

Three

He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not...



Love speaks through your eyes,
Caring, loving, trusting ... me;
Love that never ends

“**W**hat happened to *you*?” Tom gasped in a whispered tone. He was at the bus depot waiting for us on our return from Oregon. Tom took Sarah from my arms, giving us both a warm hug.

“What do you mean?” I asked, puzzled.

“You look different, like you’ve got a big light on inside.”

So it does show, I mused. It showed so much in fact, that later in the evening when I shared with Tom all that had happened, he fell on his knees, repented and gave his life to God. He said whatever it was I had he wanted it too.

Throughout that past year, I had suspected Tom really wasn’t into all the Bible reading and talk about God the way I was. Yet this man so often remained quiet, never saying much of anything. He had always listened considerately as I read the scriptures aloud but showed no emotion, no real interest. Thus, I rejoiced when I witnessed my husband’s genuine excitement for Jesus Christ.

The next six months seemed a near perfect portrait of a fairy tale marriage—we both enjoyed true happiness together, something only to be obtained when two people put Christ at the center of their union. Tom quit smoking pot and cigarettes, stopped drinking,

and our fighting came to a halt as we spent much of our time reading the Bible together and enjoying our little girl.

On a radio talk show, we heard about missionaries, people who traveled to foreign countries to tell others about the Lord. Full of passion and zeal, we decided this is what we wanted to do with our lives—become missionaries. However, when we contacted a national missionary society, they advised us to get plugged into a local church and give ourselves some time to grow spiritually.

I was disappointed that we could not be missionaries right away; nevertheless, our lives radiated with joy and contentment. We loved our baby girl, we loved each other, and we relished in our newfound innocence as God answered our prayers quickly, at times even dramatically. Taking the advice of the missionary society, we joined a church.

Tom wanted to go to Bible school, and I still missed Oregon so we decided to move back so Tom could attend a school in Portland. As the fragrant lilac blossoms fell from their green bushes indicating summer's imminent arrival, we built a makeshift camper on the back of our '51 Dodge pickup. Filling it with clothes, mattresses and dishes, then with an *Oregon or Bust* sign nailed to the back, our dog and our baby by our side, we were off.

Tom and his parents cried when we left. Normally hard hearted, non-emotional folks, this was the only time I ever saw them break down. They considered it my doing that we were going back to Oregon and resented me for it, a resentment that would only grow over the years. They knew nothing about Tom's drug and alcohol problems. However, his younger brother informed them of my past, so from the beginning they felt I'd been a bad influence on him. My *religious* fanaticism carried no more acceptance with them than the drugs. They seemed far from realizing their son had a serious substance abuse problem. Tom was sniffing glue at the age of ten and claimed once that he'd shot up peanut butter just to get high. I had no idea his parents were the source and cause of all Tom's addictions and the reason Tom lived in a world tormented by fear, deceit and guilt.

At last though we made it out of town and away from what I had come to see as an oppressive grip on my husband's life. For the time being at least it became a thing of the past.

We no sooner settled into a turn-of-the-century apartment in southeast Portland when I discovered I was pregnant. Thrilled at the thought of another beautiful baby, we began our life in the metropolitan jungle. Tom started Bible school part time while working for various contractors as a carpenter's helper.

Eight months later, sweet little Rachael was born by emergency C-section. When Sarah was born, I never imagined loving anything as much as her, but when Rachael came, I found out that a mother's love isn't divided but rather it multiplies making room for another.

Being a wife and a mother fulfilled my ambitions and goals. I found it a joy cooking healthy food for my family and using creativity to make a fun and comfortable home. I could always find something more important to do than spend all day cleaning, but in between walks to the park and rides on the bus to the library with the girls, I made sure our home was clean and homey. It was a good life, and I never understood why women would *want* to leave their babies and go to work.

Tom's ongoing struggle to find steady work drained us. More than once he called his father to borrow money. Each time he squirmed as he listened to his dad's lengthy lectures on how Tom had messed up his life. Tom no longer attended Bible school, having only stayed about four months, and with school went his enthusiasm and interest in spiritual things. He started drinking and smoking again, then gradually withdrew from the kids and me.

