.

“I’m here, you guys,” she hollered. “Where are you?”

“In here,” Sunshine yelled back,

Sissy came to the bedroom door. We were still kneeling in prayer. “Oh. We can wait on the singing. Would you like me to pray with you?”

“Yes,” Sunshine answered for both of us. “Mama really needs to hear from God, Aunt Carol.”

Sissy knelt beside us and began praying for God to personally touch me and give me peace in what I was to do. Without a word from me, they both knew what to ask God for. When our prayer was over I didn’t have my answer, but I felt the sweet peace and knew the answer would come soon. Sissy, Sunshine and I sang for a couple of hours, not just to practice our songs for church, but to praise our Lord.

At that time Daron had stopped going to church with us. My husband, Gary, rarely went. It was usually Sunshine, Dean and I, Sissy, and some of her kids. That evening, after the guys got in, Sunshine asked Daron if he would go with us this Sunday. She told him she wanted to sing a song just for him. He agreed, so the next morning Daron, Dean, Sunshine, Rick and I headed for church. Sissy and her family went separately in their car.

We had a visiting pastor that Sunday, and after we sang, Sunshine took her seat between Daron and Rick. The pastor gave a good sermon and a rededication altar call. Much to my surprise, Daron went forward.

Sunshine and I began to cry. We had prayed for him so much, and were touched by his recommitment. Sunshine got up and walked down the aisle, knelt beside Daron and put her arm around him. What a blessed day that was for all of us. They came back and took their seats. Daron leaned over with a big smile on his face and said, “I’m back home, Mom, back where I should be.”

My heart soared that day. We all rejoiced in Daron’s salvation, especially Sunshine, who had prayed for him so many times. Now her prayers had been answered. We went back to church that evening. It was so good to see Daron joining in.

That night I thanked God for Daron’s return. But then this burden of moving to Florida weighed down on me again. God, I prayed, please show me something soon.

The next morning I was standing at the kitchen sink doing the breakfast dishes and looking out the window when I heard Sunshine walk up beside me. She put her arms around my waist and her head on my shoulder.

“Mama,” she said, “you’ve got to do it.”

I spun around and looked into her eyes. “I’ve got to do what, Sunshine?” My heart sank. Oh, God. “I’ve got to do what?”

“You’ve got to go.”

“Go where, Sunshine? Where do I have to go?”

“Where God told you,” she replied.

“Do you know what you’re saying, Sunshine? Do you know what God has asked me to do?”

“No, not entirely, but I do know God has told you to go somewhere and take the family with you.”

The chills came. Here was the sign I had waited for. “That’s what I needed, Sunshine. That’s what I needed to hear so bad.”

I stood, arms raised, and thanked God for revealing to Sunshine what I needed.

Sunshine was looking down at the floor. “What’s wrong, baby?” I asked.

“Not me, Mama. Not yet, anyway.”

Horror. The thought of going anywhere without her was not at all in my plans. “What do you mean, Sunshine?”

“I’m not sure why, Mama. I just know I’m not supposed to go when you go.”

I looked at her. “I can’t go without you, baby.”

Sunshine brushed away my tears. “Mama, if God tells you to, you can do anything. And you must.”

I knew she was right. It wasn’t going to be easy, but I knew I had to be obedient. I sat down heavily, holding my head in my hands. Okay, God, you’ve given me the sign I asked for. Now give me the strength and the knowledge to do it. Remembering all the arguments I would get from the other family members, I prayed, “You’ll have to do it, God. You’ll have to open every door to every heart. I’ll never be able to do it alone.”

Now comfortable that I knew what I had to do, but feeling somewhat like Moses, I walked to Sissy’s. “I don’t even know how to ask her, God. I’m sure she’ll say no. I know her like no one else – well, except You, of course.”

I knocked on her door. I truly hoped she wasn’t up yet. Then I could go home and think some more about how to present this to her.

“Come in, Teresa,” she yelled from her back bedroom. I had knocked so softly I don’t know how she heard me. She must have seen me walking over. I came in and sat down.

“Good morning, Sissy,” I said. She was going down the hallway. I was still wondering how in the world I was going to broach the subject of moving to Florida. The very thought of it still seemed bizarre to me.

“You’re sure up early, Teresa.”

“Uh, I know,” and without even thinking, I blurted out, “How would you like to move to Florida?”

It pulled her up short, of course. All she could say was, “To Florida?”

“Yes, leave here and move your family to Florida.” I surprised myself with my own abrupt questing. While I’d been walking over to her house, I’d thought I would start by telling her about God speaking to me or something.

“Well,” she said. “What brought all this on?”

“I just need to know. Would you consider moving to Florida?”

“The only way I’d move anywhere is if God Himself told me to, Teresa. You know how I feel about that.”

“Yes, Sissy, I do.” Believe it or not, I was very relieved by her answer.

“I’m going to have to pray about it, Teresa.”

“I hope you do, Sissy. I expect you to.”

“You’re talking about disrupting a lot of lives.”

“I know, Sissy. Believe me, I know.”

“You can bet I’m really going to have to pray about this, sister dear,” she said.

I nodded. Soon I returned to my house. I wondered why I hadn’t told her the whole situation – about God speaking to me and about Sunshine’s confirmation. Then in my spirit I knew why. It wasn’t time yet. She needed to hear from God herself; then I could tell her of my experience.

While I was at Sissy’s, Sunshine had called Rick and asked him what he thought about moving to Florida, as abruptly as I had asked Sissy. Even though he’d never lived anywhere but in Texas, he agreed, and even asked his district manager if there was a possibility of a transfer for him. The district manager had said yes. All that, in less than

half an hour! I couldn't believe how smoothly it was all going. It seemed my fears were groundless.

As soon as Daron and Dean got home, just as I had done with Sissy – no groundwork laid – I simply asked them, “Would you like to move to Florida?” They both said they'd like to think about it.

Up to this point, not a single one had said no.

Daron asked his instructor at school if he could transfer. His instructor had a friend in the town we would be moving to, and this friend was an instructor in a good school. Not only would this friend help Daron make the transfer, but he'd give Daron special help in his new school.

Daron's decision was made from that. Dean also agreed. Without hesitation, Gary resigned from his job and sent out resumes the same day for prospective jobs in Florida. Unbelievably, Sissy's husband did the same. Within three days, everyone had said yes. I could only marvel at it.

The families joined in discussion in Sissy's front yard, to work out the details of our trips. It was agreed that Gary, Dean, Daron and I would be the trailblazers and go first. Two weeks later, Sissy, her husband and their children would come. And five weeks after that, Sunshine and Rick would come. They didn't seem to mind at all that their wedding would take place in Florida. Sunshine said it didn't matter where they got married, as long as her family was there. Even Rick's parents said they'd fly over for the wedding, and were excited about it. So that was settled.

Gary got a job offer immediately. It looked like a good position and salary. He called them and accepted, and they told him they wanted him to report to work in 10 days. What I thought would take months was all going to take shape within a couple of weeks. Even though everything was working out, I felt uneasy that we'd have to be there and settled in ten days. We were already packing up the contents of the house.

Sunshine had taken most of her belongings over to Rick's, since they were making the trip together. She only kept what she needed to go to work and get by on for the few weeks until they would leave. She decided to stay with Tinker, Sissy's oldest daughter.

Sunshine and Rick each had a car. They decided it was more practical to sell Sunshine's; Rick's was larger. They would rent a trailer and make the trip together in his car.

I contacted my mother-in-law, who lived in Florida, and she made arrangements for the wedding in the big, beautiful church she attended. She made the reservations for Sunday afternoon, August twenty-fourth. I could see that I had my work cut out for me.

The time for our departure was nearing. Sunshine and I clung closer than ever, rarely leaving each other's side. The night before we were to leave, we had a big family

get-together – something like a “bon voyage” party. Our trailer was loaded and ready. All we had to do in the morning was get up, get in the car, and drive away.

I still couldn't believe I was really leaving my home, my town, my church. The real hurt came when I remembered I would be apart from my Sunshine for seven weeks. Seven weeks would seem endless. And I still had no idea why – why in the world had God ordered this move? What could be His purpose?

After the bon voyage party, we walked back home. I started to step inside, but Sunshine asked me if I would sit on the side porch with her for a few minutes.

“I just want to talk with you one more time before you go, Mama. I need to tell you something.”

We went around to the side porch and sat on the steps. “What is it, baby? I'm all yours.” The stars lit up the big Texas sky. There was no need for the porch light.

“Mama, do you remember a couple of years ago when you and I went to that church of your friend's, and the pastor saw a light around me?”

“Yes, baby, I remember it well. It's a night I'll never forget.”

“I've been thinking a lot about what he said for the past few weeks. You know, the part where he said God has a mighty work for me?”

“Yes, sweetie, I remember. Have you been thinking what that work might be?”

“Yes, Mama, but...” she hesitated.

“But what, baby?”

“Mama, I don't feel worthy. I have failed God so many times. I've done things I knew were wrong, things that I know must have hurt Him.” Tears came to her eyes.

“Oh, my dear, sweet baby,” I said as I put my arm around her. “Let me ask you this. These so-called terrible things you did – did you openly and sincerely go to God and ask Him to forgive you?”

“Oh, yes, Mama, I begged Him to. I was so sorry. I asked Him over and over to forgive me.”

“All right, then what's the problem, Sunshine? You're not perfect, I'm certainly not perfect. You know the very first time you asked God to forgive you, He did. And you know what? The second time you ask forgiveness for the same indiscretion, He says, ‘What am I forgiving you for? I see no sin on your slate. It's all been wiped clean.’ That's what Jesus died for, so we can be free from that burden. Accept that, sweetie. You've done nothing you haven't asked forgiveness for, have you?”

“Oh, no, Mama.”

“Well, then, your record in heaven is as clean now as when you were first born. You have no, I mean no sins to your account.”

“Then God might still use me for a mighty work?”

“Well, Sunshine, that’s up to God. He alone knows what He’s called and ordained each of us to do, but you can bet your boots that as long as you’re open and obedient...mind you, I didn’t say perfect. Only Jesus is perfect. We must always strive for that perfection. But we can’t be down on ourselves if we sometimes fail. You just pray that God uses you for the purpose that glorifies Him. Don’t even look for glory yourself, but pray you can glorify Him.”

“Oh, Mama, I do. That’s all I want. I hope that if Jesus tarries, and I go home before the rapture, people who remember me will say, ‘Sunshine was a real child of God.’”

She was smiling. My husband came to the door. “Oh, there you guys are. It’s late, and we have a big day in front of us tomorrow. You better come in and go to bed.”

Sunshine and I got up, hugged each other, and went into the house to our bedrooms.

“Mama!” Sunshine called from her bedroom.

“Yes, baby?”

“Maybe the work God has for me is in Florida?”

“Maybe it is, sweetie, maybe that’s why He sent us. We’ll soon see. Right?”

“Right,” she yelled back.

I readied myself for sleep and lay down in my makeshift bed – our bedroom furniture was all loaded. I lay there thinking of my conversation with Sunshine. Then, in my sleepy state, I prayed, “God, only You know what’s in store for her. She wants so much to bring glory to Your name. She has such a sweet, loving spirit. She’s always given much more than she’s received. But You’ve seen it all, haven’t You, Father? I don’t need to tell You anything about her. You knew her before I did. Thank You for choosing me to be her mother. I hope I never let her or You down.”

With that, I fell asleep.

Morning came, and without a word from me, everyone was out of bed. I awoke to hear them talking in the kitchen. I looked at the clock: a quarter after six. Looks like I’d better get up fast, I thought. My husband said he wanted to be on the road by seven o’clock, so I’d better get it together.

Sunshine had run over to Sissy's to make sure they were up for our departure. Well, I thought, *This is it. This is the big day.* As I rolled up our sleeping blankets, I thought of leaving my Sunshine, my baby girl, soon to be a wife, and – I hoped – in time, to make me a grandma. Then I thought of my own grandfather. Sunshine and Rick's kids will be his fourth generation claimed for God's glory.

I was only twelve years old when my grandmother told me the story of how my grandfather claimed us. "Why only four generations, grandma, why not ten, or a hundred?" I had asked her.

"Well, Teresa," she answered, "I asked your grandpa the same question. I reminded him that the righteous can claim 1,000 generations, according to the Bible, and here's what he said to me: 'Mama, I'm only claiming four generations because after that, we'll all be in glory.'"

After four, we'll all be in glory, I thought. To think back on that now! I was so young – grandchildren were an abstract idea to me. To think that my grandfather, who was only 24 and the father of two little children at that time, could have that kind of love and spiritual discernment! He died a few days after making his claim, so of course I never knew him, but I always felt such love for him, and thanked God for him.

I came back to reality. *Boy, I've got to get busy. The rest of them will be waiting in the car, and here I stand reminiscing.* I gathered our blankets and took them to the car. Rick was just driving around the corner, and Sunshine was walking down the driveway to meet him.

"Hi, Mom!" he yelled. "This is the big day, huh?"

"Yes, I guess so," I said, going over to where he and Sunshine were standing. Sunshine took my hand and put her arm around me.

I looked at Rick. "You'll take good care of her, right, Rick?"

"Yes, ma'am, I promise. Don't worry. We'll be over there ourselves in seven weeks. Okay, Mom?"

"This will be a long seven weeks, though," I said.

"Okay, Mama, you remember what we want as far as a house goes? You'll have to find that for us."

"Yes, Sunshine, I remember – A little white house with a white fence and big shade trees on a quiet street."

"Yes, Mama, and it must have two bedrooms, right?"

“Right, Sunshine.”

“And it’s got to be cheap. We can fix it up, right, Rick?” Sunshine asked.

“Right,” Rick and I answered her together.

“And only a few blocks from you, Mama, okay?”

“Okay, Sunshine. It’s a tall order, but I’ll see what I can do. I’ll try my best.”

“You can do it, Mama. If anyone can do it, you can.”

“Sure, Sunshine! Flattery will get you everything,” I laughed.

My husband was getting in the car, and I asked Rick again, “You will take care of her?”

“Mom,” he answered, shaking his head, “she’s not a little blind girl anymore. She’ll be okay.”

“All right, all right,” I said. “Point well taken. Just drive safely when you-all come over.”

With that, we joined the others. Sissy and her family were already standing there. “Let’s all pray,” Sissy said. We joined hands while Sissy led in prayer. She prayed for our safe trip and for all God’s blessings and protection to be with us. Then Sunshine prayed for us; then Daron led; then it was my turn. I, for the most part, prayed that soon we would all be back together, and never have to be apart again.

Then we all hugged and said our goodbyes. I turned to Sunshine last, and took her face in my hands.

“Remember, my sweet baby girl, I love you with all my heart, and where you are, there also is a big part of me. So you take care, write often, and I love you, love, love, LOVE you.” We were both ready to cry. “Me you too, Mama, me you too.”

My husband started the engine as I got in the car. Sunshine patted my hand. As we pulled out of the driveway, Sunshine shouted, “Wherever you are, Mama, I’m there, too!” I looked at them all standing there as we drove around the corner, Sunshine and Rick holding hands, waving goodbye.

“See you soon!” I hollered. Then they were out of sight.

Chapter 9

THE TRAILBLAZERS

We had been on the road for about five hours and had gone about two hundred and fifty miles. Our small wagon was pulling a large trailer – not the best way to make good time. I asked if anyone was hungry and got three yeses in a hurry, so we stopped at the next rest stop. Daron and Dean both had been napping off and on. They hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. We all got out and stretched. I began unpacking the lunch Sissy had made for us and setting it out on the table. The guys went to the rest room and walked around stretching their legs. I called, "Let's eat." Dean yelled back, "Great!" and they ran over to the table.

"I'm starved to death," said Daron, still stretching.

"Me, too," Dean echoed.

"How do you guys feel about making this trip?" I had asked them several times before, but not since we had set out.

"Well, it's too late to turn back now. We'll just have to wait to see what Florida has to offer."

"And, you, Dean, how do you feel?"

"I won't really feel right about it until the whole family is back together again," he said.

"I know, Dean. I know." My mind turned again to thoughts of Sunshine. God, how I miss her already. Then again I thought of the words that God had spoken to me. "There are some who won't go – don't force them." That was my only comfort in Sunshine's staying there. But nevertheless, she and Rick will only be seven weeks behind us, and I can stand that.

"Mom. Mom. Earth to Mom. Come in, Mom." Dean said.

"Uh, what is it, Dean?"

"Just wanted to know if you were still on this planet."

"Oh, yes, son. I was just thinking of Sunshine and Sissy and everyone standing on the road saying goodbye."

"I hate that sight."

"I do too, Mom," said Daron, "but soon they will all be there." Then he added, "But I'll tell you what, if Sunshine ain't there in seven weeks, I'm going back to get her."

“She’ll be there all right, Daron. She’ll get a little job, and stay with Tinker. By the time we’ve got the wedding all arranged, they’ll be there.”

“Okay, Mom, if you say so.”

Soon we were back on the road. By eleven-thirty we were at the halfway point of the trip. We spent the night at a motel. After another full day of traveling, we arrived at our new home. We just threw our sleeping bags on the floor and slept. I don’t think any of us realized we weren’t in our own beds.

After a few weeks we were settled in. The boxes were unpacked, and everyone was into their rooms and feeling somewhat more at home, although I still felt like the proverbial fish out of water. I wrote letters home as soon as we got there – one to Sunshine and one to Sissy, telling them of our trip, our safe arrival in our new world, and how anxious we were to see them.

Since we were the trailblazers, I scouted around for a house for Sissy and her big family. I found a part-time job in an office doing much the same work Sunshine and I had done together. My boss agreed to hire Sunshine as soon as she and Rick got back from their honeymoon. So that, too, was settled. She and I could work together again.

