MAMA MARRIED ME

BY

GERTRUDE HILL NYSTROM

WRITTEN IN 1946 AS A TRIBUTE TO THE AUTHOR'S MOTHER
SADIE CRYER HILL WILKIN (1873-1966)

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CHAPTER I

MAMA JOINS A BAND

For years I have been waiting for Mama to die. You see, I wanted to write a book about her, but old age seems to agree with her and it doesn't with me, so I have decided to write about her now while I have the chance.

You see, Mama married me--in spite of the fact that there were usually more conventional candidates in the offing--both for her and for me. Not only was Mama a preacher, but I come from a family of preachers: first, Mama--before she was Mama; then, Papa--after he was Papa; then Mama again after Papa was an angel leaving offspring behind which showed no resemblance to the paternal strain; then Step-Papa; then Mama a third time.

I'm sure you don't believe in women preachers, for no one does. But let me tell you about Mama. I think you might believe in her. Quite a lot of us do. I had two half-brothers, two half-sisters, two step-brothers, two step-sisters, one brother, one sister, one adopted sister, and one cousin and one niece who lived with us for a year at a time. In addition there was one girl friend whose papa moved to a town with an inadequate school system. So Mama said, "Well, Viola can come and live with us,"--which she did--as simply as that.

And we aren't the only ones who believe in her. All of my life I have had the experience of meeting one after another

of the persons who were converted through Mama. Several became outstanding ministers whose influence was much wider than hers because they were far-sighted enough to be born men and had no prejudice to overcome.

The other day we added up Mama's years of service in Christian work:

13 years as evangelist in Band work

16 years as pastor

24 years as a pastor's wife

53 years of active Christian service

Mama says, "It doesn't seem possible!"

Mama was not given to the Lord like Samuel without benefit of a plebecite. She gave herself. At sixteen years of age she possessed the teaching certificate of the State of Illinois, and her father looked to her as an assistant supporter of the seven other brothers and sisters either present at the moment or anticipated in the mode of the 19th century.

But Mama had her own ideas. She had visited the Grundy County jail where some religious workers were detained because of street preaching in the land where freedom of speech is so highly regarded. Grandpa was a Methodist Sunday School superintendent and a fine one at that, but by this time Methodism was a conventional church and did things according to the Scripture--"decently and in order." They had forgotten the ways in which John Wesley kicked over the traces of established religious life in the growing-pain stage of the Methodist movement. So Grandpa was shocked, chagrined and all their synonyms

when Mama announced that she would forego teaching and join these bands of Christian workers and take up the itinerant life of that movement which went from town to town helping to form churches in the newly-established villages of the Middle West.

"Pack your trunk, then," said dear Grandpa. "No child of mine will disgrace the family by becoming a part of that outfit." So Mama began the packing which was to become the habit pattern of her future life. For thirteen years she travelled with three or four other girls through the Middle West spreading the old-time religion. The personnel of the group changed from year to year as cupid and mammon made higher bids for the attention of the girls. But not Mama--at least, not yet. Conversion with Mama was sort of a vaccination against all the normal appeals of adolescence. She was a young woman with "an eye single to the glory of God."

In my childhood when she used this phrase in telling of her experiences, I visualized her holding a huge icicle before the throne of the austere and bearded deity. I don't recall if I regarded it as the forerunner of modern refrigeration or just what, but the "eye single" was always to me a feminine counterpart of the ice-man--only in this case she made no back-door entrance but paraded into the throne room as a special guest of honor.

There was nothing soft about the life Mama lived during those years. I thought about it when I was sixteen and packed my trunk to go away to college with all the assistance and

parental blessing that a parsonage home could give. Mama's first home-leaving was so different!

Mama and her band began in Pekin in 1891. They would go into a town, either by invitation or as total strangers, according to their understanding of God's leading. No schedule was planned in advance. They stayed in one town until the Lord told them to go on to another. Usually they stayed two or three weeks in one town, but Mama recorded one meeting which lasted fifteen weeks.

Services were held in tents, school-houses, churches, empty halls, or even on street corners. Mama recorded in her journals times of secret prayer in the woods, in corn fields, in hay lofts and in cemeteries, believing the truth of Jesus' teaching that neither Jerusalem nor Samaria is a favored place of worship, but that the heart is the only requisite.

Their first necessity when reaching a new town was to find a place to stay. In the nineties inns were few and far between in the Middle West; and even if there had been one on every Main street, the band workers could not have patronized them, for they had no financial backing and therefore possessed very small coin purses.

In Joliet they were able to secure a large room with one bed; but since there were then five girls in their group, they agreed to sleep on the floor. No one was willing to sleep in the bed while the rest slept on the floor. Perhaps they reasoned that if they took turns sleeping in the bed, the discomfort of going back to the floor would be multiplied.

They had no table, so they spread a newspaper on the floor, and gathered around it to eat. Having little to eat, they missed the table the less. They had bran coffee with molasses used as a sugar substitute and bread with air used in place of butter. Sometimes for variety they had graham pancakes.

One day early in their experience Mama wrote in her diary, "As this morning was fast morning, we did not have occasion to think about the empty cupboard."

Most folks nowadays wouldn't know what a fast morning is. They know about a person who runs around with a fast crowd or a city which is on fast time, but they have never heard of fast mornings. I know because we often had them at home when I was a youngster. In the band work they observed Tuesday and Friday as fast mornings. That meant that they ate no breakfast and spent that hour in prayer for their own Christian growth and the success of the meetings which they were holding.

They did not always live with an empty cupboard, of course, or they wouldn't have lived to tell the story. But there would be times of privation as well as feasting times. At one time they had fifteen cabbages. But who wants to live on cabbage for a week! Mama even recalls a time when they had six pounds of steak and another day she wrote, "A stranger brought us some strawberries today. Surely the Lord is in this place."

Many were the times Mama went hungry during those long years of low-nutrition menus. The only fortunate aspect was that she was born before vitamins were known, so she managed to keep healthy in spite of her underprivileged state. She

didn't realize till I took a course in nutrition in graduate college what a sad life she had lived, and even then she was somewhat facetiously disdainful of our sympathy.

You see, it was this way. Mama was happy and when one is happy a lot of details seem irrelevant. Happiness and contentment must have high vitamin content. Of course, she could quote me chapter and verse to remind me that the Bible in its first edition disclosed that fact long ago.

If you are asking me, I don't believe there is a subject in the world on which Mama couldn't find adequate source material to write a thesis just from that one Book. Not that she looked down on other books, for the house was full of them and we all grew up with an inherited love for reading. Funny thing, we always had money for books and music lessons no matter how we cut the corners in other ways. We children took piano lessons, voice lessons, violin lessons, cello lessons, clarient lessons, and when we ran short of instruments--elecution lessons. But here I am talking about the children and Mama hasn't even met Papa yet.

Food really was a problem for them many times during the band work days. Once they had absolutely nothing to eat. The cupboard had been getting emptier for several days and finally there was not even oat meal. So she gathered the other girls around her and explained the predicament.

"Now, girls, there isn't any need for worry," she said. "We must just tell our Father about our need. This is His work that we are doing. We aren't making any selfish requests.

We'll just kneel down and tell Him that we are hungry and that in order to do our work for today, we need some simple food. And if it is His will, He will send us some food even though we are among strangers and without any money."

So they knelt down and prayed with simplicity and expectation for their daily bread. During the period of prayer a heavy knock was heard at the door. Mama slipped away from the group to answer the door. There on the porch stood a burly man with his arms full of groceries and a sack of potatoes at his feet. Without the slightest word of greeting Mama threw out her hands and said, "Oh, the Lord has sent it."