One night, when Rachael was not quite two weeks old, as I painfully recovered from the C-section, Tom drove away shortly before dinner and did not return. Later in the evening close to midnight, as I rocked a colicky baby, a sudden rap at the front door startled me. Slowly I opened the door and looked up into the compassionate eyes of a concerned police officer. Tom had been picked up for drunk driving, and he would be spending the night in jail. With a grieving heart, I lay my now sleeping daughter in her bassinet and

climbed into bed alone. Though Tom was never arrested again while we were together, drinking while driving became a habit he would practice for years to come.

Tom continued attending church with us. It seemed he really wanted to be close to God but just couldn't stick with it. Once, when an evangelist came to our church and prayed over several people, he laid hands on Tom and began praying for him. The man, who knew nothing about Tom, said he saw a picture of a cage with a bird flying around in it. The trembling bird was frantically trying to flee. There was something peculiar about this for the door to the cage was open, yet still the bird couldn't seem to escape. The evangelist said something in Tom's life resembled that bird. God had opened the door for him to be free, but some unknown factor kept him from flying out the door. How could I have known or have fathomed that a dark decaying secret had haunted his family long before Tom was ever born?

Frustrated with our marriage, I tried hard to be happy and content, but inside I felt terribly wounded, wanting a godly husband—someone I could look up to and depend on. Sometimes at night, while Tom slept, I wept, praying for us to be close but not knowing how to accomplish it.

Tom hadn't any successful relationships, not with men *or* women. He seemed more afraid than anything else of most people. He was terrified of his father. On the phone to Ralph, Tom often lied about the details of his life. If Tom had been given a dollar an hour raise (an impressive raise in the seventies), he would tell his father he received a two-dollar raise. His greatest nightmare, one far beyond normal limits, was his father's disapproval.

Soon I noticed Tom's deceptions extended to other people. As if he believed this world of lies he constantly created, he was no longer able to distinguish falsehood from reality. In our lovemaking, he was quick and unemotional. I felt more like an inanimate object with him than his wife. Whatever transpired in his mind was a complete mystery to me; I heard only silence. The silence grew stronger . . . and louder.

Occasionally the feeling of being lost in a race without end

overwhelmed me, and I became almost hysterical in a futile attempt to get some kind of reaction from him. When this happened, my husband merely looked at me so much as to say, “You’re nuts.” Still, he never said a word. A lonely dejection ate a hole through my heart as I came to understand this was going to be my burden to carry.

One cool, breezy afternoon while the two girls took their naps, I fell to my knees in our small family room with the mid-day sun dropping golden rays down on my back and cried out to God. I prayed for Tom and for our family. Suddenly, a scripture popped into my head, and I felt the Lord urge me to read Proverbs 29:1. Reading the verse, I knew right away it was a picture of my husband, “He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.” I felt the Lord telling me:

“If Tom does not repent, I will take his family away from him forever.” At first it frightened me as I wondered if God was warning me that the children and I were going to die unless Tom changed. Yet how could I tell him? He wouldn’t believe me but would only see this as a wife-nagging tactic.

No, I simply cannot tell him. I jotted down the date in my Bible, then rose to my feet with a sense of helplessness welling up within.

That evening when Tom arrived home from work, he made a beeline directly to the kitchen where I stood over the sink scrubbing carrots for dinner. “There’s something I have to tell you,” he said softly. “On the way home tonight, I was going to stop for a drink when I believe God told me that if I didn’t change my ways and follow Him I was going to lose you guys.” Stunned at this *coincidence*, I then spoke in detail of the afternoon’s occurrence, show-



ing him the notation I'd written in my Bible.

So moved by this apparent sign from God, by the next day Tom seemed like a totally new person. He stopped smoking just like that, quit drinking and became the loving person he had once been. It was a glorious time. We laughed and did things together as a family. I forgot about the difficult past and dared not think of the future. The present brought laughter to my soul.

In February 1979, I gave natural birth to Matthew Josiah, who weighed a hefty nine pounds, six ounces. When our good friend, Leslie, saw him, she laughed and said, "Why, he looks just like a little man." Being a helpless baby was not Matthew's idea of a good time. He rolled over at only a few days old then lifted his head shortly after that as if to say,

"I'm strong and independent. I'll figure this all out." He proved such to be true when at the age of five he would do the bravest thing any child could do.

Tom did not believe in birth control though he never really gave me any reasons except that he didn't want me "taking nothing or putting anything in my body." I was glad for all my precious babies, but after having three in four years, I was in need of a break. Tossing out literature on diaphragms and birth control pills, Tom told me not to worry about it—that it would all work out.