I started on her wedding dress at night after everyone else had gone to sleep. First I made her veil, just as she had ordered: a crown of yellow silk flowers and pearls. It was shoulder-length in front, and grew longer as it went to the back, to the floor and three feet longer. So beautiful, I thought. Sunshine is going to look so pretty in it. Then I worked on her gown. With every spare minute I pinned, sewed, and measured, and the gown was coming along beautifully.

Daron enrolled in his new college, but he said he couldn’t and wouldn’t start classes until things were settled again. His concern was Sunshine. “I’ll go back to school when I feel secure in my mind that she’s here and settled in. I’ll wait these five weeks, but if she isn’t here, I’m going back after her. I don’t care how far it is.” Seeing how determined he was, I let it go. This was typical behavior for Daron. He had to look out for his little sister.

It was time for Sissy and her big family to arrive. That day I was constantly checking out the window for them. I had done all I could to secure them a place to live, but nothing had turned up. The size of their family made it difficult. Nevertheless, they were on their way. I had prepared a large meal and some makeshift beds for them, since I didn’t know which they would want most when they arrived. Only rarely had Sissy and I ever lived apart, and these two weeks had been hard for me anyway on Sunshine’s account. So, when I heard a car horn outside, I thought, *It’s them!* I dropped the napkins I was folding and ran outside. I know it’s Sissy!...And maybe...just maybe, Sunshine has changed her plans and come with them.

Sissy and her family had all arrived safely – tired but happy. I felt a little disappointed that Sunshine hadn't chosen to surprise me like I thought. Still, it felt good to have so many of us together again. I thanked God for bringing them over safely. Sissy and I talked for hours, and for the first time since I came to Florida, I felt home.

We checked newspapers, consulted real estate agents, and just drove around in the car to find them a house. After almost two weeks, a house only six blocks from us became available. It wouldn't have been the house they chose to stay in forever, but it was nice and it accommodated them. So they all settled in, and we praised God for that.

I still wondered constantly why God had sent us all over here. What in the world could be His purpose? What's to come out of this major move? There was still not only Sunshine who had yet to make the move, but there was Tinker and her four children. Tinker wanted so much to come, but she said it wouldn't be possible for at least another year. There was also Katrina, Sissy's third child. She was the mother of one, and she must have been feeling some what abandoned. Loren, Sissy's fourth, had decided to stay in Texas.

Why, God? Why this move? Why so many lives disrupted? What good can come of such a drastic uprooting? I was secure that it was God's plan for this move to take place, but I still didn't understand. I was anxiously awaiting what I knew would be our blessed reward for our obedience. I just knew God was going to bestow something so wonderful on the whole family that we couldn't have hoped for it in our wildest dreams. Yes, indeed. We were in for a really supernatural blessing.

Now, with Sissy and her family all settled in, I began hunting for Sunshine and Rick's dream home. Since I already had quite a network of realtors put together, I simply called each of them and told them exactly what I was looking for. With Sunshine and Rick's finances, a small, modest Cape-Cod style would probably be best for them. Sunshine had been explicit in her description, and there was no doubt in my mind when I found the house. I recognized it immediately. I found it just a week before they were due to arrive. It was only twelve blocks from us – a nice walking distance – on a cul-de-sac. It had two very large oak trees in the front yard, sheltering the whole house and a white picket fence with a lavish growth of honeysuckle twined through it. There were two bedrooms. It fit Sunshine's description exactly, I thought as I looked at it. It needs a coat of paint, though. But Daron said he, Dean and Sissy's boys would buy the materials and paint the house as a wedding present for Sunshine and Rick. So now even that was settled. Thank you, God, I thought. I couldn't believe how smoothly it's all worked out

Chapter 10

I SAW JESUS

Sunday morning at six o'clock, I awoke and sprang out of bed – not my usual style. I grabbed my Bible and hurried to the living room. I let the Bible fall open in my lap, and there were the Psalms. I turned a couple of pages to Psalm 43. My eyes went straight to the note Sunshine had written in the margin: “Sunshine, the hospital, the angel.” Her visitation from the angel seemed like it had to signify a turning point in her life. Oh God, I prayed, look out for my baby girl and bring her over safely. I miss her so much. I marked another day off the calendar. Only four more days. Only four more days.

I got everyone up. “Time to get ready for church!” I said, knocking on Dean and Daron’s doors. Dean said, “This time next week Sunshine and Rick will be here, huh, Mom?”

“Yeah, we’ve got a busy week next week.” As we’d done every morning since we’d arrived in Florida, we all held hands and prayed for Rick and Sunshine and the rest of the family. This morning Daron led the prayer, thanking God for all that we had, especially each other, and for God’s divine guidance in our lives. While he prayed I stood there thinking, *what a sweet spirit Daron has. God has truly blessed me.* A strong sense of peace came over me, and I knew Daron and Dean felt it too. When Daron finished his prayer, I reached over and hugged him. “Thank you, son. That was very sweet.”

“I really felt the presence of God this morning,” he replied.

“Yes...I felt as though angels were surrounding us,” I said. “It’s a great feeling.”

It was a warm, beautiful morning. As we drove to church I looked out the car window, wondering, *God, why have You loved me so much when I have failed You so badly in the past? Blaming You for things I didn’t understand, like my mother’s suicide. I guess it was easier to blame You than to blame her. Did she go to heaven, Lord? I don’t know. There’s so much I don’t understand but this morning I do know You love me. I’ve never felt your love so completely as I do now, all around me and through me. It feels wonderful. Thank you so much.*

It was exceptionally crowded in the church parking lot, so we drove around the side to park the car. Dean and Daron went on ahead while my husband and I paused to talk briefly about the day’s activities. “I want to stop at Maggie’s Nursery on the way home,” I said. “Okay?”

“I guess so. What do you want to get?”

“Sunshine will be here in four days. I want to plant a little area just for her, to make her feel more at home.”

“All right. We’ll do that.”

I’m sure the sermon was good that morning, but I must admit I have no idea what it was about. This peaceful spiritual feeling preoccupied me. I spent the whole morning talking with God in my spirit. When the pastor ended, we spoke with him briefly about Sunshine’s wedding. “We’re getting so excited,” I told him. “They’ll be here in four days.”

On our way home I asked Dean and Daron if they would mind if we stopped somewhere, because I knew they were usually anxious to get out of their church clothes. They agreed and waited in the car while I went into the nursery. “Good morning, Maggie. I need a beautiful yellow rose bush.”

“Over this way,” she said. “I just got some in yesterday.” At the end of the aisle I could see all the beautiful yellow blooms bunched together. She began pulling out some of the containers. “Which one would you like?”

I looked them over. One bush had a single open bloom on it, along with seven large buds. “Oh, this one. It’s lovely. My little girl will be here in four days – you know, the one I told you about that’s getting married.”

“Oh, yes...Sunshine, right?”

“Yes. Sunshine loves yellow roses. I’ll bet if I plant this one now, all seven blooms will be open by the time she gets here.”

“Yes, they should be.”

“I also want two trays of these,” I said, pointing to some little purple flowers. She picked up the rose bush and I took the trays, and we put them in the trunk of the car. “Grab a bag of peat moss, Mom,” Daron reminded me. As I went to get the peat moss, I saw a big foliage plant. This will look perfect behind the rose bush, I thought, so I told Maggie and she put it in the trunk for me.

“These are for Sunshine,” I told the guys as we were driving home. “She won’t have any problem recognizing our house. She’ll know immediately these were planted just for her. I’ll make a deal with you, Daron.”

“What’s that, Mom?”

“I’ll run in and fix a good lunch if you’ll grab a shovel and overturn the dirt by the walkway right there at the corner,” I said, pointing at the spot I wanted dug up.

“Okay, Mom, you cook and I’ll dig. Cook fast, ’cause I’m really hungry!”

“You’ve got it, son,” I said. We all went in and changed out of our church clothes. Daron got the shovel and overturned the earth for me. Soon I yelled, “Lunch is ready!” I made up Gary’s plate and took it to him in the living room, where he was watching TV.

Dean took his plate to the front porch, where Daron was finishing up. “Do you want yours out here, Daron?” I asked. “Yes,” he said as he rinsed his hands off with the garden hose.

“Well, I’ll come out and eat with you guys.” We had several lawn chairs on the front porch. Soon Dean was finished. “Will you unload the flowers for me, son?”

“Sure,” he answered. I threw him my keys, and Daron and I watched him as we finished our lunch. “Okay, how do you want them, Mom?” Dean asked.

“Well, the big foliage plant goes in the back, between the house and the walkway, and the rose bush in front of it. I’ll scallop the little purple flowers myself”

Within a few minutes Daron and Dean had the larger plants in the ground. I grabbed my little hand shovel and began putting in the little purple flowers. Dean and Daron sat in the lawn chairs, watching. Gary came out and sat with them.

“That looks really nice, Mom,” Daron said.

“Good touch, Mom,” Dean added.

“Well, great.”

At that moment my nephew Lonnie rode up on his bike. He looked at me and then at Gary. “Mom and Dad want to see you-all,” he said, as he came to a stop.

There was nothing unusual in this. I looked over at my husband. “Will you go? I want to finish planting these, okay?”

“All right, I’ll be right back,” he said, and got in the car.

I continued planting the little purple flowers. Sissy was only six blocks away, so in no more than five minutes Gary was back. I was still kneeling on the ground when he and my brother-in-law drove up. The look on Gary’s and my brother-in-law’s faces told me that something was very, very wrong. I glanced at Daron and Dean. They had sensed it too.

Gary met my eyes, then looked down.

“What is it?” I asked. He stood silently, as Daron came over and stood beside me, putting his arm around my waist. Gary suddenly looked up at the sky. My goodness, I could see tears in his eyes. I couldn’t remember ever seeing him cry before.

“What is it!” I yelled. Daron grabbed my hand and squeezed it gently. Gary looked me in the eyes again, then shook his head. “What is it?” I asked again.

“It’s Sunshine,” he said.

“What do you mean, it’s Sunshine? What’s wrong?”

He looked down again and shook his head.

“What’s wrong? Is she sick? Has she been in an accident? What’s wrong with Sunshine?” Horror spread all through me as I waited for him to answer me. “What’s wrong?” I cried.

He glanced at the porch at Dean, then back at me, his lips quivering. “She’s...she’s dead.”

“What?” I screamed, and he repeated. “She’s dead. She’s been murdered.”

Daron screamed, “No, no, no, God!” He clutched at me. “No, God, my sister, my sister, my sister!”

I heard what Gary said, but I didn’t believe him. My immediate impulse was to hit him. Then I wanted to ignore him and go back to planting my flowers. He’s wrong. I know he’s wrong.

“What are you saying?” I screamed at him. Daron was now crying uncontrollably, repeating, “My sister, my sister...No, God, no, God!”

In total disbelief, I told Gary, “No, you’re wrong!” The frantic horror coursed through me. He’s wrong, he has to be wrong. No one could hurt Sunshine. Everybody loves her. God wouldn’t let anyone hurt her, not her, not Sunshine.

I began to shake my head. “You’re wrong!” I screamed.

“No, I’m not wrong,” he said. “Let’s go to your sister’s.”

Daron was still holding onto me, and by this time he was going limp. I could barely hold him up. Dean had a stern, confused look on his face and he turned to go into the house.

“Go get him,” I told Gary. He opened the car door and I got in, supporting Daron. My brother-in-law helped get him in. Daron put his arms around my neck and started rocking.

“No, Mom, no, Mom,” he repeated. “Please tell me they’re wrong, Mom.” Then, at the top of his lungs, he screamed, “God, God, where are You?”

I just sat there, shaking my head no. Gary came out of the house with Dean. They got in the car and we drove to Sissy's. Daron was going into shock by the time we pulled into Sissy's driveway. Dean got out of the car and wandered down the sidewalk in a daze. Gary ran and got Dean by the arm, and led him into Sissy's house. Then he and my brother-in-law carried Daron into the house and laid him on the couch. Sissy was standing there with her hands clasped to her mouth.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I'm so sorry, Teresa," she repeated, and hugged me.

"They're wrong, Sissy. Don't you understand? It's all a big mistake."

She looked me in the eyes and shook her head no, then looked at Daron, grabbed a washcloth and started wiping his face. Daron was shaking so badly she could hardly sit beside him. I felt frozen numb. This is wrong, I was still thinking. This is a big mistake.

Dean had gone out into the back yard. I could see Gary talking with him through the sliding glass doors. I wish he wouldn't tell Dean any more, I thought, since it's all a big mistake anyway. Dean wouldn't look at him. He didn't want to hear what Gary was saying. He stood with his arms folded, looking up at the sky. He's like me, I thought. He knows, too, that it's all just a big mistake.

Soon Gary came in and walked over to me. "I've got to call the coroner in Texas."

"Good," I responded, "call them. Then you'll find out this is all just a big mistake."

He went to Sissy's kitchen and began dialing the number. Sissy was still wiping Daron's face and praying over him. Still crying, Daron got up and went over to a picture of Jesus hanging on the wall.

Indicating the picture, he looked at me and said, "She's right there, Mom. I just saw her, she's right there with Him. It's true."

I kept on shaking my head no. I could hear Gary mumbling on the phone. I went to the kitchen, where he was. I wanted to hear this. I wanted to hear them tell him this had all been a mistake, and it wasn't Sunshine.

Gary gave the coroner Sunshine's description: "...a little girl, not more than 100, 110 pounds, long red hair." He looked at me. "Are there any other identifying marks?" he asked.

I thought for a second. "Yes, she has a little mole just above her lip." I knew they wouldn't see any mole, and then they'd know it wasn't Sunshine. Gary repeated to the coroner, "She has this little mole, just above her lip." He listened for a moment, then whispered, "Oh, my God." He turned to me. "She doesn't have enough face left to identify." Then he continued talking to the coroner. "...Okay, I understand." He hung up the phone.

“What? You understand what? It’s not her. You understand it’s not her!”

“They just got her finger prints back. It’s Sunshine. She’s dead. She’s been murdered.”

“No more!” I screamed, “Don’t tell me any more!” I slumped to the floor in the corner of Sissy’s kitchen. In my mind I kept hearing over and over, “She doesn’t have enough face left to identify.”

My mind shut down at that point. All I could do was cry silently. My beautiful baby girl doesn’t have a face. My Sunshine has no face, this can’t be. I sat there in the corner, rocking. In my mind I was singing to my Sunshine: You are my Sunshine, my only Sunshine, you make me happy...oh no, God, they can’t take her away, You can’t take her away...You are my Sunshine, you make me happy when skies are grey...oh, God, what happened here? We’re Your children. Sunshine’s Your child...How can they tell me she’s dead and doesn’t even have a face left? Something’s wrong here, God – what happened to Your protection for Your children?...You are my Sunshine, my only Sunshine, you make me happy...no, no, no, God, this can’t be. It’s all wrong! You, God, You have to help me to understand this. I feel so betrayed, so wronged! I’ve been doing all the right things for all the right reasons – for You, God. I did just what You asked, I moved the whole family over here. I didn’t want to, but I did it anyway. Now look! Look what’s happened to my precious, beautiful Sunshine. This just can’t be.

Sissy knelt beside me and put her arm around me. She was crying, too. “Someday we’ll understand all this, Teresa. Maybe not now, but someday we will. Sunshine’s gone. She’s with Jesus now. You know that, don’t you? You’ve got to know that.”

I just sat there with my face in my hands. I couldn’t answer her. I somehow thought that if I didn’t say it out loud, it still wasn’t true. Like I could change what happened by just keeping silent.

Gary and Sissy made all the arrangements, and the next morning we were at the airport. I still kept thinking, this isn’t true. I didn’t say anything until we started to board. Sissy and I were hugging goodbye and I whispered to her, “It’s not true, Sissy, you’ll see. It’s a bad mistake. It’s not Sunshine. It can’t be.”

I could see the pain and in her eyes as she said, “I’m afraid it is, Teresa.”

The whole flight I clutched my Bible and spoke only when necessary. Our pastor Cliff and his wife Betty were there at the airport to meet us. Gary and Cliff decided it would be best if they went to the morgue alone to identify Sunshine’s body. Gary also wanted to talk with the detective on the case, to find out exactly what had happened to her.

Betty suggested she and I go and buy something to bury Sunshine in. I sat there silently as we drove to the store. Over and over in my mind went the words: buy something to bury Sunshine in.

I couldn't believe what was happening. Yesterday morning I'd been talking with the pastor about her wedding. In a few short days I thought I'd be seeing my beautiful baby girl walk down the aisle in her wedding gown. Now I was picking out something to bury her in.

I tell you, I tried hard to keep it together. But after a few minutes in the store, trying to shop, trying to pick out something I knew Sunshine would like...I just couldn't. I turned my face to the wall and cried.

Betty said, "I'll do it, Teresa. I'll pick something out." I knew this was painful for her, too. After a few minutes I pulled myself together as best I could and joined Betty. We finally decided on a beautiful white ruffled gown. It was exactly to Sunshine's taste. She would have loved it.

The pastor's home was attached to the church. As soon as we got there I went into the church to pray. I looked at the pulpit...This is where we sang together. I looked at the place where Sunshine usually sat. I remembered the last service we attended, the Sunday just before we left. She and Rick had sat there beside me, and I could hear them whispering during the song service about their wedding and about how God was going to use them.

I went back into the pastor's house. I had to call Rick and find out what happened to him. I dialed his number, but there was no answer.

When Gary and our pastor came back, I was sitting in the church again, and Gary came and found me. He had a very stern look on his face. "Did you see her?"

"Yes," he answered, and looked away.

"How does she look?"

"Don't ask. Just don't ask."

"Please tell me something. Is it her? Is it Sunshine?"

"Yes," he said.

"Are you positive it's her?"

"Yes, I'm positive. Now don't ask me any more. Believe me, you don't want to know. It's best you remember her as she was."

"Well, how did this happen? What happened to her?"

He sat down, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. After a few seconds I asked again, "What happened to her? Please tell me something."