Offering her the packages, the man said in an embarrassed manner, "Well, if it was the Lord that sent it, it was the devil that fetched it."

When Mama would retell the story to us as youngsters, we'd say "Wasn't that wonderful?" She would answer with a far-away look in her eyes, "No, the part that was wonderful was that he came to the meeting that night and was converted." And everyone in Gardner in those days could tell the difference between a man before and after he was converted. To be a Christian was to be a changed person!

In 1894 Mama began her diary with the words of a song:

"O come angel band, Come and around me stand.
O bear me away on your snowy white wings
To my immortal home."

It's a funny thing. Mama is past seventy now, but she never sings that song anymore. She loves to live. But the

angel band almost took her at her word that year. She took a severe chill after being stalled with a buggy breakdown and developed a high fever on Sunday. At night she led the meeting, although she was so weak that she had to hold onto the pulpit for support. On Monday the doctor said she had typhoid-pneumonia. For twenty-eight days she ran a high fever.

The girls had felt sure that Mama would die, but she recorded in her journal an account of a vision or dream which she had while she was sick. She was singing:

"Then in a nobler, sweeter song
I'll sing Thy power to save
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave."

As she looked heavenward, she seemed to see angels with spread wings who joined her in singing. They told her that she was to go with them to heaven to sing that sweeter song. At first she readily consented, for they looked so inviting and the thoughts of the glories of heaven filled her mind. With them she saw the multitude of souls that were soon to be lost unless someone told them of Jesus.

At once she asked the angels if she might stay on earth a little longer and work for Jesus. Finally they consented and she awoke shedding tears. From that moment she was sure that she would recover.

Although her view of life was very serious--her mind being centered on the other world--she was still distinctly human. In one journal I read, "My, but we had a dull meeting last night."

After reading all six of the big journals I have decided that a dull meeting was an exception when Mama was in band work. Something was always happening. In Evanston the tent blew down during a service when a severe storm came up suddenly. A young man named Fred died suddenly at Sheffield right after refusing to accept Christ.

At Yorktown they had excellent crowds--so much so that a man decided to open up a stand next door to their tent to sell ice cream, lemonade, cider and cigars. They were able to hold the attention of the crowd but were much grieved because he kept the stand open on Sunday. They requested him not to, but he continued. Finally the justice of the peace told him that he would have to close or be fined $100 and costs, so by the next Sunday he had closed up his stand and moved on.

Mama and her friends were not always popular with everyone. At times they suffered real persecution. Ruffians would disturb their services, and the police would attend to keep order. Many who came out of curiosity or to have some fun were finally converted. At the close of a series of meetings they would organize a church if there was not already church provision. Those converted included doctors, teachers, policemen, business men, gypsies, drunkards, bankers, one deaf and mute girl who wrote out her testimony to be read by the leader, a man recently released from the Joliet penitentiary,housewives, farmers, children and people on their death beds.

Today the church rolls in the towns where Mama held meetings contain some of the names recorded in Mama's journals and many

of their children and grandchildren. Most of the persons she mentioned have died. In fact, no minister is still alive of the dozens to whom Mama refers by name in her journals, but I knew many of them in my childhood.

The incidents of persecution which I have found in Mama's journals were not the stories Mama recounted to us about her band work years. It wasn't until I grew up and was given permission to read her diaries that I found out the hard details of those thirteen years.

On one page she wrote, "I slept last night in a place some wicked folks had threatened to burn. The windows were smeared with oil. At first I felt quite nervous, but God helped me to go to sleep and I had a fine night's rest."

In Elmhurst the tabernacle was put upon the wrong lot by mistake; and when the owner objected, it was taken down and moved. On August 20, 1896, Mama was awakened early and informed that the tent had been maliciously burned down during the night. As Mama stood weeping by the charred remains, a minister came up and patted her on the shoulder and said, "My dear girl, those tears are bottled up in heaven." Influential persons of the city contributed to a fund to purchase a new tabernacle.

Sometimes the men did mischievous rather than really mean things to bother Mama. She tells of one young man who flirted with her while she was trying to lead the meeting. When she would shake her head "no" at him, he would put his hat up in front of his face and peek out from behind it to distract her.

Another young man put a corn-cob pipe in one of her pockets

and a package of chewing tobacco in the other so that when she took out her handkerchief she was horrified. To be irreverent to God was a sure way of hurting Mama. One man told her that he expected the Lord would give him the steady job of fireman when he got to hell. Mama was greatly grieved.

Her worst experience came after staying in a home in which the wife was a Christian but was much opposed by her husband. When Mama left, he took her trunk to the depot. When Mama reached her destination and opened the trunk she found it filled with refuse from the barn mixed in with all her clothes. In her journal she wrote, "How I did long for some cologne after I finished that cleaning job!"

But that is not the end of the story. Later on when she was very sick and not expected to live, the same man who did that unkindness made a journey to the city in which she was ill to ask her forgiveness, and he was converted at her bedside. Finding her so forgiving, he could believe in the forgiveness of God.

CHAPTER 2

THE GAY NINETIES

Believe it or not, Mama kept a diary four years before making a single entry in relation to a man in her life. And then she wrote "A report is out that I have a husband in the penitentiary. 'Blessed are ye when all manner of evil shall be spoken of you falsely for my sake.'" But she had no husband to boast of! And yet it would be far from the truth to hint that the gay nineties had no excitement as far as Mama's life was concerned.

Mama had joined a band in 1891--when she was seventeen. It was not a musical organization but a group of Christian girls who acted as lay evangelists, going from town to town, holding revivals and starting churches.

Reading her experiences now from her carefully kept diaries, they seem a strange mixture of the tragic and the humorous. But I have a feeling that to Mama at that time they didn't appear either way--they were merely the experiences into which the Lord led them as they sought to follow Him day after day.

And they must have learned how to look back and laugh at the difficult trials through which they passed. That is, if anyone can look back and laugh at hunger and personal opposition.

At times their hunger is observed in her diaries by indirection. She said, "We were each given three oranges today. For some reason I seem to have a very enormous appetite."

One day she wrote, "I prayed that I might deny myself for Jesus' sake, and it has been real easy to do this week as we

haven't had much provisions."

At only one time did she express concern about her financial limitations. She wrote, "Sometimes it seems hard to have to go for weeks without any money, but God knows what is best."

A kind friend presented them an angel's food cake and a basket of strawberries, but as it was Mama's fast day she did not yield to the temptation to enjoy them.

At one time a church fair was held in the town in which they were holding meetings. At the close of the fair, the left-over food was brought to them as a gift. Mama wrote in her journal, "They thought they were doing us a favor, but we feared that we might choke if we ate the devil's food; so our leader wisely sent back the basket with a note of non-acceptance, telling them of our disapproval of church fairs." They felt that the Bible taught that money for God's work should be given by His people in tithes and offerings. So they went hungry rather than violate their consciences.

One day a kind neighbor sent in a roast of beef. They didn't know what to do with it as they had no oven and yet hated to cut up the roast and cook it like stewing beef. Finally they decided to roast it in their coal heater and so took out the ash pan. But they could find nothing among their few pans which would fit in the space of the ash can. Finally, Mama scoured the ash pan and cooked the roast in that! They called it their "something new under the sun roast" and declared that it was delicious.

New and strange experiences came to them in this roving

life. For one thing they made many friends as they travelled from place to place in their evangelistic work. In most cases they were very fond of these friends, and the feeling must have been mutual for a stranger once arose to testify in one of their meetings and said, "I want to express my thanks to the Heavenly Father for these fine meetings and also to these heavenly sisters."