Unfortunately, Tom's recommitment to Christ lasted a very short time, partly due to a group of people who had joined our church. This group brought with them the unbiblical word-faith doctrine that taught if you had enough faith in God you need never suffer or go without life's pleasures. If you were poor, unemployed or sick, it was because of a lack of faith.

The leader of this group approached Tom one day and told him we struggled financially because he did not



Sarah, Matthew and Rachel

have enough faith. Though our pastor eventually asked this group to leave our church, Tom could not get over the condemnation put on him. I watched in agony as he grew bitter and angry and slipped right back to where he had come out of, only this time his depression was deep and unreachable. Tom never hit the children or me. He was especially kind to the children. Nevertheless, his silent, obscure behavior tore away at my very life and was far more painful than a hard slap in the face.

My self-esteem plummeted as I fervently wished for a successful marriage, continually blaming myself for not having one. *It's my responsibility to make this work*, I told myself. Even as a child, I felt a sense of responsibility for everything and everyone around me. Once at the age of eleven, a small gray mouse had been unwarily caught in a mousetrap in our garage. Carefully I removed the bleeding, whimpering creature, begged for a small dose of sleeping medicine from my mother, then fed it to the dying victim, hoping to ease its last suffering moments. Minutes later, it died in the palm of my hand, and I cried. Now I struggled with the unyielding responsibility of my marriage.



The thought of leaving Tom crossed my mind more than once, but in my heart I knew God's blessing would not be there if I did. So I resolved to stick it out no matter what and pray that someday God would answer my prayers, giving me the godly husband I desired and the nurturing father the kids needed.

I wanted to behave and think as God desired. I was determined to adjust, to be satisfied with what God had given me. Somehow, through God's grace I would become the kind of wife Tom needed.

That is why in the spring of 1980 when Tom came to me one day and said he wanted to move us back to Kansas, I agreed. He insisted it would be good for the children to be near their grandparents and that his father had promised to help him find

a better paying job. I didn't want to leave Oregon again. Yet, when I saw how Tom perked up so much from the idea, I thought it might be the very thing to bring him out of his depression, thus allowing us the chance to become close again.

Two months later, we headed for Kansas. Memories of the Midwest's massive blue sky and of the air radiating with cleanness were



1980—Rachel and Sarah

rekindled. Returning to the endless miles of farmland and antiquated farmhouses filled me with optimism towards the future.

While we traveled from state to state in a large U-Haul truck, Tom spoke few words. I entertained the kids with coloring books and every song I knew as we passed the days peacefully. However, when Tom told me he had been smoking pot again, we got into a big argument. Knowing marijuana was back in the picture again frightened me. I tried to push the fear aside and hold onto my hope that this move would bring a positive change.

When we reached my in-law's home, they decided we would stay there a few weeks until Tom started working. In spite of my hopefulness, things went from bad to worse. *Surely*, I thought, *his folks are overjoyed at our return and will not harbor their earlier resentments towards me.* Yet from day one, there was a coldness I could not interpret as anything but resentment and dislike. Unusual things happened, things I tried to ignore but soon picked up as signs of hostility. It started out with such oddities as neglecting to set a place for me at the dinner table and later Tom's mother serving after-dinner coffee to a number of adults, bringing each person coffee in her best china then bringing me mine in a Styrofoam cup. I said nothing, but I hoped these oversights were just that. Soon though the family was excluding me from all conversations and any outings.

In the evenings, Tom and his father would go into the study and spend hours away from the rest of us. When I asked

Tom once what they talked about, he snapped at me with a peculiar coldness I'd not often seen in him. One evening when I passed by the study door, stooping to pick up a toy dropped earlier by a playing toddler, the study door flew open. There, glaring down at me, stood my father-in-law. He never said a word but gave me an icy look that sent shivers up my spine. *Whatever are they talking about*, I wondered, *that would make him so suspicious?* Later that night, Tom asked me what I had been doing eavesdropping.

One morning, I woke up feeling nauseous and exhausted. "Tom," I said, "I wonder if I'm coming down with something."

"You're probably pregnant," he said with a sarcastic sneer. Hearing the words, I feared them to be true. Tom told his parents, and from that day on, Ralph never spoke another word to me. If he walked into the room, he greeted each person but acted as if I wasn't even there. Hilda, Tom's mother would talk to me, but I knew she was upset. I wanted to tell them how I had asked Tom to let me use birth control, but he was dead set against it. I wanted to tell them that it was as much his doing as mine, but again I said nothing.