He wouldn't look at me. "She was murdered, she died a horrible death, a horrible... You don't need to know any more, I can't talk about it anymore."

I kept silent, thinking, maybe he's right. Maybe I don't need to know any more. Truthfully, I don't think I could have handled it.

After spending the night with Betty and Cliff, we flew back to Florida the next morning. We made arrangements to have Sunshine's body sent to where the rest of us were, to be buried there.

Sissy and her husband met us at the airport. It seemed like a thousand years since I'd been in our own home. Everything was pleasant and happy, and then our whole world turned upside down.

We had to make arrangements for Sunshine's arrival and choose a casket. How horribly difficult that was. I kept slipping back into denial, kept thinking they were wrong. Sunshine was loved too much by God. He wouldn't let something like that happen to her; she'll walk in the door any minute, I know it, and she'll smile and say it's been a big mistake...Oh, God, I know what I have to do. Even though we had to have closed-casket service, I knew that for my sanity, I had to see her. I had to know in my mind, my soul, my spirit that my Sunshine was gone, that it was really Sunshine in this casket.

The police in Texas delayed Sunshine's body for two days, saying they needed it for evidence, but finally it arrived and we had her memorial service at 7:00 in the evening. Sonya arranged and rearranged all the flowers that had been sent. It was the last thing she would be able to do for Sunshine, after watching over her ever since she was born.

I repeatedly asked Gary if I could see her, if I could hold her just one more time. At first he said no, that it was best that I remember her as she used to be and not as she was now. But I persisted. I understood his reaction, his protectiveness of her and of me, but I had to at least be able to hold her hand one more time. I had to know. I had no choice.

After all the family had viewed the casket and said their goodbyes to her, I asked if they would all leave the room so I could be alone with my Sunshine just one more time.

Sonya came up to me. "Mom, are you sure this is what you want to do?"

"I'm sure *I have to*, Sonya. I have no choice."

Gary was still the only one who had seen her. They all reluctantly left the room, and we closed the doors. Gary covered her face with a towelette. He told me, "Just don't look at her face."

I lifted the top half of the casket lid. She had on the gown that Betty and I had picked out for her, but, God, that didn't look like her.

I looked at her arms. There was a lot of makeup and body putty on her, but the marks up and down her arms were still visible. Her hands were under the bottom lid. God, this doesn't look at all like Sunshine. This isn't her. I reached under the bottom lid and pulled out one of her hands.

My heart fell sickeningly. "My God!" I whispered.

Beside all the other horrible marks on her arms, she had holes in her wrist. Holes in her wrist! Oh, my God, no one had told me about this – she'd been crucified!

But it still didn't look like Sunshine. As strange as it may sound, and even though I did know it was her...I couldn't see her. I saw Jesus lying there. The marks on the arms: that was Jesus. But, no, that was my baby girl. How could this be? I didn't understand, but suddenly I felt comforted, so comforted by the fact that I knew Jesus was lying there. Yes, even there, Jesus was in her place.

My God, what had she gone through, I wondered, but then it kept coming to me, Christ was in her place. Tears ran down my face. My God, look at the holes in her arms, she was crucified but, no, Christ was in her place.

Oh, beloved, I know this must sound bizarre to you, but I could not see Sunshine laying there. I saw Christ. God, what have You done for us? Could we even remotely understand Your sacrifice? The horrible, horrible suffering You endured for us – I see it here, here in this casket.

I closed the lid. I didn't need to see any more. I had seen as much as I could stand, and as much as I needed to know was right there in front of me. I knew this was the body of Sunshine, but I also knew she wasn't there anymore. I had this strange, rushing feeling. I knew she was happy now, full of joy, full of peace. She had everything that anyone could ever want, and more. Oh, precious Jesus, thank You so for loving us, for suffering and dying for us. How I love You! I don't understand it all, but I thank You.

The following day was Sunshine's funeral. The very day she was to be married, we were burying her. The pastor who was to perform her wedding was now giving her funeral service. The brothers who were to be her best man and ring bearer were now her pallbearers. The cousins who were to be ushers were pallbearers, and the bridesmaids were now sitting with tears in their eyes.

Chapter 11

THE GOWN

After Sunshine's service Daron fell into deep depression. He lay in his bed day after day, just looking at the ceiling, tears seeping from his eyes. He wouldn't say or do anything. We all tried to talk with him and convince him to join the family. I sat beside his bed and read the Bible to him. His cousin Sonny (Sissy's oldest son) would come in Daron's room and just sit beside him.

Sonny and Daron had been best friends all their lives. I knew Sonny felt Daron's pain deeply, as well as his own. He had adored Sunshine and had tried to call her several times the day he and the rest of Sissy's family were on the way to Florida.

All of us were very concerned for Daron. Besides how close he and Sunshine had been, we also knew his feelings of protectiveness for her might lead him to feel it was his duty to avenge her death. Only occasionally would he speak, and then only to ask, "Have they got them yet? Are they arrested?" I'd have to answer, "No, son, not yet." Then he'd go back to silently watching the ceiling. I kept trying to convince him the police would get them eventually and that we didn't have to concern ourselves with it.

"They will be captured and punished," I kept telling him, but I was deeply afraid for him. I knew that if something wasn't done soon, he'd be leaving. Day after day I prayed for him, that somehow Daron would be released from this terrible grief

The day we had gone back to Texas, Gary talked with the detective. He told Gary that day who had done this to Sunshine. The detective knew them well, and gave him a lot of background information on them, especially the leader and his wife. He told Gary that they had killed several times before, and had gotten away with it. But this time, even though it might take him a while, he promised he'd get them. So, with that promise, we left it up to him and his department.

I couldn't believe what had happened to our once-happy family. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get Gary, Dean, or Daron to talk about Sunshine. Gary would say to me "She's gone. We can't change that, so we're better off to try to forget her."

Not only was this impossible for me, I couldn't see how he could even imagine forgetting her. And, to my way of thinking, the silence just made matters worse for everyone. Everyone seemed to be avoiding conversation on any subject, even eye contact. And although the days were bad enough, the nights were like a bad horror movie.

Dean wouldn't talk at all. He'd busy himself during the day by playing solitary basketball in the driveway or reading his law books. He had wanted to be an attorney since he was nine. At that age he checked out books at the public library on law. By now he had an extensive law library of his own. Many of the books were gifts from Sunshine. She had encouraged him and taken a lot of interest in his studies.

Now he often read himself to sleep at night. After he fell asleep, I would hear him thrashing around in his bed and screaming, “No, no, don’t hit her! Don’t hit her!” He’d break out in a cold sweat. I’d run and wake him, try to hold him, comfort him, but at age 15, he wouldn’t let me do this for him anymore. He seemed angry that I had invaded his privacy, although he wouldn’t be rude to me.

Oh, Dean, my sweet, precious, considerate son – how wounded was his sweet, loving spirit. Night after night, for weeks, the nightmares came. I walked the halls, anointing everything, from Dean’s and Daron’s headboards and doors to their foreheads after they fell asleep. I laid out their Bibles, opened to Psalm 23. I put as many Christian items out as possible. And, yes, from the start, I suggested counseling, but no one would agree to go or even hear of it.

Satan would have loved to destroy each and every member of the family through Sunshine’s death. He tried his best. If it wasn’t Dean, it was Daron or my husband who woke up screaming in the night. I didn’t know what to do, except walk the halls and pray. I needed peace, I needed to be near my Sunshine. I needed to be away from this evil. One night, I jumped into my car and drove to the cemetery. I had to be close to her.

I sat beside her grave and softly sang the songs she and I had sung together. I made crosses for her out of the pine needles that had fallen on her grave from the large pine tree that sheltered her.

I began going to the cemetery every night, and it got to the point where during the day I would look forward to going there. I felt peace there.

One evening, over four weeks after her death, after everyone had been asleep for a while, I noticed her wedding dress still hanging in the garment bag in my closet. I had honored her request that no one see it until her wedding. I got the dress out of the bag, and without another thought I ran to the car with it and drove off.

I had been so anxious for her to see it. Please understand – I know that doesn’t excuse my behavior, but I was confused and in deep grief, not capable of rational thought. I had this huge hole in my heart, Sunshine’s place. I felt so constantly crippled, like a large part of my very being was gone. In every stitch of her wedding gown there was love and anticipation. It was, beyond a doubt, the most beautiful thing I’d ever made, so perfect, so exact to her specifications.

An enormous statue of an angel that stood just above Sunshine helped me find her spot quickly. I parked the car, took her gown, and laid it on her grave. Then I sat there looking up at the angel.

“Are you the one who’s watching over her now? Are you the one who visited her in the hospital...or the one who took her little hand and led her to find me when I had fallen off the cliff?” Of course, he didn’t answer, but I was comforted by his presence.

“No one will ever hurt her again,” I told him. “No one can do anything to hurt her now, not now!” I don’t know who the angel was supposed to represent, but I felt comfort in calling him Michael, God’s mightiest warrior.

I looked at the gown lying there on her grave. *It’s yours, baby, it’s just the way you wanted it.* I don’t know why I didn’t choose to bury her in it – the thought never crossed my mind at the time of her funeral.

“You never got to see it, Sunshine. You’ll never get to wear it, but it’s yours, baby,” I said as I fussed over the gown to make sure it was lying perfectly with no wrinkles. It had to be just right. I knew deep in my spirit that this was not healthy, that this was not a good mental or spiritual situation to be in. But my maternal sense was so outraged, my compulsion so complete – I had to be with her. I had to give her gown to her.

More than anything in the world, I wanted to join her in death. How easy it would be to die right here! The emotional pain was so horrible...the thought of suicide seemed so comforting in comparison. I began thinking of ways to go about it, and decided that the next night I’d do it. I’d bring something and do it right here. “Then I’ll be with you, baby. I’ll be out of this horrible world and with you.”

I sat there beside her, singing, barely able to sound the words for crying so hard. “You are my Sunshine, my only Sunshine, you make me hap–”

That instant, as though the whole earth and sky shook, I felt my body tremble violently and I heard these words: “She’s not here, she’s with Me. Leave here and never come back!”

Frightened, I screamed, “God! Please, no!” I ran to my car and sped out of there as fast as I could go. I had heard God speak to me often, through the Holy Spirit, in a still, soft, loving inner voice, but this was as loud and thunderous as a herd of buffalo.

Oh, God, I thought, I’m so sorry. I’ve displeased You, I know, please forgive me. Even before I was back at the house I was feeling God’s love again, so abundant. I began singing, this time to God.

When I got home, I slipped silently into bed. I never visited the graveyard again... that was one small step taken in climbing the mountain of grief that was smothering our family.

Dean still would not talk about Sunshine’s death. He was so solemn in his grief. One afternoon I was in the kitchen, and Dean walked past me to the back door. “Where are you going, son?” I asked him, trying to strike up a conversation.

“Just out,” he answered. That short, snappish answer was completely unlike Dean. It hurt me a little, although I understood.

“Can we pray, son?” I asked, taking a few steps toward him.

“What for, Mom?” he said, lowering his head. I could see tears coming into his eyes for the first time since Sunshine’s death. “We prayed for Sunshine every day, Mom. What good did it do?” He turned and walked out the door. I felt so hurt by his question. I truly had no answer for him, but I knew in my heart I would get one. God would reveal to all of us what good it does to pray, if something like this is going to happen anyway.

I began reading my Bible more diligently than ever before. It truly seemed like a new book to me. The stories were still the same, but I saw their meaning in a new light. I found myself hurrying through my daily tasks so I could go back to reading my Bible. I had to find the answer to Dean’s question. I couldn’t, and wouldn’t, tell him the kind of clichés we hear so often: “Well, it was God’s will.” I had to find out why. I knew something was badly out of synch in this Christianity of ours.

After all the protective hedges I’d prayed around her, quoting all the scriptures referring to protection, health, wealth, you name it...If it was in the Bible and positive, I claimed it for all of my children. So what went wrong? Why is Sunshine dead now?... And not just dead, but from what little I know, she died such a long, horrible, suffering death. Why is her mutilated body now laying in the grave? Why, God?

I read my King James version, underlining all the scriptures pertinent to my questions. Then I read my Living Bible. I even looked up certain words in my Greek and Hebrew Bibles. I’ve always had the comfort of knowing that no matter what the question, if you truly search the Bible, you will always find your answer.

I wished that this had occurred to me after my mother killed herself when the preacher told me that regardless of her life, she would go to hell. I believed him then. I was only a teenager and wasn’t sound enough to search out the scriptures for myself.

Day after day, every spare minute I had was spent either reading my Bible or on my knees praying for the answer. It was at this time that God spoke in my spirit and told me to write this book. I questioned Him repeatedly about it. Not only did I recognize that I wasn’t a writer, but I could see no value whatsoever in a book about death, suffering and confusion.

Nevertheless, He told me to do it, so I took daily notes of conversations and situations I recalled, recording the details of them as accurately as I could. I had no idea how long it would take, or what other actions it would require of me. I only knew I had to be obedient. I could never have imagined what was to come.

Chapter 12

PHONE CALLS

One night I remembered that Gary had received the police report on Sunshine's murder. I got up and eased his wallet out of his pants pocket. He was sound asleep. I had never done this before, but I felt compelled to know who these people were who had done this horrible thing.

I slipped into the bathroom and thumbed through his wallet until I found it, even though I was more than a little fearful of having that information. Once I knew who and where these people were, would I be able to contain myself? Or, in some grief-crazed moment, would I go and do to them just what they did to her? I knew I was physically capable of it, and there was no doubt I felt I had the justification, but then I would be completely, utterly out of God's will. That alone scared me so much that I saw I didn't need to fear myself or my behavior. Nevertheless, when I found the report, I prayed, *God, I plead the blood of Jesus over any information I may find in this. I rebuke satan from using any of this against me. Somehow You, Father God, will get the glory.*

I knew the story on the police report was a lie. I had been told that from the beginning – but I was curious about the names, addresses and phone numbers. I wanted to know who these people were. I wrote down the information I felt so desperate to get. Then I put everything back just as I had found it.

I looked at the names for several minutes. James and Helen were the main subjects of the report, and I was certain they were the ones who had murdered Sunshine. *God, now that I have this, what do You want me to do with it? Do I call them? Do I go back to Texas and confront them? Just what do I do?* From what Gary said, the detective blamed most of what happened to Sunshine on James.

But then God spoke to me and told me to pray for Helen. I admit that at the time I felt God was being a little unfair. *God, I thought, You want me to pray for someone You know tortured and murdered my Sunshine?*

But, for obedience and strictly for obedience, I began praying for Helen. I didn't have a heart for her; I didn't have sympathy or concern for her. I hurt too deeply for that. In fact, what I really felt for her was contempt. I wanted her and James to be captured and punished. And at that time I felt no punishment could have been too severe for them.

But God said to pray for her, and pray I did. At first, I could only pray, *God, I bring Helen and this situation before You. I lay it at the foot of Jesus' cross.* Then, as time went on, my prayers became more direct. Day after day, prayer after prayer, I began pleading for God's protection and guidance in Helen's life. I rebuked the obvious satanic influence over her. I pled the blood of Jesus over her and prayed for her to confess – not for my benefit, but for hers. Day after day, week after week, I prayed for Helen until finally, one afternoon, the detective called me. "Well," he said, "I just wanted to let you

know that this afternoon Helen came in and signed a full confession. She freely admitted that she and James did murder Sunshine.” I was elated. It would soon be over.

What is it in our human psyches that demands resolution? Why do we have such a driving need to see something like this through to completion – any kind of completion – before we can let go? I don’t know, but I was convinced that this aspect of Sunshine’s death was going to be resolved, and that our whole family would experience a kind of release. James and Helen would now go to court and be convicted of all their horrible crimes.

Then the detective went on: “We found another girl and two men that I’m sure James and Helen murdered. They were supposed friends of James and Helen, and I think they were killed because they knew too much about Sunshine’s death.”

“Did Helen confess about their deaths, also?” I asked him,

“No. I didn’t question her about them – I wanted to get them nailed on Sunshine’s murder first. Now Helen is afraid that James is going to kill her for confessing.”

“Can’t you put her in protective custody?”

“I guess we’ll have to,” he answered.

Shortly after we hung up I felt impressed to buy Helen a Bible. This was not easy for me, but God had impressed on me to do it. I walked through the Bible bookstore, praying every step of the way. *God, give me courage to do what You’ve asked me to do.* Finally, after fighting with satan, I bought a red Bible and took it home. I shared the news with Sissy and told her about God having me get the Bible for Helen. She and I sat on my couch and underlined scriptures on forgiveness, and wrote several scripture references on salvation in the front of the Bible. I also enclosed this letter to Helen:

Dear Helen,

First, permit me to introduce myself. I’m Teresa, the mother of Sunshine. I can’t begin to tell you the loss and hurt I feel from the death of Sunshine. She was so very special, so blessed, and since you knew her personally, I’m sure you knew how close she and I were. She was truly the Sunshine of my life, but I know she’s with our Savior now. I’m writing you this letter to let you know how grateful and relieved I am to hear of your confession. I’ve been praying for you since Sunshine’s death. Whatever the reason, Helen, your confession is your first step to God. I don’t know what’s in store for you, as far as your life on this earth is concerned. What I do know is, it’s your eternal soul that counts, and God forgives, no matter what the sin or transgression. Jesus died for you, Helen, and He wants you to know that He loves you and, no matter what you’ve done, you can come to Him. Sissy said you told her that as a child you knew God. As with most children of God, satan works harder and uses more of his evil demons to corrupt, to use them for his own work rather than God’s. I’m sure he did this to you.

Please know, Helen, I'm not judging you. We're all sinners saved by God's grace. And all sins are forgiven if we just pray and accept Jesus in our lives as our Lord and Master and personal savior. He wants to save you, Helen, and give you a new beginning, and make you a child of His. Just call on His name.

Sincerely in Christ,

Teresa

(I'll explain later how Sissy and Helen met.)