At one place in which Mama was entertained she could find no facilities for taking a bath. She hinted her desire to her hostess but failed to get any response and wondered what the folks of that household used for baths. Finally she became desperate and asked point-blank, "Isn't there something that I can use so that I may take a bath?"

The woman looked about helplessly and at last said, "Well, I guess you could use that coal pail," pointing to one which was partly filled behind the kitchen range. So Mama scrubbed out the coal pail and used it for the model bathtub of 1895.

I used to think that was terrible, but recently I met a missionary who had been imprisoned in Korea. They were given one cup of water a day for all purposes, and she told me that every seventh day she went without a drop of water to drink so she could take a bath. Coal pails and cups! God's children take what comes and are thankful.

Mama was only seventeen when she began this rugged life; she naturally enjoyed the fun of the average adolescent. She tells of going with her companions to the highest hill in Algonquin and having a snowball fight and washing each other's face in the snow. At another time some of them stuffed dummies

and set them by the table so that when the rest came into the room they found a man, woman and baby sitting up at the empty table. Probably it was their sense of humor which preserved their physical and emotional health in spite of their wearing circumstances.

Most of the girls stayed in the work only short periods of time. Emma, Mama's best friend, stayed four years before marrying a preacher, but Mama's thirteen years was the all-time record. During these years she preached in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Iowa. Most of this time--except the first year or two--she was the leader of the band and had to make important decisions for the group. When she was twenty-three she was given a preacher's license by the Free Methodist Church.

When she was only seventeen, she had her first experience putting a shroud on a dead body. At various times she was asked to conduct funerals. One day she was called to take the funeral of an infant and went to the house as directed. When she arrived, she saw no sign of a coffin and finally asked where the baby was. "In here," the lady said, and Mama followed her into the bedroom. Imagine Mama's surprise when the woman pulled out a dresser drawer and there lay the dead baby! The dresser drawer was placed on two chairs and the funeral proceeded. Later the body was transferred to a simple box for burial.

At one time she was called upon to conduct several funerals within a short time. The girls in the band said, "My, but you are getting popular, Sadie," and Mama said, "Yes, with the dead."

Their life surely wasn't monotonous. They had to sweep the church or its substitute, carry wood and coal, build the fires in the stove, fill and light the lamps, carry lumber for the benches in tent meetings, and perform all sorts of unexpected duties. At one time a horse was loaned to them, but they had to feed and care for it. So it was only one more mouth to feed! Often they could not afford to have coal delivered and so would save the delivery fee by pulling it by the bushel on a borrowed sled or wagon. Mama admitted that she hated this but said that perhaps that was one of the means God used to keep her humble. Usually they kept house in one or two rooms and, of course, did their own laundry and cooking--when there was something to cook.

They held services every night and took turns speaking and leading the singing. Sometimes Mama's helpers got scared out the last minute and she would have to preach for them on the spur of the moment. One of Mama's greatest difficulties was hoarseness and a sore throat. Public speaking night after night--often out of doors--was hard on her voice. In those days they had altar services regularly and most of the time they would be in prayer at the altar until ten or eleven o'clock. Sometimes the congregations were small, but at other times more than a thousand attended. Without amplifiers it is easy to understand the voice strain at such services. Mama mentioned that sometimes the teams couldn't pass in the road because there was such a big crowd around their tent.

During the daytime they called in the homes. Time and again Mama wrote in her journal, "We have called at every house

in this town." When the meetings were held in cities, time alone determined in how many homes they called. I find such entries as "We called at all the saloons on May St.(Chicago) today." On another day "We made 56 calls today including some houses of vice." And another "With our suitcases strapped to our shoulders and Bibles under our arms we visited from house to house through the snow drifts."

In fact, they walked so much that shoes were one of their greatest problems. Once in awhile Mama had cash to choose her own shoes, but usually she made it a matter of prayer and some neighbor would find that she had a pair that was too tight or too loose or too something and Mama's prayer would be answered.

But they didn't spend all their time walking. Mama tells of going on the C.B.& Q. and having the conductor ask them to sing--a novelty which proved so interesting to the passengers that they were encored for about an hour. At another time Mama spoke of a very tiresome journey to Kewanee in the caboose of a freight train. They travelled to New Bedford in a wagon. When using a horse, they often had difficulties. She wrote, "We had to carry our luggage and dishes the last two miles as the wagon broke down." At another time, "The single-tree of the buggy broke today and we were stalled for a long time till a farmer helped us fix it."

Mama must have been something like me. Someone asked me if I could change a tire and my husband answered, "If she can't, she can stand on the highway and look awfully sweet and helpless." I guess Mama was like that, for she tells of men from whiskey row helping to put up their tent.

In 1900 she recorded her first auto ride but did not seem to be especially thrilled. Perhaps the reason she was unimpressed was that it seemed tame transportation compared to the horse she had been using. One day "Foxie" became frightened at a Chicago street car and they had a runaway. He ran for over a mile down State Street, bumped into a buggy, broke its wheel, turned at the watering trough, finally ran into a post, threw himself down, tipped the girls out and the buggy on top of them. Emma was able to crawl out and found some men to get the buggy off the other girls. A policeman took the horse, and the girls took a street car. Fortunately there were no broken bones--only painful flesh wounds. These would heal, but their clothes were ruined--a real calamity in their lives. And what was even more serious, they felt responsible to pay for the wrecked buggy, which was like mortgaging their entire future. Only everyone had told them that there <u>was</u> no future in that kind of a life!

During those years Mama's fate seemed to go back and forth like a pendulum from good to bad. One day a creek would overflow and put their tent floor under five feet of water; the next day someone would send her some much-needed shoes. One page of her diary says, "I have a new flannel nightgown. The Lord has given me a great deal more than I deserve," or "For my birthday I received an autograph album, a pair of stockings and some mittens, so I fared very well." Sixteen two-cent stamps were listed among her five Christmas gifts one year. Also included were a hat veil, a chamois lung protector and

a hand-made painting of the motto which their band had adopted --"For Others' Sake."

One day she would be rejoicing because they had found a band home for a dollar a week, and the next she would be downcast because she had cut her thumb with an axe while chopping the wood for their fire. In one town they had no fuel and suffered from the cold. In the next, the stove got tipped over one night, but two strong men carried it out and the service continued--about as smoky as most restaurants and hotel lobbies.

One day their kitchen caught fire from a defective gasoline stove and the very next night a kerosene lamp caught the tent on fire. But they were cheered up by a letter from a local minister commending their meetings and saying he wished that his members would go to their tent meetings and get converted.

Religious meetings in those days sometimes made the front page of the newspaper. One day in the mail they received two clippings. One said that these girls were crazy over religion, but the other bragged them to the sky. In her diary Mama wrote, "Papers are very unreliable. We will do as the Lord leads whatever the papers say."

In one entry she wrote "Our meetings are the talk of the town. Religion is being discussed on the streets and even in the saloons. Last night a saloon keeper put a dollar in our offering! Think of that!"

Some way or other, things seemed to work out. When their plans were suddenly changed, they found themselves ready to go to a new place without money. All they had was return tickets to Rockford, and they didn't feel the Lord wanted them to go

to Rockford. So they asked the ticket agent if he could exchange these for some tickets to Peoria. He said he couldn't unless someone else came along wanting tickets for Rockford. Before long someone came along wanting to go to Rockford, and they were able to get Peoria tickets in exchange.