Tom wouldn't talk to me, let alone look at me, and when he did, he seemed angry and irritated. He spent countless hours away at his brother's place, his brother who was into drugs and heavy drinking. In the evenings when Tom was home, most of his time was spent in his father's study. What little connection I still had with my husband while we were back in Oregon now quickly disintegrated in Kansas.

One night, as we sat around the dinner table, Ralph finally made contact. He hadn't spoken directly to me in days. He was holding a flashlight in his hand when suddenly he shone it straight into my eyes. I laughed a little, thinking he was joking around, but when I asked him to stop he continued the game all the while piercing me with his cold eyes of steel. It wasn't a joke, no one was laughing. It was a tactic of intimidation, something Ralph was very proficient at.

Finally, after three weeks, we found a cottage-style house in a small town outside the city. We paid rent on it but could not move in, Tom said, until we bought a refrigerator. More anxious than ever to get into our own place, I felt more like an intruder than a houseguest at my in-laws home. On top of that, it seemed like I was losing my husband. So one afternoon when Tom returned from his brother's place, I managed to get him alone. As we stood facing each other, I asked him if we could move in right away. When he agreed to this, I hastily rushed to pack our things. Quickly, I folded blankets, washed sheets and tidied up the rooms. Within two hours, we were packed and ready to go.

Hilda had been to the circus with the kids and upon returning saw our bags sitting by the front door. Hastily she stormed out of the room, found Tom and wanted to know why we were moving out. I never found out what went on in that conversation, but Tom came to me a few minutes later very coldly stating, "You've upset my mother. We're not moving out; you'll just have to wait." My eyes filled with tears.

"Please Tom. I think things will be much better once we get into our own place again."

"We're going to wait," he said, raising his voice. I proceeded to fill him in on all that had been happening, explaining how his parents' resentment and rudeness were wearing me down. "You're making it all up," he snapped. "It's you that's got the problem; you're the whole problem around here. We're *not* moving out until I say so, and we won't go until it's fine with my folks."

With my eyes welling up with tears, I called to the girls, picked up the baby and a couple diapers then ran out the front door. We walked along unfamiliar streets until we came to a large, grassy park. As the children played on the swings, I called Tom from the park's pay phone. "Listen Tom," I began, trying to hold the tears back. "I can't spend another night in that house—maybe we should go back to Oregon; maybe coming here was all a mistake." I felt devastated over the way things were turning out.

About an hour later, Tom picked us up in his parents' car and said he would drive us to the new house. He made no eye contact as the late spring sun warmed the inside of the car. Then out of the blue he said, "I think we need a cooling off period, Catherine." I sat listening to this man who had become a total stranger to me.

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking intently at my husband.

"I'm not going to move out there with you," he answered curtly. I studied his face, looking for some sign that he really didn't mean this but instead saw only a stoic glaze in his eyes. In fact, he appeared to be in a trance-like state. The bizarre thought crossed my mind that maybe he was hypnotized, something his parents had practiced for years. Shaking such thoughts, I wondered why Tom had been acting so strangely, so distant and bitter since we'd arrived. He'd always been quiet, often depressed, but I rarely saw him hostile.

My soft crying turned to heavy sobs as I begged him not to go. However, he gave no indication of relenting. All the way to the house, I neither saw nor heard anything outside the confines of the car; as we drove through the city and out into the country, passing houses, pastures, people and cars, they were nothing more than a blur. Crying came easy as the tears, which had been bottled up for so long, were released. I could not bear the frightening thought of my husband leaving.

As we pulled into the gravel driveway of the small red and white house, Tom seemed to soften. Maybe seeing the brilliant colored flowers lining the white picket fence brought him to his senses or taking in the fragrance of the sweet smelling lilac bushes reminded him of why we were here—why we traveled half-way across the country. Maybe for a moment, as he gazed into the eyes of his two little girls and his baby son he remembered who we were, that this was his family, and till death do we stick together. To my relieved surprise, he agreed to take his parents' car back, get ours, then return. It was as if the invisible hold his father and mother had on him was temporarily broken. *Has it been their doing that kept him away from me these past three weeks? Why? How? How could a grown man be so easily drawn into the*

spell, yes, the spell of these people? When Tom left, he promised to be back in a couple hours. He never returned.