I folded the letter, put it into the Bible, and sent it to the detective to be given to Helen.

Three days later the detective called me again. "James tried to have me killed today. He hired a hitman, but I caught him. I have the gun here in my desk that he tried to kill me with," he said.

"How do you know James hired him?" I asked him.

"Because he confessed that James paid him a thousand dollars to kill me."

"Well, that ought to make the case against James even stronger."

"Yes. I also have statements from four of Sunshine's friends to the effect that James and Helen came by their house the night they murdered Sunshine, saying that they were going to find her and kill her. I've got him now. He'll never get out after this."

"Good. Now James won't be able to kill anyone else, right?"

"Right," he answered. "Well, I know of four he killed before Sunshine, and at least three after. That's eight so far, that I know of, and only God knows how many more."

Then I told him, "Well, I'm glad you're not on that list, detective."

"Me, too," he said.

"Were any of the others that were murdered from other states?" I asked.

"Yes, I know there were some in South Carolina."

"Has the F.B.I. been called in yet?"

"Yes."

"What have they found?"

“I don’t know; our investigations are totally separate.”

“Well, don’t you-all collaborate on your findings?”

“Sometimes,” he answered.

“Doesn’t the F.B.I. know about the other seven?”

“Yes, I’m sure they do. They told me about the three that were killed before Sunshine.”

“My God, why hasn’t this man been caught before now?” I asked, aghast. “How in the world can a mass murderer get away with killing so many people – how can he still be free?”

“Well, he won’t be free long. I have all I need to put him away for good.”

“That’s so good to hear. I’m not concerned for revenge’s sake, but I pray to God he can’t kill again and put another family through what we’ve been through. How soon until he’s behind bars?”

“Real soon, real soon.” Then the detective lowered his voice and said, “A friend of mine who is a Texas Ranger told me that James will not be prosecuted, that I won’t be able to get him charged. But I will. I’ll get him put away. I’ve been after him too long to let it go now.”

“Why should your friend say that, detective?”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to get James. I promise you that.”

We said our goodbyes and hung up. I had a lot of unanswered questions in my mind, and some of the things he had said were confusing to me, but I knew in my spirit somehow that all this would come together. Somehow I would know, in time.

One evening, about two weeks after I sent the Bible and letter to Helen, we were all settled in for the night. Daron, Dean, my husband and I were all watching Christian TV, which had become my lifeline. Still fairly new to the area, I had no long-term Christian friends nearby, except for my immediate family. Watching Christian programs gave me some encouragement.

It was shortly after ten when the phone rang. Immediately, I got a feeling that something significant was about to happen.

I picked up the phone and said hello. A woman’s voice said, “Sunshine’s mother?”

The question made me hesitate before answering, “Yes?” It seemed like a strange way to start a conversation.

Again the woman asked, “Sunshine’s mother?” Without thinking, I said, “Yes, Helen, it’s me.”

She paused a few seconds, and without another word, hung up.

I don’t know how I knew it was Helen. Why had she hung up? Because I had called her by name, I supposed. How did she get my phone number? How did she even know where I lived? I sat back down, then began crying and praying for her. *God, please have her call me back. Have her explain! I have so many questions I’d like to ask her.* I desperately needed to know why they murdered Sunshine. *Why, God? Why did You permit it? We need to be released from the guilt of this. What could I have done to keep this from happening? What could Daron have done, or Dean...or You, Father God? It’s all still so confusing, and we all suffer so much from guilt. Dear, sweet Jesus, please have her call me back. She needs to know that You forgive. I’ll tell her God, I’ll show her. I know I explained that in the letter, but I’d like to talk to her.*

About ten minutes later the phone rang again. I ran and answered it.

“Hello.”

Again, the question: “Sunshine’s mother?”

“Yes, it is. Please talk to me. Please don’t hang up this time. Please talk to me.”

She paused a long time, then said, “I don’t know if I can.”

“This is Helen, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know if I can answer you...I don’t know if I can talk to you.”

I started to speak again, and she hung up.

I resumed praying for her. God, she sounded like such a tormented soul! Help her, Father, and help me to understand and help her. I waited and waited, praying for her to call again. Eleven o’clock, twelve o’clock, one o’clock. I finally went to bed.

As I lay there dozing, in my mind I kept praying, *Father God, please have her call again. I know so little about Sunshine’s death.* I fell asleep, and the phone rang again at two-thirty. I ran and picked it up. “Hello, please don’t hang up – hello?”

After a long silence: “Sunshine’s mother?”

“Yes, Helen, don’t hang up. Please talk with me.”

“He’ll kill me, you know.”

“Who, Helen? Who will kill you?”

“James. He’s already tried. He’ll kill me for talking with you. I made the confession...but I don’t know why.”

“I do, Helen. I know why.”

“Why?”

“Because I prayed for you, too.”

“You prayed. Huh,” she snorted. “Your God has no control over me.” She was bitterly scornful.

“If my God has no control over you, then why did you confess? Why are you talking to me now?”

“Just you shut up and listen!” she snapped.

I knew I had made her angry, and I didn’t want her to hang up again, so I said, “Okay, Helen, I’ll listen. Go ahead.”

“I guess you want to know why we murdered Sunshine.”

“Yes, Helen, I would like to know. It would help me so much to understand.”

She paused a long time. “You wouldn’t understand it if I told you,” she said contemptuously.

I felt she was trying to provoke me, but this was too important for me to let her get the better of me now. “Maybe not, Helen, but I’d like to try. I just need to know why. Why Sunshine? Please tell me.”

There was another long silence. Then, in a very arrogant tone, she said, “We ran the ad to attract girls like her. We chose her from the beginning.”

“Chose her for what, Helen? What are you talking about?”

“You ignorant, (blankety-blank) Christians, you have no idea what’s going on, do you? You live in your own little (blankety-blank) dream world.”

“Well, Helen, why don’t you inform me?” I already had a good idea of what she was talking about. But I wanted to hear her say it, in her own words. “What, Helen? What do us ignorant Christians have no idea about?”

“We do whatever is necessary. You understand?”

“No, I don’t, Helen. Explain it to me.”

“I’m a witch. My mother and grandmother were witches. We do whatever is necessary. You understand!”

“Helen, please explain to me why it was necessary to murder Sunshine. Where does she fit into all this?” I was pushing her. I wanted to hear her confirm what I had suspected from the moment I saw Sunshine in the casket.

“Sunshine told me all I needed to know when I interviewed her for employment,” Helen sneered.

“What’s that, Helen?”

“Well, she said, ‘I’m a Christian – I won’t do anything that will hurt my walk with God.’”

Of course, I’d heard Sunshine say this often. “Explain more, Helen, please.”

“It’s time you all knew, you’re losers,” she said. She then went on to tell me every detail of the evening they murdered Sunshine. She told me how and why, when and where.

There was no guilt or remorse in her explanation. On the contrary, she was bragging about what she had done. I regret that I didn’t have more of a spiritual impact on her. I tried. I sincerely wanted to lead her to Christ, but she would have absolutely none of it. Her last statement was, “The police will never get us. You’ll see. You’ll see.”

What did she mean? How dare she think she could get away with such a horrible crime! No, I reassured myself. I thanked God for her call, for the insight I received from it. Now I could begin to understand why and how this happened.

Although I tried several times to get in touch with the detective, to tell him about Helen calling me, he either wasn’t in or was too busy. I always left messages for him to call me back A.S.A.P. I even wrote him several times, but weeks went by, and he didn’t answer me.

So, feeling more or less abandoned by the police, I retained an attorney in Texas. Two weeks after I hired him he declined to handle my case on the grounds that he was unable to obtain any records pertaining to Sunshine’s murder. I figured this was just lawyer-talk, and I asked him point-blank, “Don’t I have any rights in this case? I’m her mother. Don’t I have a right to know anything?” He had no answers for me, and I didn’t know where else to go. So I just prayed and waited.

Three long months later, I received this letter from the detective on Sunshine’s case:

Mr. and Mrs. _____,

I received your letter regarding Sunshine's murder. I conducted a very extensive and detailed investigation of the period up to the time she was killed. The instrument of her death was a claw hammer, and she was beaten for a long period of time before she expired. She put up a struggle, but was finally overcome by her attackers. Without wanting to cause any more grief by disturbing you with more details, I have filed murder charges against James and Helen for killing Sunshine.

I sent the case to the district attorney's office last September. It has since been brought before the Grand Jury for review. They both have been brought before the Grand Jury for further investigation, and we will continue with the investigation until they are indicted for the murder. At this time the case is before the Grand Jury for review of the evidence we have accumulated to date. If it is found to be sufficient for indictment, I will be given warrants for their arrest. If not, then the investigation will continue.

I wish to end this on a personal note. I felt that I knew Sunshine when she was with us. My investigation revealed that she was a very attractive and likeable person. She was beautiful, and as her friends say, she spread sunshine wherever she went. When her life was taken from us, the world that never knew her will miss the glorious ray of life that surrounded her.

Please feel free to contact me anytime. I understand your loss and am never too busy for either of you.

Detective _____,

I read this letter to the family. Something was finally being done! After all these months, there would finally be a trial, and Helen and James would be convicted.

After I read the letter, Daron's response was, "Will they really get them now, Mom? Will they really get their punishment?"

"I can only pray so, Daron."

Daron came and put his arm around me. "They'll never know how bad they hurt us."

"I know, son, I know."

Dean stood looking at us, shaking his head in disbelief. "What is it, Dean?" I asked.

"Mom, don't you think – if they had all that evidence from the beginning – they would have already arrested them? That letter's just another delay, to drag it out longer. They've had all the evidence they needed from day one to convict them, if they really wanted to."

It's strange he said that. I hadn't told the family about my conversation with Helen.

It was a long eight weeks until we heard from the detective again. About four-thirty in the afternoon the phone rang. "Teresa?"

"Yes," I answered.

"This is Detective _____. I just wanted to let you know there'll be a hearing for James in three weeks. I'm sure we have enough evidence to convict him."

"Well, it's taken a long time, but I hope it all goes well. I sincerely hope you really have all the evidence you need for a conviction."

"I do," he answered.

"What about Helen?"

"Well...Helen's dead."

"Oh, my God. Who did it?"

"I'm sure it was James, although there's no evidence of it. We found her body in the river. She'd been shot in the head."

My God..."Does her death hurt your case against James?" I asked.

"I don't think so." He gave me the date of the hearing, and I told him one of us would be there.

The family debated extensively about my going to the hearing. Sissy insisted that because she had to be there at that time to be with Tinker, I should let her go in my place. I didn't want it that way, but my husband insisted it would be better for me. So it was decided that Sissy would go to the hearing.

Tinker had been subpoenaed because James had denied even knowing Sunshine, and Tinker knew this was a lie. James had gone to Tinker's on two different occasions. She was still afraid of him.

Sissy arrived at Tinker's the day before the hearing. The next morning, after praying that justice would be done, they arrived at the courthouse an hour early. When the bailiff escorted James and two other prisoners into the courtroom, Tinker pointed James out to Sissy. Sissy looked at him as he slouched lazily in his chair, with one arm hanging over the side and a very self-satisfied grin on his face.

The judge came in and took his seat. On one side of the room James' lawyer, a tall, slender, black-haired lady with a reputation for defending hardened criminals, sat with

her assistant next to her. There was no one on the state's side.

The judge asked, "Where's the district attorney?"

"He hasn't made it in yet, Your Honor," the bailiff said.

The judge got up and stormed out of the courtroom. James gave Sissy a cocky, arrogant look, as if to say, "I've already won." Sissy sat there praying, *God, don't let him get away with this. Please don't let this end here.*

In a few minutes the assistant district attorney came running in, sat down, and began searching his papers. Shortly the judge returned and asked him, "Are you ready, John, for James _____'s case?"

John replied, "No, Your Honor. I don't have the evidence, and there is only one witness here." He was referring to Tinker, who was sitting directly behind him.

The judge said sharply, "Get on the phone, then, John. If you don't have your act together in seven days, this man goes free."

Again, James grinned at Sissy. Sissy waited another hour as the judge heard two other cases. Then she went to the front of the courtroom, where John was standing. As she stood there, the bailiff took the two other prisoners out and left James standing there only a few feet away from Sissy. They stared into each other's eyes, James still wearing his cocky grin. Tinker came and stood beside Sissy, and told James, "You won't get away with this, James. You know you murdered Sunshine, and I know it, too. You won't get away with it."

James just looked at her and laughed. He bent down and started talking with the stenographer. The bailiff returned, patted James on the back, and said, "I'll be back to get you in a little bit, okay, buddy?" James answered, "Okay."

Then Sissy saw her opportunity to speak with the assistant district attorney. "Sir," she said, "I'm the aunt to Sunshine, the girl James murdered. Could you please tell me why they sent an assistant district attorney, totally unprepared, to prosecute a mass murderer like James?"

"Well," John answered, "because of the confusion, I was just given the case an hour ago, and I haven't had time to get it together. It seems there's a lot of documents missing." Then, with a guarded look, he said, "I can't tell you any more."

Frustrated, Sissy cried out, "Where is the justice?" and walked out of the courtroom.

I, too, have to earnestly question where the justice is in our so-called judicial system. There was a silent crash; it fell, and nobody heard or saw it happen. Some don't even know yet that it's gone. But they'll find out; I guarantee they will.

Sissy flew home and told me what had happened at the hearing. How, with all the evidence they had gathered, could they assign an assistant district attorney with no knowledge and absolutely no preparation to this case? Does mass murder really rate so low among their priorities? I've heard of traffic violators who got more time and attention in court than this.

I understand that Sunshine was nothing to them, that she had no profound importance to their lives, but, dear God in heaven – wouldn't justice require that they at least come prepared to do their jobs?

I recalled the detective's words on the phone, the first time I talked with him. "James has murdered many times before. He's killed again and again, and I know it. And I haven't been able to prosecute him. But this time I will. I have all the evidence I need." So now I wondered, why wasn't this case prepared properly? I tried again and again to call the detective with no response from him. He was always out of the office, or just couldn't come to the phone.

The judge had given the state one week to get their act together. The state didn't make it. One week after the preliminary hearing, James walked out, a free man.

Chapter 13

ANOTHER QUEST

The travesty in the courtroom was like salt poured into our family's fresh, deep wounds. Sunshine's death was still so very hard to accept, and now our hope and trust in the judicial system was shattered. Satan was still using every weapon in his arsenal to destroy every one of us. Gary and I were having major marital problems. Dean was beginning to fail in school and seemed to have lost all his ambition. A wedge of grief separated each of us from the others, and there were still the screams in the night.

Daron was especially discouraged that the judicial system had failed us so badly. As despondent as he already was, he became even more withdrawn and isolated, and nothing I could do made any difference to him. I could only watch him suffer. He started going out late at night and not returning until I was asleep. When I waited up for him, he wouldn't talk with me. One morning I realized his bed hadn't been slept in, and I cried to God, *Please don't let satan steal another one of my children.* Thumbing through Daron's Bible, I saw he had highlighted a lot of scriptures and written many notes in the margins. *He loves You, Lord, he's Yours; please look out for him.*

I waited anxiously all day for Daron to come home. I talked to Dean and Sissy's sons – none of them had any idea where Daron was. That night I knelt beside his bed and prayed for him, hoping he'd walk in any minute. At three-thirty I went to bed exhausted. *God, I prayed, help him. He hurts so bad. I know he even feels I've let him down –* I told him again and again that the police would get Sunshine's murderers, and they'd failed. Only the distance had kept Daron from flying off the handle and doing something drastic, something that would have ended him in prison. Fourteen hundred miles was the only deterrent.

Then I remembered the night I was sitting out in the yard, and God spoke to me and told me to move the family to Florida. God knew this was going to happen. He knew if He didn't get us out of there, the temptation to drive the three miles to where those people lived would have been too much, and not only for Daron. *Oh, God, I still don't understand it all! I know You knew, but You moved us – why? God, why didn't You just keep this from happening to Sunshine? Why did she feel she was supposed to stay behind? God, I beg of You, please don't let satan steal another one of my children!*

My heart sank when I thought of Daron going back to Texas. He could already be there by now. *God, he could have already done something senseless and be in jail and there's nothing I can do about it – Stop him, God. Don't let this happen! Please, God. Daron is not at all vengeful, but this is so much for him to deal with, so much for one family to bear.*

When the fourth day came, I began driving around the neighborhood and asking his friends if anyone might possibly know where Daron had gone. Yes, Daron was an adult by then, but he was still my son – and I wasn't about to let satan steal him. Daron had always been so reliable, and now he even failed to show up for work. Something had to

be seriously wrong. Oh, God – could they have murdered him?...No. I knew in my spirit Daron was still alive, though he had to be in trouble. He'd promised me, after all, that he wouldn't go back to Texas and look for them.

I saw one of his friends coming out of a convenience store, so I pulled into the parking lot next to his car. "Hey, Bob, have you seen Daron?"

"No, not in several days."

"Bob, he hasn't been home in four days, and I'm very concerned. If you have any idea where he is, please tell me."

"Well...you might try Crackville."

"Crackville? Where's that? What's that?"

"You know...drug town. On the west side."

"Oh, my God," I said. Drug town – oh, God. "Bob, please – do you know anything about Daron getting on drugs?"

"All I know is, he's been hitting them pretty hard." It was difficult for him to tell me. He was breaking the young people's code of silence, but this was too important to keep quiet about.

"Where exactly is this Crackville, and how do I find it?"

Bob gave me directions. It didn't take long to find out why they called it Crackville. On the first street in that neighborhood, I rolled down my window to speak to three guys standing on the corner. Before I could get a single word out, one of them came running over with a tiny package in his hand, saying, "It's good stuff. Ten dollars."

"I don't want that," I said. "I'm looking for my son," and I gave him Daron's description. By then, the two others had approached and were standing by my car too.

"No, I haven't seen him," the first one said, "but if I do, I'll tell him you're looking for him."