For the most part, people were very kind to them. Some supplied them with provisions. Some named their babies after them.

I was given my middle name for one of the girls with whom Mama worked--Evelyn, but they always called her Eva. It is interesting to me to realize that I was named for two persons of whom Mama might have been jealous--my father's first wife and Eva. Eva was evidently a highly gifted girl and very well-liked. In her diary Mama wrote, "I had a strange dream about Eva last night. I dreamed that at the close of a revival we had held, I learned that all the conviction and all the conversions came as a result of Eva's devotedness to God. It seemed that I hadn't helped at all." But it was only a dream. In reality they worked together beautifully and remained close friends after Eva married--and left the band.

The "wicked men"--Mama's term for them--were always doing favors for her. In one town the hotel keeper came to their house and presented them with tickets to eat in his dining room. He said the men at the hotel had talked it over and felt that the girls should have hot food. I have an idea that they wanted a look at these strange young women.

At one time she wrote, "There is a man outdoors cutting our wood for us with a pipe in his mouth. Think of that!"

Having a big funny bone, I wanted to ask "What's the matter? Doesn't he have an axe?"

CHAPTER 3

A DIARY FULL OF LOVE

I knew whom I was going to marry when I was seventeen and didn't wait too long to make my dreams come true, so I've never been able to understand how Mama managed those thirteen long years of itinerant gospel work without a man in her life. There were men to be sure--she was even engaged once--but she changed her mind about it. Her heart was fully in her work, and she was not sure that the Lord wanted her to give it up.

Few girls will understand how Mama could let sweetness and light go by and stick at her work which gave little remuneration beyond a bare living. However, dividends were high in the consciousness of bringing peace and joy to restless hearts through acceptance of Christ.

The thing that strikes me most, however, about Mama's carefully kept diary is the fact that it is full of love. First of all, it is just filled with evidences of her love for Jesus. Most persons are classified as Christians because they believe on Christ. But with Mama it was much more than that. She loved Him as we love a person.

Then her journals are filled with love for the girls in her band--always seeing their best qualities, overlooking their mistakes, concerned for their welfare. She wrote "God bless and keep the dear child" in reference to one of her helpers, and this was typical of her concern for them.

Love for the people in the towns in which they held meetings was equally shown. The sick, the poor, those in trouble always seemed to have a special place in her heart.

Would it seem likely that a person who loved people in general so much wouldn't eventually fall in love with one in particular? Well, Mama did. It must have been fun for the other girls to watch the idea grow on her.

At first she seemed quite immune to Cupid's call. She wrote in her diary "Uncle George will be married tomorrow. It will be a new life for him. I pity them both--especially poor Laura. I am so contented with my lot." That was in 1894 and it seemed to be true that she was absolutely contented with her life.

In 1897 she wrote in reference to one of her girls who married in haste (and repented in leisure as the years revealed), "I wouldn't care to be married on such short notice as that. I should want more time to pray over the matter. But I guess I needn't worry, as I am having all the time I need."

However, at about that same time she began to need time to think about such things. Later that year she wrote, "Someone met me when I returned from Morris, and we had a pleasant time as long as it lasted. Keep this within thy page, O little book . . .The corner by the streetcar barns. O! I know that I am naughty. Lord help me!"

The Someone was a young bookkeeper who worked in an office on LaSalle Street in Chicago and who had been converted in one of Mama's meetings two years earlier. At the time of the holidays that winter she wrote, "We did an awful thing this week. We invited Edward (a cousin) and Ray (the Someone already referred to) here for New Year's dinner. First time we ever did such a thing in a band home. Hope it won't cause any talk. God help us!"

But she evidently was not swept off her feet, for that night she preached with Someone in the congregation from the text, "There is but a step between me and death," and the service was very solemn.

During these months of courtship she had a feeling that God might not want her to take the step of marriage. She wrote in her journal, "Another letter from the office on LaSalle Street. I fear this is going too far, and how can I ever stop it with such feelings as I have in my heart? Will forever cast all things aside if I feel God is displeased with it."

In 1898 she wrote, "I fear this thing will go through," clearly showing her doubt that it was the will of God for her life. It might mean an awful heartbreak for Mama, but she really desired to do what God wanted her to do more than she desired her own way.

Included in her band was a girl named Arminta. For her birthday one year Mama gave her a little lamp which she laughingly told her to put away and not use until she put her first child to bed. Little did Mama realize that she would break her own heart over renouncing her love for the man who would some day be the father of that child. When Ray and Arminta were married a few years later, Mama wrote in her diary, "May God give them a happy life together. I am still sure that was not God's will for my life."

It seems strange, but Mama ended up doing almost everything she said in her diary she'd never do. At one time a young girl was killed in the town in which they were holding meetings and the step-mother was under suspicion. The folks said they could

see finger marks where she had choked the girl. Writing about this Mama said, "Oh! what awful things these step-mothers can do. That is something I hope never to be."

Mama went and prayed with this step-mother, and she confessed the murder. The whole ordeal made an awful impression on Mama and intensified her aversion to step-mothers. But she ended up by being one--not only once but twice--and she was a very fine one to eight children.

Another of the things she said she would never be was a circuit preacher. She loved the band work with the companionship of the other girls, but she said she would never take a circuit by herself and be a pastor.

In 1902 she gave a dollar to a minister at Harvey toward a fund for redecorating the parsonage. Jokingly he said, "I'll fix the parsonage all up nice so you can have this circuit when I leave."

"I guess not," she replied with determination. "No circuit for me!" But twenty years later it turned out to be her first circuit. Only when Mama got there it needed redecorating again.

At about the turn of the century Papa came into view and Mama fell in love. He was sixteen years older than Mama and had four children who had been without a mother's love for several years. According to all the books and newspaper columns I have ever read, Mama had 2 1/2 strikes against her before she even picked up the bat. But you see, Mama had something the columnists don't know anything about. So Mama did not make a mistake when she married Papa (unless you would call me a mistake--and I think I came along as an after-thought, but they always

seemed pleased). I came the same week as both of their birthdays, and being full of Christian grace they said that I was the best present they had ever received.

Mama's and my ideas of courtship are poles apart. You see, theirs was all by correspondence. Ladies born in the eighteen hundreds are reticent, so I have never known all the details; but somehow or other--after an attempt to balance the post office department deficit--it was decided that they would get married. And Mama hadn't even been kissed yet--by him.

She had known him for some time, having heard him speak at Sunday school conventions and the like. She had greatly admired him and since their friendship was almost entirely by correspondence, until their marriage he seemed merely to fill the role of friend rather than that of lover.

By this time Mama'a father was reconciled to the strange vocation which she filled so ably and graciously, and so a simple home wedding was planned. The groom arrived in time--always a somewhat dubious matter, men being what they are--and the wedding went off in traditional June setting.

The day after the ceremony Papa left to make arrangements in the city which was to offer them their first temporary home. Mama was to meet him in Chicago, and although she had been the leader of her band and travelled about independently for years, she suddenly became the typical helpless bride.

I have often pondered by what strange alchemy the marriage ceremony changes us from oak-strong girls to clinging-vine brides, but such is usually the case. From the moment Mama acknowledged her desire to love, honor and obey, she became one who needed a

man to lean upon. It wasn't too difficult in our family for Papa was shorter than Mama--another thing that was wrong about their marriage. Only none of our family ever realized that there was anything wrong with it. We are always wishing we could make our own as fine.