Trying to assure myself that he would come home, that he just needed some time alone, I dropped into bed late that night. My eyes burned from crying. Exhausted, I hoped for a peaceful rest. Sleep did not come though. Frightening speculations raced through my mind. I was encumbered with anxiety. As more tears came, so did alarming thoughts, grabbing deeply at my heart. Every noise startled me while a late night wind blew against each window, trying to find its way inside but able only to leave an old house groaning and creaking in the dark.

Feelings of isolation hit like a hard slap, as if God had gotten in that car and left too. My thoughts drifted back to mistakes I had made, words I had said. *Maybe this is God's way of punishing me for everything I've done wrong. If only I'd been a better wife, perhaps he wouldn't have left. But oh how I have tried.* "Lord," I questioned, "have all my efforts, all my prayers been entirely in vain?" At last . . . sleep came.

Early in the morning, I woke to the now familiar nausea. That afternoon the local health clinic confirmed my suspicions. I was four weeks pregnant! Day after day passed. Every morning the children and I made the long walk up town to call Tom, and every morning his parents said the same thing, "He's not available." After three days, I told them we had practically no food and only a few dollars. The following day an envelope arrived in the mail bearing five dollars!

Is this some kind of sick joke they are playing? Me perhaps they despise, but the children—I don't understand. We ate spaghetti noodles with catsup for breakfast, then again for dinner. We joked about the noodles and sang songs every night before going to bed. Though inwardly I was being ripped in two, I was not going to let this destroy what was left of my family. Though I was suffering from this heartbreak, I was determined my children would not.

One day, I took the children to a nearby park, hoping to make life as normal for them as I could. At the park, they played on swings and danced on a carousel, laughing and running while

I rested on the grass. I was amazed by the quiet stillness in the air. Not a soul could be seen anywhere. Dark, shadowy clouds covered the blue sky. Then, just as suddenly as the stillness had set in, there came a strong breeze of warm air. It felt refreshing after the blistering, muggy day. *Ah, these small Midwestern towns*, I mused. *Why you'd think the whole town would be out on an evening as gorgeous as this.* A man's rough, hurried voice interrupted my fleeting thoughts.

"Hey lady! There's a tornado on the way; you'd better get home!" Waving me on, he rushed back into his house across the street, slamming the door behind him. For a brief moment, I froze.

What is a tornado? I frantically wondered. They were rarely mentioned on the West Coast. I knew only one thing about them—one had carried Dorothy and Toto over the rainbow to a land of munchkins and wizards. Quickly I jumped up, lifting Matthew off the ground. The lovely breeze had now turned into hefty blasts of cold wind.

Trees swayed rampantly back and forth. The swings, which the children had played on just moments before, were crashing and banging against one another. The wind was loud, making it difficult to hear each other. "Girls," I shouted, "we've got to run as fast as we can." The wind had picked up unbelievable momentum, and we were only able to move at a slow pace. Carrying the baby in one arm and holding Rachael's hand in the other while Sarah clung to my shirt, we labored towards home. Trash cans flew into the streets while a decrepit looking cat ran against the current, trying to find its way to some secure shelter.

Breathless and shivering, we arrived home and headed for the basement, which seemed to be the safest place. Although it was dingy and gloomy, it was a welcome alternative to the raging storm. Quietly we huddled together, wrapped in an old wool blanket, listening ... waiting ... hoping we would not be taken to a far off land of witches and magic. Finally, in spite of the children's fearful protests, I hurried upstairs and grabbed a radio. The tornado had touched down on the other side of town

and was now miles away. Weary and drained but so very relieved, we climbed the stairs then fell exhausted into our beds.

With our telephone now connected, I felt certain Tom would call that night. *Surely, he's heard our little town has been hit by a tornado and will want to know how we are.* As the telephone remained quiet, disappointment and rejection wrapped their frightening tentacles around me. In the late hours of the night, I fell into a restless sleep.

Each day became an extension of the day before, none of them having any end nor any beginning. Life was a blurred vision of unreality. I wasn't even sure God was with us. I couldn't pray, couldn't hope. I was scared at night and terrified of the future. I called some local friends of Tom's. "No," they said, "We haven't seen Tom at all." When I told them I thought it was the doing of Ralph, they thought it could be true. They told me things I'd never heard before, stories of Ralph's mistreatment of Tom when he was little—degrading name-calling and locking Tom in the basement when he was very young. No, it didn't surprise them at all that Ralph was in on this.