"Fair enough," I said, and drove on. Two blocks further down, the same scene repeated itself, but this guy wasn't as polite. He ordered me out of his neighborhood with a few choice words.

Before the night was over, I must have asked twenty people if they'd seen Daron or if anyone knew where else I might look for him. One guy suggested a housing project on the south side. He warned me, though, not to go there at night, and said, "They don't appreciate white people asking questions after dark." He laughed, but he wasn't joking.

When I got home at about 1:30 I prayed that Daron would be there and that I'd made this ridiculous venture in vain. But he wasn't there, and he still didn't come home. The next day, this time with an eight-by-ten photo of him, Dean and I went back to Crackville, asking everyone we saw and showing them Daron's picture. Then we went to the housing project. After three more days of this, a girl said she recognized him, and that he'd been there the night before. I thanked her. I was glad I was on the right track, that Daron was here, alive and not in Texas...but to know he was frequenting that neighborhood meant that he was, indeed, on drugs. I kept searching. I showed his picture and asked, "Have you seen this guy? He's my son. I'm not here to cause you trouble. I just want to find Daron." Although I did get a few threats, and a rock thrown at my back, most of them were cooperative and answered my questions.

Eventually they began to recognize my car from a distance. They already knew my question, and were asking each other by the time I pulled up. I began hearing answers like, "He was here a couple of hours ago," and "He just left a few minutes ago." It always seemed I had just missed him.

The nights dragged into weeks. I'd gone to the police and asked them to help me find him. "He's an adult," they said. "We can't pick him up just because he didn't come home."

"Please – you don't understand. He's on drugs, and he's killing himself. Can't you arrest him for something?"

"Not until he's done something to get arrested for."

"But everyone I talk to tells me he looks worse every day. He's lost a lot of weight. They say he looks like death. Please. Can't you help me find him?"

The police said they could not help me. They also asked that I stop going into that neighborhood at night, because they couldn't guarantee my safety. That really irritated me.

"You can't help me find him, but you think you can tell me not to look? Don't even think about stopping me, because I am going to look. And if you're so concerned about the danger in your neighborhoods, why don't you clean them up?" And I stormed out of there.

That night I was back in Crackville alone, looking for Daron. By then, he'd been missing for three weeks. I went down 14th Street, where most of the drug action was going on. I stopped to talk to a guy I'd spoken with so often, he'd begun calling me Mama.

"I saw Daron this afternoon, Mama," he said. "He looks bad. You better find him quick, he looks so bad. He don't weigh a hundred pounds. He's got a bad problem, Mama. He's almost dead. He could barely walk this afternoon."

“Where is he? Do you know?”

“I don’t know. But if you want to see him alive, you better find him quick.”

I hunted frantically until four in the morning, bound and determined satan wasn’t going to steal Daron. The next day I was back out searching at noon. I’d been fasting for eight days and vowed I would not eat until my Daron was back home. I drove from one drug area to another, all afternoon. Into the night I was showing people his picture, praying, really wrestling with satan. At 10:30 I said to satan, “You’re not going to get him! He’s God’s child and you’re NOT going to kill him!” I had to stop the car I was crying so hard. I knew it wasn’t safe to stop where I was, but I couldn’t see to drive. I sat and prayed, *God, please help me. Help Daron. Don’t let satan ruin him.*

When I could drive again, I went on. Immediately, I saw someone I’d talked to many times before. “Have you seen Daron?” I yelled to him out the window. He motioned me into a driveway and ran up to the car.

“I’m gonna tell you something, but you didn’t hear it from me. Okay?”

“Okay. Please. What is it?”

“Okay, there’s a big drug deal going down tonight, and I think Daron might be down there. If you want to see him alive, you better hurry – it’s going down now.”

“Where?”

“Well...I’ll tell you, but you better be cool. These guys are bad. I mean they’ll kill you if you mess with them, or if you mess up their deal.”

“I just want Daron. You know that. Where is it?”

He gave me directions, and I followed them exactly. Ahead of me on that dirt road I saw the house he told me about. There were about a dozen cars parked around it. The road was rough. I turned off my headlights and coasted toward the house, hoping to see Daron’s car or hear something. Within fifty feet of the house I heard a gun go off three times. I slammed on the brakes, threw the lever into “park” and lunged out of the car onto the dirt road. I was furious.

“NO, NO, NO, satan! You cannot have him, you cannot harm him, NO, I tell you, you can’t have him! He’s God’s child!” I screamed wildly. I fell to my knees and began beating the ground with my fists. “NO! YOU CANNOT HAVE HIM! He’s God’s child! Let him go! I pled the blood of Jesus over him! Now LET HIM GO!”

While I was screaming on my knees there in the middle of the road, cars started whizzing past me. I know I was out of my mind; I wanted Daron back so badly. One of the cars barely missed the bumper of my car; another splashed muddy water on me from the ruts in the road. As they were passing I was still screaming, “LET HIM GO, RIGHT NOW!”

Then I stopped and looked around. The house that had been surrounded by cars now looked vacant. No lights – nothing. I collapsed against the front bumper of my car and cried to God, *Help him, Father. Please.* When I had collected myself, I drove my car into the driveway of the house and went to the doorway. The door was open. I felt along the wall for the light switch and flipped it on, praying I wouldn't find Daron there dead. I saw blood on the floor and other signs of a fight in the house, but no one was there. Relieved, I went back to my car and tried to search some more, but by then I was worn out. I made it home about one o'clock.

I fell asleep praying, with one arm hanging off the bed as usual, and was awakened by something tugging on that arm. I opened my eyes and didn't see anything, so I thought I'd been dreaming...but a few seconds later, I felt it again. And I heard the faintest voice saying, "Help me, Mama. I'm dying." I sat up. There on the floor was Daron.

His frame was so terribly thin, his eyes so black and hollow. Oh, thank God, my son is home. He was so light in my arms. I carried him into the kitchen. I had known God would answer, had prepared for it – all Daron's favorite things to eat were waiting in the cabinets along with vitamins and weight-on pills. I'd brought a couch into the kitchen, and now I lay him down on it. I wiped his face with a warm washcloth and thanked God with every breath for bringing him home.

"I know you're hungry, son. What can I fix you?"

His voice was so faint I had to get right up to his face to hear him. "Mama, I'm about dead. I can hardly breathe."

It hurt so much to see him like that. I had already called drug rehabilitation places, many of them. They were all full. None had room for him – so I knew whatever had to be done for him was going to be done here at home, by me and God.

"We'll beat this, son," I told him. "I don't care what it takes, we'll beat it. You're God's child, and satan isn't going to steal you. You're God's child."

He whispered, "I know, Mama, I know," and dozed off.

I put a pillow under his head and covered him with a blanket, and began cooking his favorite meal. Being on my ninth day of fasting, I was anxious for food again too. I sat beside Daron with a tray and began feeding him. "We'll beat this, son," I kept telling him. He sat there with his eyes closed, barely chewing. Occasionally he'd fall asleep again, with food still in his mouth.

"Wake up, son, and chew. You've got to eat." I fed him as long as he would eat, and when he finally said "Enough," I was surprised at how much food I'd been able to get into him. Then I lay him back down and had a good meal myself, praying under my breath with every bite, *Thank You, God, for bringing him home. Thank You for giving me back my son.*

After washing the dishes, I knelt beside Daron and anointed him with oil, putting it on his head, his heart, his feet, his hands. As I prayed, I remembered when Daron was three years old and came down with acute infectious meningitis. After three days, and with 80% of his brain infected, the doctors had given up hope. They told me that if he did live, he would be a vegetable.

“Oh, no,” I’d said to them. “God didn’t give me a vegetable, and not only is he going to live, but I’m taking him home the same way he came into this world – one hundred percent whole.”

For three days and nights, I stood beside his door and prayed for him, being told time after time that he wouldn’t make it. Every life support system they had was hooked up to him, and there was absolutely no sign of life from him, not even an eyeblink, but I knew God wasn’t going to let us down. Daron would come out of this.

During the third day of my vigil, a nicely-dressed man approached me. “Are you the lady whose son is dying of meningitis?”

“He’s not dying,” I replied sharply, “He’ll go home soon, and he’ll go home totally well.”

“Oh,” the man said, “I agree. I just came to tell you. God spoke to me in my living room and gave me a vision of him as a young man. He was in his mid-twenties, preaching to a multitude of people. Then God told me to come and tell you that He’s heard your prayers. Your son is coming home whole.”

I cried, “Oh, thank You, God,” and I looked through the window at Daron. For the first time in many days, he lifted his little head, opened his eyes, and called out, “Mama! Come and get me out of this thing.”

The next morning I walked out of the hospital with a completely healthy child.

As I sat in my kitchen with Daron and recalled this incident, I said to God, he’s in his early twenties now – and I haven’t seen him preaching to a multitude yet. A smile of joy came over my face as I thought, God doesn’t lie! Daron is not only going to make it, but I stand on the word I got on that glorious day. He will someday be preaching to a multitude of people.

Even though Daron was asleep, I began speaking to him, words I felt were coming straight from God. “Son, any time you’re in bondage to your emotions – no matter how justified you may feel giving in to them – you’re putting yourself in satan’s grip, at his mercy, and he wants only to kill you. Your bondage makes you more vulnerable to satan. You are God’s child and God’s alone. I rebuke this spirit of vengeance from you, and give you, by the blood of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, a loving spirit of God.”

I lay on a pallet on the floor beside Daron and held his hand. I'll never let you go, I thought. I'll never give up. God's not through with you yet, son.

I wish I could say that this was the end of Daron's battle with drugs, but it wasn't. Satan worked hard on him. Daron was bound with grief, discouragement, the desire for revenge and disappointment with the judicial system. It was a long time before he was back on his feet and serving our Lord, but he's back. He's victorious, and I am so grateful.

Chapter 14

TINKER FREE AT LAST

I continued trying to get a hold of the detective on Sunshine's case. Besides wanting to know if they'd gotten any further with it, I wanted Sunshine's belongings. I had been told they were keeping them for evidence. Finally I was given permission to pick them up.

I also wanted to see Tinker. Sissy had told me Tinker was suffering a lot over Sunshine's death, not just grief but a great deal of guilt. I felt a need to talk with her, console her, help her, because I knew something of what she was going through. Satan had used the same guilt trip on me. I'd almost "iffed" myself to death: "if this," "if that," "If I'd have done this, or that..." I could guess how Tinker must be feeling. I also needed her to tell me personally about all the events leading up to Sunshine's murder. I constantly felt there was a truth God wanted me to find, and Tinker had been with Sunshine the night of the murder. My heart still cried out to God, why? Why did this happen to Sunshine – to all of us?

So I made arrangements to stay with Tinker and her children while I was in town to get Sunshine's things. Tinker's husband had left her, and she was now a single mother, working hard to support and care for her four children.

I felt God wanted me to go alone. I needed private time with Him. On the trip, while driving the long stretch of silent highway, I began praying out loud, "Oh God, just speak to me in my spirit; You know nothing in this world could ever happen to me that would make me turn against You, or blame You for a wrong, like I did as a child with my mother's death. But please, help me to understand. Then I felt in my spirit these words: God is love. He is the essence of love. Without Him, there is no love."

As much as I love my children, it's only a drop in the bucket compared to the love God has for them. So, then, why – why do things like Sunshine's horrible death happen? How could a God that loves her so much let her suffer and die the terrible way she did? But then how could He allow his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to suffer and die like He did? He did this by choice. Did Jesus suffer so we wouldn't have to? No. He suffered to cover our sins. There's no amount of suffering we could do to accomplish that. Then what did Sunshine have to suffer hours of torture for? Her death made no profound impact on the world. She covered no one's sins. Why, God?

I knew then, as I was driving to Texas, that one day I would find my answer – not only for me, but also for you, beloved.

Tinker looked so changed. I could sense the guilt she had been plagued with since Sunshine's death. "Oh, Tinker..." I said as I hugged her at the front door. I had always felt so close to her. She was the first child born between Sissy and me.

"Aunt Teresa, could you ever forgive me?"

“There’s nothing to forgive you for, Tinker.”

“Oh, yes, there is! You don’t know what happened that night. I could have saved Sunshine, but I didn’t. And now she’s dead, and it’s all my fault.” Tinker began crying and sat down at the kitchen table with her head in her hands. “God will never forgive me.”

“Oh, Tinker – you’re so wrong! God had already forgiven you, and I want you to know, no matter what you did or didn’t do, I forgive you, and you know Sunshine has too.” To help Tinker purge her soul of this guilt, I delved deeper. “What was it, Tinker, that you felt you could have done to save Sunshine? I want you to tell me the whole story.” Tinker told me about the night Sunshine was murdered. It was obvious she couldn’t have done anything to prevent it and obvious that satan had tormented her relentlessly since then.

Why were so many people being harmed so endlessly by the death of one person? Why were we all so bound by this, by grief and guilt, and worst of all, by silence? So much silence!

I spent that evening trying to convince Tinker that she was blameless, that there was absolutely nothing she could have done, no matter what she felt or thought – that Sunshine’s death was only allowed because God wanted it that way. (There, again: But why?)

Finally Tinker seemed to feel somewhat more at peace.

We went to sleep that night praising the Lord. Tinker’s spirit underwent considerable healing in those few hours. The burden of guilt she carried had destroyed her self-esteem, and caused her to do things she would never have done if satan hadn’t been jerking her around. The inward pain of guilt is surely one of the hardest to overcome. We must always be careful in judging others, and realize that God alone has the right to know why people do the things they do – and the right to judge them for it. As I lay there that night, I thanked God for the privilege of being there with Tinker, such a sweet and loving person.

The next morning I got up early. I was out before Tinker and the kids awoke, anxious to get Sunshine’s belongings. I’d already told Tinker the night before what my plans were. I arrived at the courthouse before the property room was open, so I sat and thought over the events of the past few days. It was good that I came, I felt joy in knowing Tinker was feeling so much better, again at peace with herself and our Lord. It was hard on her, being mother and father to four little children, but she was doing her best.

When the property room finally opened, I introduced myself to the sergeant on duty and asked for Sunshine’s things. He had to call up to the detective on the case for permission to give them to me. I asked whether I could go up and talk to the detective –

I'd never met him, and wanted to know why he hadn't been answering my letters and phone calls. But the detective told the sergeant he didn't have time just then. I was so anxious to get Sunshine's things. I let it go at that.

I recognized a lot of Christian things in the property room, and that the property sergeant himself was a Christian. I felt comforted by it, like someone there was on my side. He told me that Sunshine's death had really ministered to him, as well as to others there.

He handed me her purse, a box with her name and case number on it. It felt so sweet to have some of her things. I took them out to my car. I wanted to go somewhere special to look at them, so I decided to go to the park, where we had so much fun and joy at our luncheons. As I drove through the park entrance, I thought maybe, just maybe I would see someone we used to know – maybe even Bill. At the pavilion someone was sitting at one of the tables. It was dark under there, from my view, so I couldn't tell who it was, and yelled out my window, "Sir?"

He turned toward me, and I didn't recognize him. "Sir, could you tell me – do they still feed the street people here?"

"No, I don't think so. The police made them stop, but the guy who's doing it took it to his church. They feed them there now."

Curious about how much our outreach had grown, I asked, "How many? Do you know how many they feed?"

"Oh, a lot. Hundreds, I know, every day."

That made me feel good. God has used Sunshine and me to start something good. She'd be so proud. I rounded the corner and saw the bench where we'd had our first lunch, just Bill, Sunshine, and me. So many fond memories here...it's the perfect spot. I brought a comforter out of the car with me and found a nice spot on the grass right beside the bench. I remembered Sunshine sitting in this very spot one afternoon, when we had several of Bill's friends with us.

First I wanted to go through her purse. I recognized so many of the things in it: her yellow billfold, her make-up kit, her hair combs and barrettes...a couple of small boxes, one with a pair of earrings in it, the other with a small broach. I had been with her when she bought them. There were also four sheets of notebook paper she had written on, folded up. I put those aside, saving them to read last. I went through every little pocket, looked at everything and put it all back. Then I picked up the four sheets of paper, to read what she had written. The first one was her study of heaven, the one we'd done together while she was in the hospital. I read over it, remembering all the joy we'd had studying together. She had written notes in the margins. In the upper left corner was written, "In a little while, you will see me no more; and then after a little while you will see me. John 16:16." Then at the bottom she wrote in big bold letters, "Dear God, please give my Mama a beautiful mansion when she gets to heaven – she deserves it." I smiled when I saw that.

The next page was Sunshine's study of the disciples of Christ. Beside each name, she had written about their service and their manner of death. This is what she wrote:

"All is for the cause and love of Christ. Take the twelve apostles, all of whom were hand-picked as servants of God and Christ Jesus, Himself – all of whom He loved deeply. He personally trained them to serve His Father and His example. To them He was most impacting. It was so clear. He did not tell them, 'I'm doing this so you don't have to do anything.' No, He repeatedly told them that He was their teacher, their example, that He expected them to follow His footsteps, even to the cross. They all, except for Judas Iscariot, the traitor, lived in total service for our Lord, and suffered for our Lord, and felt it an honor to do so. And most died a tragic death for our Lord.

For example:

Matthew – a publican or tax collector, author of the book of Matthew. He was a very unlikeable man, to say the least, before his service to our Lord. He died a martyr's death.

Thomas – the one who wouldn't believe Jesus' resurrection until he put his hand in Jesus wound, thereby getting the nickname, 'Doubting Thomas.' He also suffered martyrdom at Mt. St. Thomas in India.

Simon – the zealot, one of the little-known followers. Tradition says that he, too, was crucified.

Philip – After preaching in Phrygia, he died a martyr's death in Heiropolis.

Peter – also known as Simon Peter, author of 1st and 2nd Peter. He, too, was crucified upside down in Rome.

Jude – sometimes called Thaddeus, who wrote the book of Jude. He died a martyr's death in Persia.