When she reached Chicago, Papa was nowhere to be seen. Poor Mama was suddenly desolate forlorn, lost in a city which she knew well. As she sat nervous and restless in the station, wondering what should be her next move, a man appeared with a friendly smile on his face. Mama said to herself, "Oh, there is Mr. Hill. He will help me." Mr. Hill was Papa and in telling about it Mama would always add, "Honestly, children, I forgot that I was married and just thought that there was one of my friends who could help me." We would howl with laughter and think Mama must have been crazy to forget that she was married.

Mama might have forgotten for a moment that she was married, but the years ahead were to prove that Mama seldom forgot the status or the needs of other people no matter what it might cost her.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE IN A PARSONAGE

Mama did not allow us to go to movies, of course, but any psychiatrist would have said that we didn't miss a thing. Living in a parsonage gave us a cross-section view of life--all without admission fee. I won't say it was without cost, for we tried to cash gift checks that the banks refused to honor and we went hungry ourselves rather than turn a hungry man from our door.

Perhaps Mama didn't understand human nature, but I rather think her nature made her too human. I remember my childish embarrassment when a strange looking man came one day and kissed Mama as he greeted her. He was introduced to us as Will--a dear little boy whom she had cared for as a child. He didn't look little to us--185 lbs. x 6 ft. 2--but she turned out to be correct in her choice of one adjective--he was somewhat dear.

Mama happened to be waxing our antique linoleum when he arrived. I have never been able to understand why people will pay high prices for things that are old--our parsonage was full of them--even our wardrobes. The antique dealers felt that our possessions would bring more profit if preserved and sold to Henry Ford for an "odd"collection. Anyway, dear little Will found Mama on her knees--a familiar posture--and following the kiss insisted that he take her to the store and buy her the nicest linoleum they had. He paid for it with a check somewhat larger than the price--just to save a later trip to the bank to get the money for his ticket.

We enjoyed the linoleum. To us it was a work of art, but Mama had to spend quite a bit of time in the same familiar

posture praying for means to honor the check (which returned like the legendary bad penny--only on a much grander scale). For many months we ate linoleum--at least a lot of items were absent from our table until the linoleum bill was paid.

But I think Mama will die with a soft spot in her heart for dear little Will, although we have hinted that the soft place was in another part of her anatomy.

Of all the parsonages we lived in, not one flashes across my memory without a vivid picture of some exciting experience. Aurora was full of them. A street car tried to rob me of my life there, but it was properly rebuked--I am still going strong but the street car has been replaced by a bus line.

The house caught fire, but that too was unable to put us out of business. It all happened because I listened to my conscience and got up to say my prayers, which had been forgotten or neglected, and then I smelled smoke and saved the house. The logic evidently worked something like this, in some sort of a syllogism.

I did not say my prayers.

People who do not say their prayers go to the place of fire and brimstone.

Already I smell the smoke in my mind's eye--or my mind's smeller.

I will get up and say my prayers.

False alarm, the smoke and fire are real--here and now.

Perhaps the moral is--get in bed for awhile before you say your prayers.

Towns are odd-in my memory some seem full of tramps, but Aurora was full of drunks who wanted to be prayed with. I remember several, but my favorite came on a Sunday afternoon.

We had guests in the living room, so Mama and Papa took him out to the kitchen and the little trio knelt down by the kitchen chairs. Perhaps the aroma of the recent Sunday dinner made it hard for him to concentrate. At any rate, the poor man felt more like talking than praying. I kept peeking through a crack in the door at curiosity intervals, and I received the impression that although he would much prefer to sit with us in the living room, he was kept at his post of duty.

Presently Papa came out of the kitchen (we learned later, for the purpose of verifying a claim the man had made that he had a relative who was also a minister).

I must get my love of research from Papa, for only his insatiable desire to verify facts could have swerved him from his original purpose to pray with the man. But upstairs he went to search through the church records.

At any rate, he left Mama alone with the stranger, and as I peeked through the crack I froze in my boots for the man whisked a revolver from his pocket and said to my mother, "Do you care if I kill myself here?"

Mama grabbed the revolver from him,closed her eyes and began to pray: "Oh Lord, here's a poor man who is so discouraged with life that he wants to kill himself, and we know that life is greatly worth living if we let Thee deliver us from our sins and fill our lives with joy."

When Papa returned with the record books under his arm, he found the drunken man weeping and Mama gesturing with the loaded revolver as she continued in prayer--with her eyes still closed!

The prayer session continued during the supper hour, so that we had to go to the evening service without our meal. Later a friend decided to take us little girls home, get us a bite and put us to bed.

This was before the day of electricity, and as our friend felt her way toward the gas jet I fell over the prostrate body of our drunken friend. The bolt lock in the kitchen had been pushed shut but the door was slightly ajar so that the lock did not function. Perhaps he, too, wanted a bite to eat before he went to bed.

The hardest part of these experiences for the whole family was having to turn some of these men over to the police when they seemed beyond our help. I have cried more than once when the patrol wagon backed up to our house and took away one of our new friends.

We gave them food and clothes and sometimes let them take baths at our house, but Mama drew the line when it came to letting them sleep with us.

After Papa died, Mama became a bit more cautious about tramps. I remember one who stood on the porch calling her, but she refused to answer his knock. He kept saying in drunken rhythm, "I know you're in there. There are stars in your eyes--stars in your eyes." But Mama was looking for stars in her crown, so she didn't answer the door.

Instead of seeking our sympathy, sometimes the tramps felt

sorry for us. One day in St. Charles a man came just as Mama had finished washing all our rubbers and galoshes and had them drying in a long row along the side porch. When the tramp saw the array he said, "No, lady, I wouldn't think of asking you for a bite with all those mouths to feed." There were quite a few of us I'll admit, but only half as many mouths as feet. Even at that, it was easier to fill the rubbers than the mouths.

Emily Post might have suggestions to make as to the polite way of refusing squash when it is served in rapid succession for a whole winter. I tried all the ingenious methods I could contrive but was not successful. The Bible says to "eat what is set before you and ask no questions for conscience sake." I didn't want to ask any questions. Squash never seemed to incite mental curiosity on my part. I merely wanted to make a simple comment--"I don't like squash!" But at our house we were supposed to eat what was provided and be thankful.

My sister Hazel had two blessings which she used before meals when it was her turn to say grace. Only we didn't call it grace. We called it the blessing, and she said it very reverently.

Once when asked at another house to say "grace" she refused and gave as the reason that she could remember only the first two lines, "Grace, Grace, dressed in lace, Went upstairs to powder her face."

At home she had two "blessings" which she used. She looked around the table and if she liked the menu, she said a four-line poem; but if she didn't like the menu, she said, "Dear Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful." It was a sincere and reverent blessing and no reproof could be given,

but Mama knew that it was not a compliment.

Now that we are all grown and cooks in our own right, we know that Mama was a marvel with her limited food budget. But in those days we wondered why Mama--who taught us all the miracles--couldn't bring one to pass in our favor and change the water into pop and the familiar foods into the exotic delicacies we read about in books.

Kewanee was perhaps the greatest budget offender. Never in our lives did we have an income of more than eight hundred dollars a year, and those were definitely boom years. But Kewanee had a system all its own. There was a certain salary promised, but not all was to be paid in cash. It was known as the "Quarterage" system--for what reason, I haven't the slighest idea. Perhaps it was because we were to get a quarter now and then in cash and the rest in age.

If one member wanted to sew for us, that was her contribution to the church, and we marked it down on our income blank. Not the kind of an income blank we have now but one that I felt like saying blankety blank to, even then.