In my despair after many sleepless nights, countless miserable days, I cried out to God, begging for His presence and His guidance. Within hours of that prayer, a gentle peace began settling over me. I had always heard that in times of great trauma God's grace becomes supernaturally evident. Somehow, I knew this unexpected peace was indeed His gracious touch. Though only seeing glimpses of His faithfulness at the time, it was enough to sustain me, and I realized God had not left us nor would He ever. Whereas human love has many limits and conditions, God's love never ends. No matter what might happen, I felt He would be there.

After several unsuccessful attempts to contact Tom, including a call to him from my own father, word came from my mother-in-law that Tom was not coming back. Ever! In the same breath, she asked to see the children—could she make a visit? A neighbor woman whom I had confided in warned me that if my in-laws came and took the children and kept them, it could take months in the courts to get them back.

My mind wandered back to a scene three years earlier. I was twenty-two and eight months pregnant with Rachael; Tom and I had once again grown distant from each other. As we stood looking at each other in our small city apartment in Portland, I told him I didn't think I could take much more of our problems. Suddenly, without warning, he snatched Sarah off the floor and ran out the door with her into the cold February weather. I stood in stunned silence as if watching a scene from a movie. *She doesn't even have her coat*, I realized in a frenzied state of shock.

I waited for hours, well into the night, but they never came back. By the following day, I was near total exhaustion. On day three, my parents insisted I fly down to California to wait there, as they were concerned for my health and the health of my unborn baby. With special permission from my doctor, I boarded a plane and flew to California. When a week passed, we finally heard from Tom. He had taken a bus back to Kansas and was not sure, he said, that he would be coming back. Near collapse from lack of sleep and worry, my father interceded, speaking with Ralph.

"I think it would be best if Tom brings Sarah back. We both know who will be paying the attorney fees if this thing goes to court." My father hit a nerve that was close to Ralph's heart—money. A week later, Tom returned with my baby daughter. For days after, she clung to me and would not leave my sight for a moment.

Now here I was in the middle of Kansas defenseless and surely not able to thwart single-handedly any plans my in-laws may have to take my children. The odd and cruel behavior they displayed and the total, sudden abandonment by my husband left me terrified the family was up to no good, and taking my children from me may be very well on their minds. *If only Tom had given me the least indication he still cared, if only he'd given me more than silence; but I don't know this man anymore. Maybe I never really did.*

Using money my father had wired me, we left Kansas on a greyhound bus and returned to Oregon. Too humiliated to face my friends and church in Portland, we found refuge in a rural setting with Donnie and Virginia, two of my old hippie-turned-Christian friends. For a

month they enveloped us with their comfort, assuring us that God still cared. We then returned to Portland to wait there for Tom's return.

On January 21st, while millions of people across the country watched the final exciting minutes of the Super Bowl, Peter John was born. It was a perfect day for a boy who would grow up loving sports. Though Peter was born unbreathing from a knotted umbilical cord, doctors resuscitated him back to life, and he hasn't stopped moving since. I have yet to see his enthusiasm for life outdone by any other person.

As the months ticked by, life produced a hub of constant activity. Sarah attended a small Christian school in which an anonymous donor from church paid the tuition. Rachael and Matthew played in our picket-fenced yard with the neighborhood children who frequented our doorsteps. Our weekends were sprinkled with trips on the metro bus to parks, libraries and museums, all delightfully entertaining and fitting our very limited state-assisted budget.

We spent countless hours at home reading books. Curious George, Babar, the Elephant and Peter Rabbit lived inside our imaginations taking us around the world from Africa to Mr. McGregor's lettuce garden. Sunday mornings started by sleeping until I was tackled by four bouncing, giggling rascals then dressing in our very best (ironed to perfection) and piling into our brown '66 Plymouth Valiant to go to church. And of course, not a weekday afternoon passed when our used television set was not turned to *Little House on the Prairie*.

I discovered comradeship with two other single moms and likened single parenting to a war-torn country during tumultuous times. Leslie, whose sweetness and wisdom was like ointment to a wound, and Theresa, who had this uncanny ability to find humor in the most dire situations, became allies on the battlefield, supporting and understanding me as no one else could do. When we weren't crying on each other's shoulders, we were laughing at the whole hilarity of being abandoned and forgotten by ones who had promised to love us till death do us part.