Andrew – brother of Peter, also is alleged to have died a martyr's death. Feeling unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as our Lord, he begged that his cross be different, so they crucified him on an x-shaped cross.

Bartholomew – who came from noble birth, a searcher of Scriptures, a scholar in law, gave his life totally to the Carpenter of Nazareth. Yet, while in India, he, too, was martyred for serving our Lord, filleted with knives.

James – the elder son of Zebedee, also brother to John. James suffered death by being beheaded by King Herod. He was the first to become a martyr for our Lord.

James, the Lessor – brother to Jude, also died a martyr, his body sawed in pieces.

Judas Iscariot – the traitor. He betrayed our Lord for 30 pieces of silver, then killed himself.

John, the Beloved – writer of so much of the New Testament. He wrote the gospel of John, 1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John and then Revelation. It was said that an attempt was made on his life with a chalice of poison, but God saved him. I believe that it was because Jesus gave him the responsibility of his mother when He was on the cross. He was the only disciple said to have died of natural causes.

Then there was Paul, sent to me, a Gentile, writer of thirteen books of the New Testament. He also died a martyr's death.

All of these guys are now living with our Jesus and in heaven. How I envy you. Oh, God, I love you so much.

Your daughter, Sunshine.

P.S. Dear God, if I may but honor You this much.

I turned the page over. This was written on the back:

Dear God,

Thank You for the privilege of this day, yet another day to serve You, and show You how very much I love

You. I ask, dear Lord, that You take this body that You've given me and use it for Yourself. I return this gift of life for Your gift of love. Let Your love so flow through me that no one can see me, but You shining through.

Nothing I could do within myself could count as a flicker, compared to Your glorious flame. My life, my love, my eternal soul is Yours, my precious Lord. Do with me as You wish. Use me in some way to glorify You. Make me an instrument of Your powerful existence. Use me, O my God. Shine through me to show Your power, to show your complete and total love through me. I am yours, Lord. Please use me.

Your daughter, Sunshine

I had mixed emotions as I read this. My God, I thought, what is this she wrote? Was she asking to be a martyr? I saw it in many ways throughout these pages. And I had the realization that her death was not only God's perfect will for her life, but her own will as well, although I don't think she realized it. Just before it happened, this was her heart.

I folded the pages and put them back into her purse. Then I opened the box. “Oh, dear Jesus,” I said. There were two bedsheets covered with blood – Sunshine’s blood, I knew. I couldn’t tell what color the sheets had been, they were so soaked. I think this was intended to scare me; these sheets belonged with the other evidence, with the police...but what hit me then was how much she had suffered. This blood was for you, God – could I have done the same? Could any of us? It’s a hard question to answer truthfully.

But how can we ever begin to live for Christ unless we’ve made the decision to die for Him? Isn’t it closer to the truth that we expect, someday, to get on some happy glory train, and ride off to heaven without ever having made a stand for our devotion to our Lord? Sunshine was right. Our Lord suffered and died, and Sunshine did, too, in much the same way. Should we not prepare ourselves, as Christians, for at least some of the same suffering?

I am so deeply concerned about preachers who speak only of the “healing health and wealth” to be found in the life of a spirit-filled believer. In my Bible, I find that we can – and must – expect suffering. Or do we actually think we’re better than Jesus? or that God is there to only serve us? When, where did we lose sight of the fact that we’re here to serve Him?

I took everything back to my car and left the park. I prayed, dear God, give us all the courage to fight the good fight, the courage to war with the satanic influences that are plaguing our nation. God will continue to raise and elevate us if we stand tall and true to *His* divine purpose.

I arrived back at Tinker’s and found her still in high spirits, but she had a deep suspicion that she, too, was in danger, that James and Helen were going to kill her too. She said this to me half a dozen times that evening. I told her what the detective had related to me, about Helen being dead, and told Tinker she had nothing to worry about from Helen.

After supper, Tinker put the kids to bed and we prayed. It seemed that the Holy Spirit was speaking to her. Afterward, she told me excitedly all God had said to her. God had given her many words of comfort, she said – but also, reason to believe He was going to take her home soon.

I told her she must have misunderstood, that it would be unusual for Him to tell anyone such a thing. But it was possible.

Tinker, for her part, was convinced of it.

As I left the next morning, Tinker and her kids waved goodbye. “Pray for me,” she hollered as I pulled out of her driveway.

“I will, sweetheart.” And I drove back to Florida.

Several months later, 300 miles from her home, Tinker's body was found alongside the highway. She, too, had been beaten to death. Observers said they saw her body being pushed out of an old grey van as it was going down the highway. No charges were filed, no suspect was ever brought before a judge, and no one was ever charged for her murder, even though Sissy and I pursued it.

But Tinker is free at last.

Chapter 15

IT'S ALL LOST

Much time has passed, and I've tried repeatedly to end this book. But God told me I had to go back to Texas. I was given two prophecies from two different women who didn't know me, didn't know each other, and surely knew nothing about this book. They both said I had to go back to where it began to find my ending. So I made another trip to Texas, although I knew the trail would be cold by then. It was a matter of obedience; I needed to finish the book and get some sense of closure for myself.

As soon as I got there, I began my own research into Sunshine's case. I went over all the information I had been given in the past – by the detective, from the police reports, as well as what Tinker had told me and the few others who knew something.

I was uncomfortable with contacting the detective. I called an old friend of mine who had lived there for many years and knew a lot of people in high places and low. I asked him to see if he could find out anything about Helen, James, the detective and the judge from the hearing – anything at all. Then I made a few more calls. On the third try, I found a friend of James and Helen, and she agreed to talk with me.

Now keep in mind that for some time I had believed Helen was dead. The detective had said so, and I had no reason to disbelieve him. I went to this woman's house and found two women there who knew James and Helen. One of the first things they told me was that they had last seen Helen a long time after I had been told she was dead. Helen was driving an old grey van. Did they remember the exact date? Yes, they did, because a close relative of theirs had died the same day they saw Helen. It was the day before Tinker's body was found. And Helen had told them she was going in that direction.

Pretty brazen, wasn't she? She wasn't the least bit worried about being caught, or about these two being questioned. They weren't questioned after Sunshine's death, although I can't begin to imagine why not, since they were so close to Helen.

They told me about Helen's and James' involvement in Sunshine's death. They said they knew beyond a doubt that Helen and James had murdered Sunshine, that Helen had admitted it – or, more exactly, she bragged about it to them, about what they did before and after. It was plain enough that they were frightened of Helen. When I asked them if they'd told the police, their response was, "We weren't asked."

I had found these two in five minutes and three phone calls, yet the detective hadn't managed to get in touch with them. This deeply disturbed me.

What did they think about the police's failure to contact them? "Don't you know? The police won't arrest Helen and James. Helen told us that herself."

"Why?"

They shrugged. Then they told me about Helen's involvement in satanism and witchcraft. "She's real powerful," they said. Somehow Helen had convinced them she had great and mighty powers; you could see it when they spoke of her. They were certainly afraid of her. "We're not her friends anymore – we only know her," they said. They willingly answered all my other questions.

I rented an efficiency apartment in a part of town where an out-of-state license plate would not attract attention. I no longer trusted the police. There were too many discrepancies in the stories they had given me. And I was determined, now, to get to the bottom of it all. I lay there in my bed, looking up at the ceiling, thinking: *The detective fiat lied to me. Why? Just to get me off his back? Was he hiding something? Just what was the deal here? I trusted him, but I don't anymore. I guess I shouldn't have from the beginning, but I was tied up with grief and I wanted to believe in him. I'm on my own in this now. If I find something out, or if there's trouble, I sure can't go to the police.*

I'm going to call that detective right now and tell him what I know, I decided. I'm angry!

I drove a few blocks to a pay phone, thinking about him tracing my call. I'm going to tell him I'm in town and that I will get to the bottom of this, regardless of all the run-around I've been given since Sunshine was murdered. I found his number in my wallet, dropped in my coin, and dialed. *Dear God, help me to do the right thing.* A woman answered.

"Could I speak to Detective _____?"

"He's busy."

"Just exactly what is he doing? This is important. I want to speak to him right now!"

"What's your name?"

"Teresa _____, and you tell him that if I don't speak to him right now, I'm coming to the police station with as many reporters as this town can muster up, and I'll sit there on the steps of the police station until he has the gall to come out and talk to me. We can do it that way, or he can talk to me now on the phone."

"I'll see if he's available. Your name, again?"

"Lady, don't play games with me. You've got my name, and you're fixing to get my face if you don't get Detective _____ on the phone right now."

He was on the line within a few seconds. "Yes, Teresa. What can I help you with?"

"You, Detective _____, can first tell me why you lied to me. You told me Helen was dead, that you found her floating in the river with a bullet in her head. Why did you lie?"

“I didn’t. I thought since she didn’t show up for court, she must be dead.”

I almost gagged when I heard this. “Wrong. You lied. You mean that you found someone floating in the river and assumed it was Helen, because she didn’t show up for court. Now, what kind of idiot do you think I am, or I should say, what kind of idiot are you if you believe this story of yours? As big a town as this is, don’t you have a finger printing pad? Or didn’t that cross your mind before you told me she was dead? Now another member of my family has been murdered, and those two are still scot-free. What in the world is this police department’s problem? You lie to good people and let mass murderers go free to keep killing!”

“Well, how do you know that Helen is alive?”

“Because I just talked to two of her friends – two that you and your seasoned team of detectives never bothered to contact – and they saw Helen long after you told me she was dead. She was at their house.”

“Who did you say they murdered – who was that? A family member?”

“My niece Tinker. She was found on the highway, pushed out of a van exactly like the one Helen was seen driving the day before.”

“Where? I don’t recall hearing about that one.”

“Louisiana. Her body was found in Louisiana. But she was abducted here!”

“Oh. Louisiana. No wonder I didn’t hear. That’s not our jurisdiction. That has nothing to do with me.”

“Oh, yes it does! You let them go in the first place. If you’d done your job on Sunshine’s case, they wouldn’t have been free to murder Tinker.”

“Well, I’m busy. I’ve got to go. By the way, I’ve taped this entire conversation.”

“Great! I hope you did. Are you going to use it against yourself for incompetence?” He hung up on me.

I went back to my little room. *God, I wasn’t very nice to him, but then he hasn’t treated me very well, either. What in the world is going on in this town? Have I messed myself up by talking to him before I could find out more? Should I have waited? No. Maybe he didn’t even realize I was here in town. Maybe he thinks I’m still in Florida.* I knew then I had better get moving on whatever information I was going to get that was still public record.

Early the next morning I was at the information counter at the police station. I gave the woman the number of Sunshine’s case and asked where I might go to get the transcript of the original police report. “Oh,” she said. “That’s child support.”

“No, ma’am, this isn’t a child-support case.”

She asked for the number again, and I showed her the edge of the report. She wrote it down and put it into her computer. “Yeah,” she said, “that’s a child-support case.”

I was getting short of patience. “Believe me. This is not a child-support case; this is a murder case.”

She said, “Well, you’ll have to go up and ask someone in Homicide, but that’s a child-support number. Someone must have made a mistake when it was filed.”

A mistake? I thought, irritated, more like about a hundred mistakes. I followed her directions to the homicide department and, still not wanting to give out any more information than I had to, I asked the woman at that desk, “How would someone get information on a case they were studying? By a number?”

“What’s the case number?”

“Well, I was given this case to study, and I thought it was a murder, but the lady downstairs says it’s child support. Could you help me check whether I was given the right number?”

She asked where I got the number. “From this old police report. I was kind of curious what happened to the people in it.”

“Well, let me see if I know them.” She looked at it. “I do recall something about this James _____, but this number is a child-support number.” She punched up James _____ on her computer. “Look – here’s his file, but there’s no number like this one at all.” I bent over and shared in her discovery, just amazed at how clever she was in finding this error. “Boy, you can’t trust these computers, can you?”

“Oh, this wasn’t a computer error. Someone must have put the wrong number on this report. Let me show you a homicide number.” She pointed to a place on the screen. Meanwhile, I was busy reading over James’ file: many arrests, the charges dropped for one reason and another. I asked her, “Do you happen to remember anything about this James _____?”

“Oh, sure, ol’ James has come up on my screen many times.”

“Has he ever been convicted of anything?”

“Well...” She looked at my police report again. “I don’t recall what happened in this case – my records don’t show him being convicted or acquitted. But you can go downstairs and ask the deputy if you can look at this file. I’ll give you the new number.”

“Great,” I said, taking it down. “I won’t be bothering the deputy, will I?”

“Oh, no, that’s one of his jobs. He’ll let you look all you want. He’ll even make copies for you; it’s all public record.”

“Well, thank you, ma’am. I sure appreciate you.”

Downstairs, the deputy in charge of records told me I couldn’t review the file today. “Come back at ten o’clock tomorrow. I’ll see if I can have it for you by then.”

I thanked him and left.

The next day when I reviewed the file, I was surprised at how little was in it. No transcripts of a court hearing, nothing but a few copies of subpoenas and a letter from an investigator on behalf of James’ attorney. I copied down the names that were unfamiliar to me and asked the deputy where the detectives’ findings were.

“Well, that would be in the sheriff’s files. You can’t get access to that. It’s a murder case and it’s still open.”

I asked for a few photocopies and left. By then I didn’t trust anyone at that police station, and I was glad to get out of there. I couldn’t blame them all – but I couldn’t know whose friends were whose, either.

Out of sight of the police station, I stopped the car and glanced over the investigator’s letter. There was a woman listed as a relative of Sunshine’s who was nothing of the kind, although her name was vaguely familiar to me. I drove to her address, recognizing the neighborhood. We had lived here years and years ago. The house had all the blinds closed, and from outside you couldn’t tell if anyone lived there or not. Someone peeked through a slit in the blinds when I knocked. I called the woman’s name. “Mrs. Vaughn! Could I talk with you?” I still didn’t know what to expect, whether I was dealing with a friend or an enemy.

“Who are you?” she called through the door.

“I’m Teresa. I used to live in this neighborhood. I thought I’d stop by and see you.”

“I know who you are. You’re Sunshine’s mother.”

The way she said it seemed strange. “Yes, ma’am. I’d like to talk with you. Would you open the door?”

I heard lock after lock turning in the door, and when she opened it a crack, I could barely see her face. “You were Sunshine’s girl scout leader, weren’t you?” I asked.

“Do you want to come in? Hurry up.”

I was shocked at how she looked. “How are you, Mrs. Vaughn?”

She had been so vibrant, so outgoing, and now her face was carved with fear. “Mrs. Vaughn, I came to ask why your name was on a report I got from the police about Sunshine’s case.”

“Why did you leave her? Why did you leave that little girl here alone? You just moved away and left her!”

“Mrs. Vaughn, it wasn’t like that. Please, would you tell me what you know about her death?”

“I know Helen killed her,” she said flatly.

“How do you know?”

“She told me!”

“Who told you?”

“Helen!”

“Do you know Helen?”

She peered out the window. “She’s going to kill me too. I know she is. I have to watch for her all the time.”

“Why would she kill you, Mrs. Vaughn?”

“Because I know too much.”

“Would you tell me what you know, and how it is that you know Helen?”

“She was here the night they murdered Sunshine. She was looking for her. She sat right here,” said Mrs. Vaughn, pointing to a chair across the room.

“And?...Mrs. Vaughn?”

“I couldn’t leave. She made me stay here. You know they had Sunshine locked in that room for three days, don’t you?”

“No, I hadn’t heard that.”

“Yes, three days they had that poor little thing locked up, beating her.”

“How do you know this, Mrs. Vaughn?”

“Helen’s a witch, you know.”

“Yes, I’ve heard, but I’d like you to tell me just why or how you got involved in this. How is it you know Helen?”

Mrs. Vaughn told me everything that led up to her name getting onto the investigator’s list – how she had unwillingly become part of this case.

Here is a short version of the story she told me. She and Sunshine had kept in touch through the years, although it was only occasional. Mrs. Vaughn’s name and number were in Sunshine’s wallet, where Helen got them. A few weeks before her death, Sunshine had visited Mrs. Vaughn, and mentioned Helen and James. It seemed she liked and trusted James (Ps. 43:1: the deceitful and unjust man), but not Helen. Helen had shown up at Mrs. Vaughn’s with the excuse she had come for some of Sunshine’s things, when in fact she was waiting for Sunshine to come there. She held Mrs. Vaughn captive while she waited. Apparently Helen thought Mrs. Vaughn was a relative because she was listed as “Aunt Bee” in Sunshine’s wallet – the kids had always affectionately called her that – and Helen believed Sunshine would go to Mrs. Vaughn for protection.

Mrs. Vaughn said she had been living in fear since Sunshine’s death and that she watched every car that came down the street. She even made her husband sleep in the living room to protect her from Helen. She rarely left the house and was cautious about answering the phone. I asked her if she loved the Lord, and she said yes, so I prayed with her to rebuke the spirit of fear that was tormenting her. That poor woman.

Later that afternoon, I felt I needed to be in a place that held fond memories, so I drove the twenty miles out into the country to our old home. I wouldn’t care if someone else was living there now. I could just sit in the car and reminisce. On the way there, I prayed, *God, what should be my next step?* I drove closer to the house where we once had so much joy, where I last saw my Sunshine standing in the driveway waving goodbye. When I rounded the last corner, I stopped. The house had been burned to the ground. There was nothing left but the charred frame. It really hurt to see it. I had personally done a lot of building on that house. Now it was charred ruins.

I put the car in reverse and backed away. God, will it ever stop hurting? Will there ever be a time when I don’t feel this emotional crushing? I want to be brave; I want to do whatever is necessary for You and my Sunshine, but sometimes I feel You’ve given me an unbearable task. Then, remembering her, I said, *Dear God, forgive me when I whine. Look at what she went through for You. Nothing I could do would begin to compare with her sacrifice.*

Often, I wanted to give up this search. I was tired of the pain of it, but I kept getting this spiritual nudging to go on, to keep searching until God said it was finished.