Sometimes the quarterage came as sauerkraut or garden produce or whatever the members had in greater abundance than cash. The difficulty was that we also had more garden produce than cash, and some months it was difficult to wear sauerkraut on our feet or eat the fancy work someone had made. Cash would have been more versatile.

In self justice,I must insist that I did my best during those years. I divided the squash on my plate into several sections and played that this part was butterscotch pudding, this caramel ice cream and this broccoli--the color of which was

unknown to me, but I loved its elegant sound.

But after awhile my vivid imagination was atrophied, and I knew I must find a new escape mechanism. My most successful method was to relate some exciting adventure and while I had the family attention elsewhere transfer the squash from my plate to a convenient shelf under the table from which I could later remove it to a more suitable final resting place.

It sounds crude on paper but I really developed it into quite an art and was never caught in the act.

Don't get me wrong--those were good years--and although Papa and Mama divided their time between keeping the wolf from the door and letting the stork in through the window we managed to go to college and get a couple of degrees apiece. We grew up with the Chicago Symphony--thanks to the fact that boys buy the tickets and it was easier for us to get boys than tickets--and took music appreciation under dear old Dr. Stock.

While life in the parsonage was poor so far as a cash basis was concerned, we seemed to suffer no frustration; and it offered educational opportunities--along many lines--beyond comparison.

CHAPTER 5

"HER CHILDREN RISE UP AND CALL HER..."

If all Mama's children had arisen at one time to call her blessed, it would have sounded more like the cheering at a Michigan - Illinois football game than the accents of cherubim or a Mother's Day anthem. Our version of good old King Lemuel's tribute might more honestly have read, "Her children rise up and call her." And what we would have called would have depended on the emotional experience or need of any given moment.

When the census taker came to our house and asked, "How many children do you have?" Mama would have to count. "Wilbur, Leora, Bertha, Wilton, Mary Frances, Gertrude, Joseph, Nellie, Hazel, Muriel, Ben, Florence, George, Ruth." No one was ever rude enough to interrupt her and say, "The number, please, the number." But had such been the case, she might easily have given the legendary answer, "I'll have you know that we haven't run out of names yet." She might have said with the optimism which characterized her love of family, "How can we tell at this early date?"

The ones here enumerated are not all the children who at one time made their sojourn in our home, but merely the ones related by blood ties to Mama or one of Mama's husbands. How to keep 'my kids' and 'your kids' from fussing with 'our kids' was one problem on which Mama could have written a child psychology text. I once had a series of radio programs on the problems of raising children--but that was before I had any of my own. If radio had come along during Mama's child-bearing or child-bearing-with period, I believe she would have had the courage to take on a program even while we were greying her hair.

Wilton was the first child she helped to raise, and according to what we often hear, he should have been the most difficult to raise, for he was a step-child whom she inherited at the altar when she married Papa. Wilton's own mother had died at the time of his birth, but from the moment Mama saw him, he knew the love of a real mother. In all the later years--up until his death recently--he never said a cross word to Mama. A more lovable child could not have blessed their home.

You will remember that Mama was practically an old maid when she married Papa. And she was a bit on the nervous order. Mice and snakes and such odds and ends as fill most boys' pockets were not as appealing to her as boys think such things should be to their mothers. She wasn't afraid of any of the big things which might have brought her danger, but she was actually afraid of the little creatures. Now I'm not meaning to find fault with her. I don't like the little fellows too well myself. But my own son has taught me a little boy's point of view. When he brought half a dead bird into the kitchen and I said, "Oh, for goodness sake, take that out of the house," he answered in a very puzzled tone, "I don't see why you are afraid of it--it's dead!"

Wilton wanted to collect frog legs rather than dead birds. I suppose he caught the whole frog, but what he wanted was the legs. More than that, he wanted Mama to cook them for him. That happened to be an unfamiliar delicacy to Mama, and she reneged. Undaunted, Wilton caught, cleaned, shook in a sack of flour, and fried the tender morsels, and Mama closed the kitchen door and went into another room that she might not be contaminated by the ceremony. Soon the delicious aroma of the frog legs began to

fill the house and Mama kept moving closer and closer to the kitchen. Now fortunately for Mama, Wilton was not a Little Red Hen--I mean Rooster. Mama said, "My, that smells like fried chicken." "Please taste it, Mama," he begged and before long Mama was licking the platter clean.

Mama isn't one to be stubborn and spite her nose to save her face. It was her nose which had warned her how good frog legs were, and she was willing to admit that she had been foolish in her antipathy.

No brother could have been loved more than Wilton. He served in both the Marines and the Army, and all his life he would plunge into an oration on the merits of the Marines on the slightest provocation.

While he was in the service during World War I, a sorrow hung over our home for fear we'd lose this wonderful brother. When I had been sick with typhoid fever, he had come home on furlough with trinkets from the Orient such as my hungry eyes had never seen. At that time I didn't know another girl who had a brother in the Marines and it was for me a psychological compensation to make up for the many things which other girls had but which were lacking in our home. A brother off at war can do an awful lot for a little girl's morale.

Every morning after family prayers, Papa would go through the list of missing men in the Chicago Tribune, and before we left for school we would be assured that Wilton was safe--"at least up to the time this list was made," Papa would add. And somehow we would rest in the belief that today's prayers would carry him through another day.

Wilton proved to be the world's best step-child. After the war, when Papa was sick for seven long months at the time of his last illness, Wilton postponed his marriage and gave up his job as an engineer at Inland Steel and came home to be with us. He found a new job and helped to support us during those months of heavy expense. He served as night nurse so Mama could get her greatly needed rest. Later, when he did get married, he and his bride came to spend their honeymoon at our house. "There is no place we'd rather be than with Mama," they said.

But not all the days of my childhood were sad days--just enough to make me sympathetic with others who are in sorrow. What fun we had at our house! And what normal growing youngsters we were. How Mary Frances and I would tease Hazel about our birth-places--Crystal Lake, Melrose Park, and Plainfield. We would say, "Mary Frances was born at a lake, Gertrude was born in a park--but Hazel was born in just a plain field." And Hazel would ask, "Was I Mama? Was I really born in just a plain field?" And Mama would say, "Of course not, honey. Now, girls, you stop teasing Hazel." And we would stop--at least until a new compulsion seized us.

Hazel was our cousin who became our sister and whom we came to love dearly. Her mother died with diphtheria when she was a baby, just a month after my baby brother of the same age had died. It was probably the greatest sorrow of Mama's life, for he died so suddenly. A year old, and he could sing and smile just like Papa. And then before we knew it, the Lord took him. A lovely life-size photograph came just after his death, and it broke Mama's heart not to see him step out of the frame.

Her spiritual struggle at that time and the victory which followed may help another who knows similar sorrow. I remember the little white casket which stood in our parlor and the little girls dressed in white who carried it to the church next door while my sister and I followed carrying flowers. Those girls were our best friends, and somehow it made it a bit easier to know that they were carrying Joe.

For weeks after the funeral, all Mama could see in the parlor was that little white casket, and her sorrow almost incapacitated her for a life of continued usefulness in the Lord's service. Finally one morning while we were at school, she decided that she must have relief from the intense burden of that sorrow. Kneeling where the casket had stood, she poured out her weight of sorrow and asked the Lord to deliver her from the unbearable anguish of spirit. Miraculously, in an instant, she was free in spirit and a deep sense of peace possessed her. From then on she was resigned to the Lord's will and all was well once more in our home.

My sister Hazel was the answer to that hour of prayer. She came to live with us and filled the loneliness in all of our hearts. Never for a fleeting moment did any member of our family regret that we had taken her into our home and our hearts--as really as if she had been born there.