One warm spring day, nearly a year after Tom had been gone, there was a knock at the door. My disappearing husband had reappeared. As he plopped himself down on our overstuffed couch, I observed his slurred speech and silly mannerisms meaning only one thing for Tom—he was drunk.

“I want to move back in with my family,” he stated abruptly.

“Tom, before you do that, I will have to have your word that you will never leave us again. I wouldn’t be able to go through this again. It has torn my life in two. And before you move in, we must get some counseling.”

“I am not going to get any counseling,” he said emphati-

cally. "You get it if you want but not me."

"Can you make a commitment to this family that you will never leave again, no matter how hard things get?"

"I can't make that kind of promise. If things get bad, I'm not staying. You're being unreasonable."

"In that case Tom, I don't think it's a good idea for you to move in . . . not now. I know I couldn't go through this again."

Realizing he wasn't going to be able to regain possession without at least some effort *and* some communication, Tom became furious. As the children stood by confused and frightened, they watched while their father grabbed my arm and yelled, "You're ruining these kids' lives. They need a father!" Pulling my arm away from his grip, I answered, "Tom, please leave. Don't ever come back here drunk again." He walked out the door and that night went on a small rampage ending in a fist fight with an old friend of his. He left town the next day.

In the years we'd been together, I had never seen Tom violent as he was that night. He was ruining his life and drowning in his own debris. I felt sorry for him but knew it was not up to me to change him. I had tried doing so before, and it didn't work. I placed him in the hands of the One who could change lives.

In the fall of my second year alone, when Peter was not yet a year old, I started attending a few classes at the community college, seeing this as an avenue to adequately support my kids. As I thrust myself into writing and math classes, I found college to be a wonderfully rewarding challenge. I had attempted college a few months after high school graduation but found it boring and irrelevant. Now however, I gobbled up the myriads of information. Though homework took up a lot of my time in the evenings, I was only away from home twelve hours a week.

Then one spring morning, when the air was filled with gentle winds and fragrances of jasmine trees and lilac bushes, the telephone rang. It was Tom. More than two years had past since he had left, and we were now divorced. "I'm moving back to Oregon; I want to see my kids," he boldly declared.

I didn't think Tom would ever show up to see them. He'd shown absolutely no interest in any of us for so long.

He had definitely lost interest in me—the children though were another matter. I was gravely concerned about Tom seeing the kids alone, not able to pinpoint my anxiety, but one thing for sure, Tom would not be a good influence on them.

In a dire attempt to halt overnight visits, I made an appointment with Legal Services, a legal agency for low-income families. "I'm afraid my husband is going to hurt my children," I told the attorney.

"What makes you think that?" she asked, looking skeptically over her wire rimmed glasses. I had wished at that moment, seeing her cold, apathetic attitude, I could have hired a regular attorney instead of this service for the poor.

"Well, he drinks a lot and smokes pot."

"Oh for goodness sake," she retorted, "lots of people do that!"

"I'm also worried he may try to molest them." It had become an underlying concern. Though I didn't think Tom would actually do such a thing, I felt he had the potential. Things he had told me before we were even married seemed like no big deal then. But now the youthful naivete I had possessed at nineteen was slowly disintegrating as I met women who had been sexually abused by their own fathers.

"Well now, that's a different story. Do you have proof he's done this?"

"No, he hasn't done anything *yet*, but I think he could. He told me once that he'd been involved in a homosexual relationship before he met me (I had always suspected it was with his old sheep farming partner, Jered), and he also grew up with a lot of pornography around."

"I'm sorry," she said, "these things are not proof he is going to molest your children. If something happens, you let us know." Later this curt answer would haunt me.

The eve before Tom's first visit, I called him. "I just want you to know, Tom, I've warned the kids about good touches and bad touches. Don't ever touch these kids in a wrong way." Click!

He hung up, but I felt satisfied.

At least I have warned him. I have covered the ground. There is no way he'll ever try anything now, I assured myself, *knowing I'm aware of such things.* That was the only time I ever said this to him. And although I would periodically remind the kids about good touches and bad touches, I never referred to my initial suspicions of their dad. I did not want to turn the kids against him by bad mouthing, which I was sure would only confuse them. As long as I maintained an open line of communication between my children and was the best mother one could be, praying for them, giving them a sound, moral home, as long as I did these things—they would be fine. No one could hurt them. After all, I wasn't anybody's fool.