Back at my little efficiency, my old friend Johnny was waiting. He got out of his truck and hurried over to me. I said, “Hey, Johnny. How are you?”

“Come on, hurry. Let’s go in,” he said.

“What is it?”

“We have to talk.”

We went in and I shut the door. Johnny went right behind me and turned the lock. “Don’t do that again, Teresa,” he said.

“Do what? What did I do?”

“Don’t ever come in without locking your door.”

“Okay, Johnny, okay. Whatever you say.”

“You asked me to get some information for you, and I did.”

“What have you found out?”

“An old friend of mine is a retired deputy sheriff. He knew enough about it to ask me to tell you to drop it.”

“Drop it? That’s impossible. I can’t do that.”

“Well, if you want to keep breathing, you’d better drop it.”

“Who’s going to kill me?”

“Just drop it, and drop it now!” he yelled at me.

“No! I can’t!” I yelled back. “I’m not afraid of James and Helen. They can’t touch one hair on my head without God’s permission.”

“It isn’t them you really have to worry about.”

“Well, who then?”

“Just drop it,” he repeated.

“Just who do I have to fear? Will you tell me that?”

“I can’t tell you any more than I already have.”

“Well, I sure won’t stop without any explanation at all!”

He motioned for me to sit down. “Just listen, all right? Let me paint you a little scenario, and I want you to just listen.”

I nodded.

“Okay. Let’s say there’s this businessman who, for many reasons – be they financial, or he’s on some kind of power kick – decides to benefit himself. He buys or operates a brothel or a massage parlor or whatever you want to call it, but it boils down to one thing: he has women who do sexual favors for money.”

I nodded. “Go on.”

“Okay, now this businessman throws a party, at some exclusive club, hotel, his home or wherever, and invites as many influential people as he can. Chances are it’s taken him some time to build up this rapport with them, but, nevertheless, he invites these influential people – some of them might be police, lawyers, maybe even a judge or a Congressman – you know, people who can make a difference to any kind of situation this guy might find himself in. Now, at this big party he has these girls give his influential friends any and every kind of sexual favor they can dream up with their sick, devious minds. And, unbeknownst to these influential friends, the businessman is taking all kinds of pictures of them in compromising positions. Then, guess what? If this businessman were ever to get into any kind of trouble, all he’d have to do is tell one of his influential friends about the pictures he happened to take at his party. Are you beginning to understand, Teresa?”

“Of course I do. James and Helen keep getting off because they blackmail whoever they have to with these smut pictures. Right?”

“You’ve got it. Now, can you see how much danger you’re in? You can’t trust anyone, because you never know whether the one you go to might have been a photo’d friend.”

“I understand, Johnny.”

“Okay, now will you drop it and go back home?”

“No. I won’t drop it, but I promise you I’ll be very careful. I won’t trust anyone.”

“Oh, Teresa! Just go home! Go back to being a housewife, or whatever you were doing. You couldn’t bring Sunshine back if you exposed every corrupt person in the world. Just go home!”

I hugged his neck and sincerely thanked him for his concern.

“I’ll pray about it,” I said. “I’ll do whatever God wants me to do.”

He shook his head. “I warned you,” he said, and closed the door behind him.

I would have loved to go home at that point. I didn’t want to be there in the first place. But I knew there was something else, something yet to be completed.

The next morning I got out the police report I'd gone over so many times. *God, what is it? What am I supposed to find?* I looked at the clippings, the autopsy report, the investigator's letter, everything I'd put together. There was a number listed of a woman who had been subpoenaed. It was long distance, but...I got in my car and stopped to get a lot of change in case I did get a hold of her. Some guy answered and she was there. Could she help me in trying to find out why James and Helen had murdered Sunshine? To my amazement, she agreed and began telling me quite openly about all the events leading to Sunshine's death. It was clear she had been there as a forced participant. Her story correlated point-for-point with what I'd been told by Tinker, Helen, the two women and with what the autopsy indicated. I felt it was helping her to tell me these things, that she needed to. I assured her I would never reveal her identity. I prayed for her after she had finished telling her story, and she thanked me for calling.

I was relieved when I returned to the efficiency. I felt in my spirit that she would be all right now that she had confessed everything to someone – now she'd be able to forgive herself, and maybe find the Lord.

It was days before I felt the urge to do anything more. I wrote letters home telling Sissy and another dear friend all the details of what I had found, just in case something did happen to me. Then they'd have some idea why, and possibly even who. Mind you, I wasn't afraid to die – to go home to my Jesus and my Sunshine wouldn't hurt me in the slightest – but then I wouldn't be able to finish this book.

I remembered a conversation with the detective a long time ago, when he'd told me there were some pictures of Sunshine in his file, and that I could have them later. I decided to call him and see whether he would give me those pictures now.

When I finally got him on the phone, he told me I was welcome to the pictures and that he'd tell the property sergeant to get them ready for me and that I should call there the next day. I thanked him for that, remembering the property sergeant and all the Christian things on his desk and around the room.

The next morning I called. The property sergeant said he'd go to the homicide file and get the pictures out of the file jacket, and that I should "call back tomorrow."

I did. He told me he had looked all through the homicide files and couldn't find the one on Sunshine's murder. He said that it was nowhere in the homicide department and he asked me again to call back the next day, because he would go to the archives across town to look for Sunshine's file – he was sure it had been transferred there.

So I called back one day later. "Did you find the file?"

"No, it's nowhere to be found. I looked all through the archives, under every possible number, and it's not there."

"Tell me something, Sergeant. What, besides Sunshine's pictures was in that file?"

“Everything pertaining to the case.”

“Like what? I’m trying to understand.”

“Everything. All the evidence, all the statements, all the confessions.”

“If new evidence were obtained, could the case be reopened?”

“Reopen what?” the sergeant said. “I’m telling you, it’s like it never happened. There’s no case to reopen. It’s all lost!”

And at the moment I hung up God said to me, “It’s finished. You can go home now.”

I want you to know, beloved, that this isn’t meant to be a book of revenge. I don’t need revenge; we don’t need revenge; you don’t need revenge. It’s simply a true story told by a present-day Christian, of what Christians are really dealing with – and will very probably have to deal with a lot more, in the not-so-distant future.

Chapter 16

SUNSHINE EMPOWERED

I stayed in Texas a few more days to make sure I was reacting to God's persuasion, and not to my own frustration and fatigue. I was full of conflicting feelings, still asking God, is this it? Is this all? No resolution – it really ends here? Eventually I became convinced that I could go home, that at least for now my job was done.

Before I left, I went one last time to the place where Sunshine was murdered. It was painful to go there, and as I pulled up in the driveway, I wondered why I had chosen to come back – was God leading me here, where my Sunshine's last breath left her body?

I went through to the little room where it happened. The walls had been painted, but I could still see traces of the satanic symbols that had been written on the walls in the blood of my sweet girl. The horror of her ordeal flooded my mind again. I said to God, *Where is the justice in all this?* Remember when that pastor said to Sunshine and me that she had a mighty work to do for God, and told me to prepare myself? *Is this what You revealed to him – was this Sunshine's mighty work?*

I was able to reconstruct most of what happened to Sunshine from what I was told by the people I talked to about her. But first, here is what I learned about James and Helen.

James was born to a very wealthy family in the east and raised with the best of everything. After being educated in private schools and graduating from West Point, he served as an officer in the military. He has a highly charismatic personality, warm and outgoing. He dresses well, and appears to have everything going for him. Helen's grandparents were from Haiti. She was raised in the Midwest by her grandmother. Tall, thin and elegant, she managed to raise herself to respectability by her appearance. She claims her uncle is an attorney in this city. She is very straightforward, projecting an authoritative and intimidating persona.

Now I'll pick up where we left off, at our departure for Florida.

As we drove off, Sunshine, Rick, Sissy and her children stood waving goodbye to us. Then Sunshine turned to Sissy and put her arm around her. "Oh, Aunt Carol, I miss them already. But I know I've made the right decision."

She began to cry, and Sissy hugged her. "It's only for a short time, Sunshine. In seven weeks we'll all be back together again." Sissy and her kids started back for their house, and Sunshine noticed a little white kitten near our house. It had been hanging around for the past few days. It was a little wild and hadn't let anyone pet it or pick it up. She went across the road toward the kitten and knelt down within a few feet of it. "They're gone, kitty," she said. "No one lives here anymore." The kitten came to her and rubbed against her ankle. She picked it up. "I'll take care of you," she said to it, holding it against her face to feel the soft fur. "It's okay, Angel. You're not alone." She put the

kitten gently down on the grass, and as she stood up it scampered off into the woods next to the house. Rick left for work, and Sunshine went back to Sissy's.

She told Sissy she was going to start looking for a job the next day, that she needed to make as much money as she could for the trip and their new home. The next day Sissy asked her how the job hunt was going. "Well, I see a couple of ads I could call about," Sunshine said. "I kinda hate to start a new job knowing I only have six weeks, but we could use the money."

"Yes, it takes a lot of money to set up housekeeping. And some new experience will do you good," Sissy told her.

Two days and three interviews later, Sissy asked again how things were going. "Okay, I guess. On one interview, the lady said she was really looking for someone with more experience, but she'd keep me in mind." The next afternoon, Sunshine reported, "The man said my educational background is good but I look like I'm only about fourteen."

"Did you show him your driver's license?"

"I offered to, but he said he needed somebody more mature."

"Oh, well. Keep looking, Sunshine."

She did, for several more days. In the evenings she came to feed the kitten and talk with Sissy. One night she said, "I saw an ad in today's paper I'm going to call about. It sounds right."

"What is it?"

"The ad says 'Receptionist secretary, no experience needed, will train, wholesome qualities, excellent earning potential, relaxed environment,' and then the phone number."

"That sounds good," Sissy said, "but be sure you're fair to them – tell them you'll be leaving in six weeks."

"Oh, I will, Aunt Carol. I'll be totally up-front with them."

The next morning Sunshine called for an appointment, hoping they could interview her that day. A woman answered the phone: "Morton Roofing and Construction Company." Sunshine thought, *Bingo! A construction company! Mama and I just worked for one of those, so I have some experience already.* She made an appointment to be interviewed early that afternoon. She was told that James and Helen owned several businesses, often worked out of their home and needed someone there; that they were frequently out of town and wanted someone they could depend on and trust – preferably a Christian – to stay at the house, answer the phone and do general office work and house tasks.

Right on time, Sunshine arrived at the home of Helen and James. Helen immediately said she liked Sunshine's appearance and attitude. Then, as she had always done, Sunshine said, "Ma'am, I want you to know: I'm a Christian, and I won't do anything that will jeopardize my relationship with God."

"That's perfect," Helen replied, "Just perfect."

Sunshine gave Helen her personal references: our pastor and his wife, and a few others from church. Then she told about her education and work background. She explained that she could only work for six weeks because her family had gone to Florida and she and her fiancé were to join them then.

"That's all right," Helen said. "Six weeks are better than none. We need someone right away. My husband and I need to go out of town this weekend and we need someone to stay here."

"I can," Sunshine said. "I'll answer your phone; I'll even do jobs around the house if you like."

"Great. You're hired."

"My Mama has always met my employers, but she's not here now. Would you talk with my Aunt Carol instead? I know it would make my Mama more comfortable this way."

Helen agreed readily. Then she showed Sunshine around their beautiful house. There was one large, lovely bedroom she said Sunshine could use if she wanted to.

After another hour or so of conversation, Sunshine mentioned her Aunt Carol again. "Could you talk with her?"

"Sure," Helen said. "Let's go have some lunch, and we'll drive out there. I'll convince your aunt that you're in good hands."

Helen bought lunch for the two of them in a restaurant, and they drove out to Sissy's.

Sissy noticed the unfamiliar car coming up the driveway. When she came out of the house, she saw Sunshine getting out on the passenger side. "Hi, Aunt Carol. This is Helen, my new boss. We just came to talk with you since Mama's not here."

"Hi, Helen," Sissy said. "Please come and visit for a while." They went to the lawn chairs where Sissy usually entertained, at the big oak tree in her parklike yard. It was full of flowers and perfectly groomed, comfortable and inviting. Sissy looked at Helen. "Sunshine did tell you that we'll all be going to Florida?"

"Yes."

“We’ll be leaving in six days. Sunshine and Rick will be leaving five weeks after us.”

“I know. She explained all that,” Helen said.

Sissy, being Sissy, began telling Helen all about God. She even went and got her guitar, and they sang Christian songs. Sunshine was obviously very happy with how things were turning out.

Soon Helen said it was time to go. She had to get back to work and James would be home soon. Could Sunshine start work immediately? She wanted James to meet Sunshine, and make sure Sunshine was familiar with her job by the weekend so they could leave without worry.

Sunshine said she wanted to talk with Rick first and pick up some of her things that were with him. Helen said she couldn’t stay and wait until Rick got off work, but they could stop by Rick’s house and get Sunshine’s things, and Sunshine could call Rick later that evening.

Sunshine also asked Helen if they could stop by her cousin Tinker’s later that evening, and Helen agreed. Then they left Sissy’s.

That evening, Sunshine knocked at Tinker’s door with her two new bosses beside her. “Tinker, I’d like you to meet Helen and James _____. They own a construction and roofing company, and they just hired me today.”

Tinker was confused as to why they were there with Sunshine.

“What is your job, Sunshine? What were you hired for?”

“Well, Helen says I’m their personal secretary. They need me to stay in their home and do stuff there. They have a real nice house. Helen showed me a bedroom I could use. It’s a real nice place, and I know it will work out fine. I took Helen out to ask your mother, and she seemed to think it’s okay.”

Tinker invited them in and offered them refreshments, but James declined. “We really must be going. You want to get your things, Sunshine?”

Sunshine said “Yes, sir,” and went back to the bedroom she had been sharing with Tinker’s daughters. She came back out with her suitcase. “Let me give you my new address and phone number, Tinker.”

“Good, Sunshine...well, James, Helen, it’s nice to have met you-all. Take good care of our Sunshine.”

“We will,” Helen answered. And the three of them left.

After unpacking her things at James' and Helen's, Sunshine called Rick and told him all about her day. Rick was very ill at ease over the urgency Helen and James had expressed about Sunshine moving in with them, but he said he understood. It did seem like a good opportunity for her to work and save money while they were waiting to leave.

Helen and James took Sunshine over to see Tinker and her kids one more time. It was Tinker's impression that whenever she tried to talk with Sunshine, Helen would interrupt and dominate the conversation, and Sunshine stayed quiet. Tinker knew something was wrong – she could feel Sunshine's wounded spirit – but with her four kids and all her own troubles, she let it pass. She attributed Sunshine's mood to her missing the rest of the family and wanting the weeks of waiting to be over.

Nobody could tell me much about what happened to Sunshine before the night she was murdered. She showed up alone at Tinker's once and told Tinker about all the things Helen and James had done to her.

They had beaten her many times. Once, they were in the car on the way to their house on the south side, Sunshine in the back seat and Helen and someone else in the front. Sunshine began quietly singing a Christian song and Helen went into a rage. She stopped the car in the parking lot of a shopping center, pulled out a gun and beat Sunshine with it. Then she showed Sunshine one of my letters and said that if Sunshine didn't straighten out, she had my address and would get on a plane that night and kill me and the rest of the family before evening.

Sunshine did escape from them that evening, and swore out a warrant for Helen's arrest (it's documented), but James and Helen were waiting for her in their car outside the police station. They dragged her into the car and beat her again, very badly. They told her they weren't going to beat her to death that night because they had something special in mind for her.

She also told Tinker that they took her to a place on the south side and left her tied up there in a small room for three days. Just before they let her loose, Helen brought in the kitten Sunshine had been looking after. She cut the kitten's throat and smeared its blood all over Sunshine's face.

Then they took her to Las Vegas with them. She knew something was going to happen to her, because one of the people who met them at the airport asked whether she was "the girl," and James had said yes. So, after they registered at a hotel and Helen went away for a few minutes, Sunshine fought with James and got away from him. She ran and walked down a highway toward a small town nearby. Why didn't she go to the police? Because in Texas she had been told over and over by James and Helen that the police would not help her. And in fact, the police hadn't. On the highway she met a Christian who offered to buy her a bus ticket. (In her purse I found a note she had written to herself – it said she owed this man money.) Sunshine came back to Texas, went straight to Tinker's and told Tinker everything that had happened. James and Helen, of course, had flown back to Texas by this time, and they got to Tinker's place first. They missed Sunshine there.

As incredible as it sounds, you have to understand the audacity of these people. They're not stupid. They knew they had already gotten away with many other murders, so they were not at all backward about proclaiming what they were going to do. They told Tinker they were going to kill Sunshine. Helen told four of Sunshine's friends, too. (I learned this from the detective. The four friends gave statements to this effect.) Naturally, Tinker with her four little kids, was scared to death of these people, so after they left and Sunshine arrived, Tinker told her she couldn't stay there. She suggested that Sunshine find Rick and get out of town immediately. Sunshine said she would, and left Tinker's.

Rick was out when Sunshine called. She didn't know what else to do; James and Helen had gone to a lot of trouble to convince her the police wouldn't do anything to stop them. Around this time, Helen was at Mrs. Vaughn's waiting for Sunshine to show up there. On her way back to Tinker's Sunshine stopped at a church, but it was locked. She had nowhere else to turn, except Rick's place. So from Tinker's place she took a bus and got off at a convenience store that all of us had gone to many times. No one there had seen Rick that night. She went back out to a phone booth to call Rick again.

The information I have from this point on was given to me by Helen herself, as well as others: Helen and James were aware that we all used this convenience store. They went there to look for Sunshine, and found her standing at the pay phone. James got out of his car, threw a cord over Sunshine's head and around her throat, twisted the cord, and yanked her back into their car. Helen sped off to a place they had just a few miles from there. There fellow satan-worshippers were waiting for them.