Nellie was a cousin who lived with us at the time of a special sorrow in her Mother's life. Always our motto was 'the more the merrier.' One day while we were having a noisy play-time in an upstairs bedroom, the confusion became so great that Mama came in hurriedly and giving each of us a swat with her little "non-spoiling rod" she said, "Now, I want you to learn to play together

without quarreling!" Utterly surprised, we all looked up and chorused, "Why Mama, we weren't quarreling. We were just playing. And as an echo Nellie added, "Yes, Aunt Sadie, we were just playing and making believe that we were quarreling."

She was the one who has become a legend in our family because when Mama gave her castor oil, she said, "Leave it here by my bed, Aunt Sadie; I might want some more." Dear Nellie, we all felt bad when she went back home to live.

Muriel was my oldest sister's youngest child, and she came to live with us when her mother died. We have often thought of Hazel as being the George Washington of our family--but Muriel!!! When she came, she seemed to know no difference between truth and falsehood. It was probably her wonderful imagination and artistic ability which today make her an unsurpassed story teller and one who can hear a classic and sit down and play most of it by ear.

She was cuter than any of us, but what a merry chase she led Mama. Coming to our house, she was introduced to a number of taboos which she had not known in her own home. First thing we knew, she was a stronger negativist than any of us.

At her gym class at school, she told the teacher that she couldn't play baseball because her grandma didn't believe in it. The teacher said, "Oh, I don't think Mrs. Hill has anything against baseball. She probably doesn't like Sunday baseball, but I think she likes the game."

When Muriel came home and reported the conversation, we all assured her that we had no scruples against baseball--only the commercialized Sunday games. Finally she concluded the whole matter in her eight-year-old way, "Well, maybe you folks believe in

baseball, but I don't."

Many years later Mama married an ardent baseball fan, and my brother-in-law accused him of going for long Sunday afternoon walks in his Chicago parish in order that he might overhear what the Cubs were doing on blaring radios. Now, I'm not accusing him--that is Porter's idea and he's a Cub fan himself. We always told Dad Wilkin that his favorite spots in Chicago were the Olive Branch Mission and Wrigley Field.

What a normal happy family life we had. You may be pardoned if you aren't exactly clear as to just how many members there were in our family at any given time. We weren't always sure ourselves. But of one thing Mama was sure--there were always children and when the number got too low, Mama became chairman of an Orphan's Home Board. That is one way to keep on having children forever!

CHAPTER 6

GREAT TRIALS AND GREAT TRIBULATIONS

Generous was Mama's middle name. Her first generous act in relation to me was to name me after Papa's first wife. When he and Mama were first married he occasionally called her by that name. It did not seem to irk her or make her jealous, but one day she said, "Someday I'll give you a Gertrude of your own again." Mama was like that--so when I came along, I was given the name of the first wife. Perhaps that was the reason I always seemed close to him and was the last one he recognized and spoke to before he died. I was only a little tyke then, but since that time I have named a son for him.

The months during which Papa was sick were full of answers to prayers. Papa was one of the hardest working preachers who ever lived. When he left any parsonage, it was in 100% better condition than when we arrived. Papa would put in a new window in a dark kitchen, or a bathroom in an obsolete house, or a handier exit at the side of the house. To paint, paper, and refinish the floors was such routine procedure that it needs no comment.

He was also a handy man at our church summer conference grounds. When I was about thirty, I counted up 75 camp meetings which I had attended--making me feel quite the seasoned camper. Mama tells of one of the camp meetings which finally had to be discontinued because it rained so much that the mothers couldn't get the diapers dry. That will suggest at what age I became a camper.

It was at one of these church camps that Papa received the injury which cost him his life. While helping to equip the dining hall, he was thrown from a truck--and the camp meeting gas stove struck him on the head. They said that he died from an incurable brain tumor, but it would have been just as great a sorrow by any other name.

Early in his illness, I remember practicing to give "The Ruggles' Dinner Party" in a county grade school contest. It is foolish as everyone knows, and Mama would say, "Go out by the grape arbor and say it, dear. It might make Papa nervous to hear you say it so many times." Even now, when anyone reads The Birds' Christmas Carol,I see nothing but a sick room and a grape arbor and a plaid gingham dress in which I spoke my piece at the contest. No honor won could erase my disappointment when I found out that the new dress which I had been promised for the county contest was no Cinderella apparition but a gingham dress. The passing years have assured me that it was the best Mama could provide, but I still remember the gigantic battle it took in my heart not to let Mama sense my disappointment. We knew Mama had enough to bear, and we always tried to spare her any needless pain. That is not saying that we always succeeded, but Mama knows that we tried.

In spite of many months of illness with the expense of doctors and trained nurses, we did not owe anyone a penny following Papa's death. It was a genuine answer to prayer, for Papa carried no insurance. At that time many Christian people interpreted insurance to be a lack of trust. Perhaps that was the reason. Or maybe he couldn't take it because it was such a

problem to care for the needs of life that to prepare for death was one thing too many.

Not that Papa failed to make the most important kind of preparation for death. Many times he would say, following ministerial discussion in our living room, "I have never been given much to pre- or post-millennial argument concerning our Lord's second coming. I have felt that our chief duty is to let men know that He came the first time to be an offering for sin. If we are ready when He comes--that is the most important thing." Once when I stood by his chair at that moment, he turned and smiled at me and patted me on the head as he repeated, "Yes, that is the important thing, my dear, to be ready when Jesus comes."

Sometimes during his illness, utter strangers would come to the house and handing an envelope to Mama would say, "You don't know us, but we know what a blessing Mr. Hill has been in this community and we want to help you while he is sick." No wonder we have always wanted to pass on this help to others in the years since. We could not repay the anonymous donors, but we have been able to pass on the kindness.

When Mama mentioned to our family doctor her wish that we might have a specialist for Papa, he was kind but told us that it was financially out of the question. The best brain surgeon was at one of the University of Chicago hospitals, but Papa was unable to be taken there and the family doctor was sure that the specialist's fee to come to our city would be prohibitive. Since Mama felt that she could never be satisfied unless we gave Papa the best care available, she asked our doctor to see if the specialist would come no matter what the fee might be.

Believe it or not, he came, and what was more, he refused to accept any fee. When Mama protested, he said, "Well, if it will make you feel any better, I'll let you pay my C.B.& Q. train fare from Chicago to Kewanee. That is all it has cost me to come." He emphasized his own scientific interest as his reason for coming in order to help Mama feel less obligated. Later when Mama was asked if she would consent to a post mortem, other women--meaning to be kind perhaps--said, "I wouldn't let them cut up my husband," but Mama answered even though the decision was a painful one, "They couldn't cure my dear one, but if by a post mortem they can discover anything about brain tumors which might save another life--then I know Joseph would want me to say yes."

At no time did Mama's greatness of spirit show itself more strongly than in her time of sorrow. We children were dusting the church--for in those days that was part of the preacher's work. I remember that we had turned it into a game and were running from bench to bench when a voice called through the open church window, "Come home, children. Papa is dying." All the years have not erased the pang I felt to be found "playing" in God's house--a forbidden thing--at the moment of my father's death. And yet I know that he would have understood, for he had told us many yarns about pranks he had played in the "old country"--the endearing term he always used when referring to his boyhood home in England.

When we reached his room, Mama was waiting for us; and as we stood beside his bed, we repeated together the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer. Since that hour death to me has not seemd an ugly thing. She helped us to adjust to our loss and be happy

in the knowledge that he was released from much suffering. And Mama was such a tower of strength that she, who most of all needed comfort, was a comforter to us all.