I already mentioned that Helen is of Haitian descent. She had not only taken up some of their traditions, but incorporated some of her own. Two hundred years ago some Haitians made a pact with satan in the third week of August, and now, during that week, their commitment was reaffirmed by the offering of human sacrifices. Helen told me that she and James would be greatly elevated in power and be given 50,000 souls to rule over because of their sacrifice of Sunshine. The sacrifice of a Christian is supposed to increase their power especially.

They dragged Sunshine by the cord around her neck into a back room where the four other satan-worshippers were waiting. The room was lit with candles. They had drawn a pentagram on the floor and placed a chair in the center of it. They stripped Sunshine and tied her in the chair. It was important to them that she proclaim or deny she was a servant of Jesus Christ.

"I want you to tell them what you are," Helen yelled at her.

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to tell what you are!" Helen shrieked.

Then Sunshine understood what they wanted to know. She shouted, "I am a Christian. I serve my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me..."

Helen, who had been standing there holding a large dagger, now raised the dagger in the air with both hands and looked at each of the others, who nodded in turn for her to go ahead. They had heard it from Sunshine's own lips. Helen turned around with the dagger and slit Sunshine's throat.

Sunshine cried out, "Mama...oh, God, help my Mama," and went on reciting the twenty-third Psalm. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..." She was now bleeding profusely from the jugular, and they walked in a circle around her, chanting their praises to satan, each with a chalice in his hand. Then they stood in a circle around her, each one chanting in turn. One by one they each came forward and put a chalice to her throat, filling it with her blood. When all six chalices were full, they chanted again, put the chalices to their lips and drank Sunshine's blood. With more of her blood they wrote symbols on the walls proclaiming satan and scattered the rest around the room.

They hadn't expected Sunshine to keep on saying the twenty-third Psalm. It made them mad; it offended their ritual. So they took turns hitting Sunshine with a claw hammer, counting the blows – thirty-nine blows with a claw hammer. They aimed mostly at her mouth and face, because she was still reciting. Her face and jaw were completely crushed, yet she continued repeating the twenty-third Psalm. In the natural, this should not have been possible. So now they were really infuriated.

Helen told one of them to go and get a board and some nails. They untied her. Her blood-covered body fell to the floor, and they tossed the chair to one side so they could put the five-foot length of two-by-four in the center of the pentagram. Helen screamed orders, and they positioned Sunshine on the board. They had some difficulty getting her hands apart (out of the prayer position) to tie her arms to the board, so they broke one of her arms with the hammer. Sunshine turned her hands over to clutch the two-by-four. Then Helen hammered nails into Sunshine's wrists.

Only God knows how Sunshine managed to continue repeating the Psalm. She tried to slide herself out of the pentagram, and Helen insisted they pull her back in, not by her legs, but by the board she was nailed to. They tortured her for about three and a half hours. I don't know how long it was supposed to last, but they were interrupted when one of them said he saw light coming in under the door. He thought it was an approaching car, and hurried out of the room to check. He returned, saying "There's lights out there, someone's out there. Let's get out of here!"

Helen screamed at them to take Sunshine off the board. They pulled the nails and untied the rope; then they all ran out the side door to where their cars were parked and drove away.

Someone had called the police. I don't know who she was; from what I gathered, she was found murdered twelve days later. I wasn't told whether she was involved, whether she worked for James, or what. But the police did arrive. Meanwhile, James and Helen had gone back to their home and changed their clothes. They returned to their place on the south side, where they told their story, that Sunshine was staying there and someone had broken in while they were out, and so on. This is what was put on the original police report. Sunshine was still alive, though only barely, and still murmuring the twenty-third Psalm when the police arrived. The detective bent down to her to hear what she was saying. Her last words were, "God help them." At six o'clock Sunday morning, Sunshine went home to our Lord.

Right now, throughout the world for the first time since Noah, murder is the number one cause of death. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be..." (Matthew 24:37) I can't begin to tell you the pain I feel in knowing what my little Sunshine went through. But truly, it is overshadowed by the joy and pride I have in knowing where she is now.

Chapter 17

ROMANS 8:28

One Sunday morning after I returned from Texas, I went to church with Daron and Dean. It started off like any other Sunday, although I'd had another one of those nightmares where I saw Sunshine's torture happening over and over again. For some time I had been seeing her mutilated body everywhere, while awake as well as asleep.

At church that morning during the song service, the three of us were standing with arms raised in praise to our Lord. Tears began streaming down my face, and my mind focused absolutely on the love and adoration I felt for my Lord. Even though I didn't understand everything about what had happened, I now knew with every breath in my body, with every ounce of me, that I would forever and always love and praise my Lord. Never again would I, or could I, blame my Heavenly Father for something I didn't understand.

Suddenly I found myself up near the ceiling of the church. I turned and looked back to where I had been standing, and there was my body still standing next to Daron and Dean. My arms were still raised in praise. I realized then that I was out of my body – my physical self was over there, and my spiritual self was going on an exciting journey.

Looking in front of me from up there, I saw a large, beautiful angel, and I anxiously reached out to him. The next thing I knew, we were going through the darkened sky. The sky was lit by what I knew were the prayers of the saints back on earth – columns of light moving upward. Some were long and bright and brilliant; some were smaller, and some were very dim and slight. The larger ones were about a foot in diameter and six or seven feet long, and the smallest about an inch in diameter and a foot long. The small ones were weak and wobbly, and looked gnawed. They climbed upward uncertainly, and I wondered if they would make it to where they were going. But the large prayers shot straight up, fast, bold and strong. I saw that these prayers were front-loaded with praise. It was praise for our Lord that gave them speed and power.

In these mighty prayers crowding the dark sky I could also see the love and devotion of the sender, and near the bottom of each one were the sender's unselfish requests. It was so obvious to me that these were the prayers that went directly to the throne of God Almighty – nothing was going to slow them down. It wasn't the importance of the sender that made the difference, but the purity of the sender's heart. Some prayers had been sent up by big people in a loud and flashy way, but their hearts were shallow and their loud prayers were bitten and gnawed by demons that pervaded the atmosphere over the earth. It made me sad to see the slow, dim prayers. I was thinking, I know they'll get there, but with so little power, how will they get God's attention? But the bold, spirit-filled, praise-loaded prayers were like bright rockets in the sky.

Next, I was standing and looking through a kind of porthole into heaven. I could never have imagined anything as good, as perfect and beautiful as the scene I was looking at. Not only the beauty I could see with my eyes, but the beauty of the joy and

perfect ecstasy. No moment of happiness I had experienced on earth could compare with the sweet warmth of the love with which that scene permeated me.

Out in the distance, I saw the throne of God Himself I could make out the foundation levels of chalcedony, emerald, topaz – the very ones Sunshine and I had studied. They were so very much more beautiful than I had imagined them. The throne was made of solid gold, and there were the seraphim and cherubim that flew around and above the throne in constant praise of our great Lord God. Waves of heat, or energy, were emanating from the throne and distorting the sky behind it. I was so humbled to know that God, my Father, Creator of heaven and earth dwells here and that I had the privilege of seeing it – and that soon, I will live here. How undeserving I am to share in all this.

The throne was encircled by a majestic city. There were so many mansions I couldn't count them, and I saw that many more were being built. The workers were going about their task joyfully, reveling in their work, going about it with such speed and joy that I got excited too. I sensed in my spirit that their happy anticipation and excitement was because of our soon arrival.

Then I saw the river, coming out of the city and around the hillside. It was a lot wider than I always thought; it looked about three-quarters of a mile wide. I knew that in this river were all the wonderful creatures God had made for us that weren't there on earth anymore. They weren't really gone forever! The river was lined with trees, beautiful overarching trees that someday we will sit under to enjoy all this. What an incredible privilege.

Coming from the city and following the curve of the river was a wide road of pure gold. On either side was the most beautiful emerald green grass, glistening as though every blade were laced with diamonds. And I saw coming over the road a procession of people – thousands and thousands of them. I heard wonderful music coming from the procession as they sang and played their instruments. First in the procession were the praise singers, walking with their arms raised and their voices giving out beautiful melodies. Just behind them were hundreds of harp players; then hundreds of horn players, then hundreds of cymbal and bell players. Behind them more people were coming. The parade extended farther away than my eyes could see.

And in front of the procession was Sunshine. This was her coronation. This procession was to honor her for her service to our Lord.

All around were angels – some were flying, some were walking with the thousands of people that were behind her. My view looked out over the top of a beautiful emerald green hill, and on the side of this hill I saw two little girls. They were sitting on the hillside near a large tree. Off to one side of them I saw a white horse. Although he was very close to the little girls, I knew he wouldn't hurt them. In fact, he couldn't hurt them. The little girls couldn't be harmed anymore. I knew who they were and how they came to be there. One of them had been in a car accident; her name was Jessica. She was about eight years old. The little girl beside her had been burned in a fire. Her name was Rebecca and she was about ten. The two of them were playing together and enjoying the

procession. The grass around them was covered with flowers of every gleaming, glowing color possible.

Over to my right was a mountain made of gold, and a throne and platform were carved out of the side of the mountain. Standing on the platform was our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, facing the procession, which was moving toward the foot of this mountain. There at the base of the platform, where the road ended, I saw a half-circle of people. I looked at their faces and knew who they were, even though some of them I didn't recognize by sight. There was my great-grandfather and my mother's father – I remember feeling such love and appreciation for him. Not only had he prayed for us while he was on earth, but now this great, sweet man has the privilege of asking God in person to save and claim for His own all his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I saw my dear, sweet Uncle Vernon, my mother's younger brother who had died just a few years after my mother and grandmother. He had been my spiritual father on earth, and he too had been praying for all his children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews – he too had God's ear in person. Then I looked at the face of my beautiful grandmother. Oh, how God had used her while she was on earth! How unfailingly she had served Him! Even in the great pain of her last few weeks, she had praised Him. Then my heart jumped with happiness when I saw my sweet Mama. Dear Jesus, she did make it. And I knew in my spirit that no one here knew she had committed suicide; that sin had been erased by the blood of our Savior, Jesus. I also knew that when I came to live here, I wouldn't know it anymore, either! She did get to go to heaven – oh, thank You, dear Jesus. She was there.

The overwhelming power of the blood of Jesus became so real and alive to me then. I knew of the sins of my mother, my grandmother, my uncle. They had not led faultless or sinless lives. But here, absolutely no sin or transgression is recorded on their account. All sins were obliterated by the blood of Jesus. Had He not suffered, been crucified and shed His blood for us, none of this would have been possible. No one would ever have been good enough to receive all this. I'd always taken the blood of Jesus, cleansing us of our sins, for granted. I'd always known about it and accepted it as fact, but only now could I truly understand the significance of it. I looked at the multitudes of people and thought, *not only my Mama and my family but each one of these people is here only because Jesus' blood erased their sins. All sins, from the greatest to the smallest, were totally erased. There is no remembrance of any sin or transgression from anyone's past. No one can feel more or less worthy than anyone else. Each one is as innocent as the next. How wonderful, how glorious it all is.*

Then the procession came to a stop. My Sunshine, my sweet baby girl, stood there in a white and gold gown so beautiful I can't describe it, and a wreath of flowers was on her head. The wedding gown I had made for her was nothing in comparison to this. She was so very, very beautiful – there wasn't a single mark on her little face, not a single blemish. The only visible sign of her torture on earth was on her wrists: the marks that had been such horrifying nail holes were now shining diamonds.

She was encircled with light, brilliant light of every color. There was lavender, pink, purple, yellow, and a lot of white, but mostly shades of emerald green. I knew this was

her crown of glory, her crown of honor. When I read about a crown in the Bible, I always pictured a gold thing that you wear on your head. Now I saw that the crown is this surrounding light and that everyone here had one.

Sunshine's crown of emerald green signified that she was a martyr and a soul-winner, and it gave her special honor. It occurred to me that no one here was jealous of her high position. They were all proud of her service to our Lord. And this brilliant light around Sunshine would be there for all eternity. For all eternity her few hours of torture will give her honor and the admiration of all who live here. *Great Heavenly Father, how very much You love us – how very much You love her.* I looked through the crowd and saw all the different crowns on the different people. Some were smaller, some brighter. Some were predominantly blue, others more yellow. I could sense by these colors what the service and sacrifice of each one had been. I looked back at my Mama. Her crown was beautiful, but it would have been brighter if she'd let herself live longer. She had robbed herself of some of her eternal reward. Yet no one here judged her like that. They saw only her service – no more, no less.

Sunshine had been looking up at Jesus, and when He looked down at her, she fell to her knees. Jesus said, "Stand up, my child," and he extended his hand toward her. She reached out to Him, even though there were several feet of space between them. Jesus said, "Well done, Sunshine, my good and faithful servant. It is you that we have come to honor."

I was practically in shock, hearing Jesus speak these words to her. Jesus is honoring Sunshine – our Lord and Savior is honoring Sunshine! My joy was indescribable. All the people behind her, all the praise singers, all the instrument players were there then to honor her.

As I scanned the crowd I saw beyond them, a large golden rock. It was about five feet high, ten feet wide and twenty feet long, and on the flat top of the rock stood Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter, John – all the apostles of Jesus. In front of them, with the best view and wearing a big proud smile, was Sunshine's friend, Paul. Of all the people in the Bible (other than Jesus, of course), Paul was her favorite. A shimmering glow radiated from him. His crown is just like Sunshine's, having all the brilliant colors but mainly green, because of course he was also a martyr and soul-winner.

Could Sunshine possibly have been given the same recognition as her hero, Paul? Yes, she had. There was so much to take in, but I felt so humbled and grateful for it. *Oh, thank You, God – thank You, my wonderful gracious Heavenly Father. Only You knew what was best for Sunshine.* I remembered how badly Sunshine's torture and death had hurt me, and then I realized how it had hurt God – it really hurt His heart, He had to see it and feel her every agony. He let it happen so she could have all this: this honor and reward for all eternity.

Then just as suddenly as I was put there, I was spun around. Still with my angel by my side, we were looking at the dark sky. Now the prayers were coming up toward us. The angel pointed down at the earth, and I saw the United States upside down. The

northern states were closer to me and the southern states were further away. There was a blur of frenzied activity in the atmosphere directly above the states. They were traveling with such speed, back and forth, up and down, hurrying, hurrying – all the demons. They were madly busy. Over the different cities I saw the demons' generals giving loud, hasty commands, chasing their demon warriors to go over here, do this, do that, quickly, now hurry over there. Over New York City was a demon general specializing in greed and deception. His warriors were flying into people and gnawing at them. Hundreds at a time would attack one person, trying to bury themselves in him. Some people were easier for the demons to bite into than others. I saw them trying to get into this one individual who was covered with Jesus' blood. The demons searched frantically for a place where he hadn't covered himself, where they could gnaw and scratch until they made a hole big enough to crawl into. They kept searching all over him. I thought, *why don't they leave him alone? Why doesn't God stop them bothering him?* Then my angel looked at me lovingly and said, "God has; can't you see the blood? The man must do the rest himself."

I looked at the city where Sunshine had been murdered, where I had once felt so much at home. The general over that city was bold and powerful. His specialties were lethargy, prejudice and murder. He was also busy sending his warriors out. By the thousands they went on attack, back and forth. How ugly they were! I watched them attack and bite into one man until he was so mutilated he was void of himself and full of them instead. He no longer had control of himself. They were controlling him.

Over San Francisco was a mighty general invested with the power of perversion. But the people only want love, I thought – only love, and he's got them so mutilated I could barely tell they had ever been people at all. Each and every city had its own general and warriors. Our warriors, the angels, were also flying back and forth, fighting to get through the demons. Oh, God, the battle is so hard on them. They have to fight every way they turn. But it's for us. People are all their concern. I asked my angel in my spirit if he had ever had to fight like that for me. He smiled a sweet, loving smile. "Oh, yes," he said. "Every day of your life."

I felt such appreciation of him then. "I never even knew you were there."

"You have always been my charge."

I looked back at the United States, at the intensity of the battle taking place. Now I saw a dark, evil sickle sweeping over the states. With one sweep it covered the whole country, then back again. It sliced people in half. People got caught on it, and their blood poured down onto the states. Then came a beautiful golden sickle, shiny and pure, and it also swept over the states. It picked people up, too, but the evil sickle kept crashing into it. People hung on tightly to the golden sickle, but some of them got knocked off, or cut in half, and their blood poured down too. But the blood of the people from the golden sickle would hit the ground and put the bodies back together again, and those people were taken up. They were all uniting far above the states, and I knew they were getting ready to go home soon. Not long after all these saints were murdered, they'd all be taken home together. It would be soon, I knew – soon...

And then I felt Dean nudging me. I opened my eyes, and I was back in church again.

“Sit down, Mom. Are you all right? Sit down.”

Everyone else was seated; the singing had stopped. I sat down, awed. For the next three days I was in a spiritual trance. All I could do was write down, in every detail, my experience in heaven and above the earth. God, how I thank You for it.

It wasn't just for me, but for you, as well.

Beloved reader, I've written this book as accurately as possible and as truthfully as I could. I hope you've been able to see how our precious Lord has loved and guided Sunshine. And I hope you know His precious love and guidance in your own life, too. If you haven't accepted Him, not only as your savior but as Lord and Master over your life, please – do so now. Give yourself totally, no matter what the cost. Know that He has only good and grand things waiting for you also.

Here's a saying Sunshine used to use often in witnessing: “If we meet and you forget me, you've lost nothing. But if you meet Jesus and forget Him, you've lost everything.”

I hope, beloved, that through this book you've met Jesus.

Found written by Sunshine in her Bible:

“Let my life be the kind of life God can use even after I'm gone.”

*Oh, beloved, you cannot begin to live for Christ until you are willing to die for Him.
Your letters and prayers are welcome.*

*Sincerely in Christ,
Teresa*