During the years of their life together, she had remained in the background lest her earlier experience as a Christian worker should rob Papa of his proper place of leadership and responsibility. Sunday School classes and missionary societies filled her leisure after family cares were discharged, but nothing distressed her more than to have someone say, "I think she is a better speaker than her husband." After such a remark--which she took almost as a personal insult--she would exercise great care to keep out of the limelight.

But after Papa was gone, there was no further need for refusal and so when asked to fill his place, she agreed to do her best. The house was too full of memories, however, and at Conference time she asked to be released and was transferred to Harvey, a Chicago suburb where new scenes brought a partial relief from loneliness.

Mama has a great resiliency to sorrow. She has experienced several, but her view of life has never been self-centered and she has always been so busy helping with the troubles of others that she has found no time to nurse her own. And that has been the source of a miracle in her own life. The outreach in behalf of others has brought healing for herself.

She always had her finger in a dozen pies--or was busy getting me out of a dozen batches of hot water. In addition to all the regular work of a church pastorate, for several years she taught Bible in Thornton Township High School. Later she was asked to

hold regular chapel services at the State School for Boys at St. Charles. I don't know if they thought raising us gave her an understanding of reformatory inmates or what. At any rate she knew how to talk to them, and it was a mutually satisfying experience.

At one time she decided to bring one of the girls from the Geneva State Training School home with us for the vacation period. It was a girl who had attended our Sunday School in Kempton, a town in which we had once lived, and even then Mama had felt that the girl needed sympathy because of her home background. Her mother had come to us and said "Now when Bell comes to Sunday School without a hair ribbon, you'll know that she has been bad during the week." I don't remember ever seeing her with a hair ribbon, but I didn't hold that against her, for I would never have worn one myself under a similar accrediting agency.

But in our house we wore our clothes for good or for ill. The punishment which had hung over my head had been not being able to join the church. In an age when many folks are not church members, there will be little understanding of the severity of this punishment for me. In our church we had a system whereby we joined "on probation" on confession of our faith. Then we lived through a six-month trial period at the end of which, if the candidate felt at home in the church and the church approved the conduct of the prospect, the person in question joined "in full connection."

I joined "on probation" with great ease for I was full of faith--but that was only the first step. During Papa's lifetime, everytime I was especially naughty he would say, "Now we'll

have to begin your six-month period all over again." I often wondered how many adults would ever make the grade under similar scrutiny. I failed to make it under Papa; but after he was gone, Mama let me join the church. She had slightly different ideas along the lines of child care and training, and she knew that "man looketh upon the outward appearance" but siding with God, she looked on the heart.

But Bell's mother was different, and so Bell ended up in a reformatory. We had always felt sorry for her and welcomed the idea of taking her into our home for a summer vacation. But by that time, even Mama was unable to win her over to the good life. During the first night in our home, Mama awakened to find Bell stealing all the ribbons and bits of finery from our dresser drawers. Later, she planned an elopement with a total stranger of questionable reputation. At last Mama was forced to admit defeat and Bell had to go back "home" to the training school at Geneva.

I suppose there were a few nights in which none but our family slept under our roof, but that was not the common occurrence. I was grown up before I realized that in most homes guests were the exception rather than the rule. We did not keep a guest book, for as John said about the acts of kindness of Jesus, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" if we had recorded the names of all the guests who found hospitality in our home.

Sometimes it was for a night; in the case of the girl who wanted to attend high school it was for a year, but usually it was somewhere between the two extremes. A missionary family came

for a week-end of services and remained for several weeks while measles ran through their family and ours--each coming down with it according to date of greatest exposure and ability to lengthen or hasten the required incubation period.

Being somewhat tough, I withstood the exposure and everyone marveled that Gertrude, who had been caught in bed with some of her measly playmates, did not come down with it. Many years later I wished I had,for on the day of a college oratory contest I broke-out. "You have the measles," cried my seat mate as I went to chapel--and I was to leave immediately after chapel to represent my Alma Mater in an intercollegiate meet. I skipped chapel although I needed to pray more than usual this day and bathed my face repeatedly in ice water. When we reached the McKendree campus, I chose to sit by the lake and say my oration rather than go into the warm dormitory and be comfortable (?) I won the prize for Greenville but the next day and the next week--oh, how I wished I'd had measles as a child!

But in those early years I was far from being Mama's pride and joy. On my first public appearance I remember saying,

"Roses on my shoulder
Slippers on my feet
I'm my Mama's darling.
Don't you think I'm sweet?"

But on many occasions the answer would have been definitely "NO!"

I seemed to have a capacity for getting into trouble all out of proportion to my size. Mary Frances, my older sister, was naturally good, and I often heard my relatives say of my mother, "It was surely a blessing she had Gertrude. If she'd only had Mary Frances she'd think she knew all there was to know

about bringing up children. But Gertrude! But Gertrude'--" and then they'd sigh and raise their eyebrows and I didn't need to be especially smart to get the idea that if my coming was a blessing to Mama, it was a blessing in disguise.

She attempted such high things for me--one was to try to make right everything that I made wrong, and no mother can do that unless she accepts it as fulltime employment without pay or thanks. When I told some of the church members at St. Charles--it was before the day of the Baker Hotel--that we had been to a banquet where they had thirteen courses (I must have been hungry that day)--and that we said "grace" before each course (I think God at least gave me credit for a thankful heart)--I had to make the rounds and confess that I had told a lie. But the restitution was still a profitable venture, for at each home I was given a cookie or some other "goodie," so that in the end I think it was really true that I at least had had a banquet of thirteen courses and "grace" before each one.

Bathtubs would have been the bane of my existence if we had had such things in our parsonages. I was the tomboy of the family, and cleanliness must have been one of my recessive characteristics. But it was dominant with Mama, and she was domineering when it came to soap and water. She believed that "cleanliness was next to Godliness" and much more easily guaranteed in the life of one's children. Personally, I felt that since I had not yet attained Godliness, I should not strive for the things which came next in order. Somehow it seemed rather improper.

She got a whole congregation to read their Bibles trying to find that verse. They were sure it was there but spent months

in vain looking for it. While they were looking for a Bible verse which God didn't put in the Bible--although I think He approves the general idea--Mama was hunting for traces of dirt on me. Not that this was a strenuous search. Each time she looked at me she made a pass for the soap or the scrub brush--or both. I think it must have been an obsession with her--though not a very magnificent one, in my opinion.

However, the worst bath I ever had, I gave myself--and I should have known better, for I was in my teens. There was no bathtub, but there was a cookstove, and some way or other Mama seemed to think the presence of the latter compensated for the absence of the former.

"You can take it right here by the cookstove," she would say in such a happy sort of way. Now, we didn't have a fireplace and so in our home the cookstove was sort of the center of interest. We'd sit around it on a chilly night and pop corn, crack nuts or munch apples. But a bath by the cookstove did not appeal to me as something to draw the family together.

But she assembled the paraphernalia--tub, tea kettle and lesser essentials like soap and I began to pull down the shades. Just as I was at the height of my bath--if you know what I mean by the height of a bath--a gentleman who happened to be passing the house came dashing into the kitchen crying, "Your house is on fire." At that moment I thought it must be my face! In a desperate attempt to do my part, I tipped over the wash tub. I never found out if that was what put out the fire or not. Fortunately, I was so excited about the fire that I couldn't remember afterward who the man was. But for a long time afterwards

I would get weak in the knees if I was introduced to any of my mother's male friends and he would say, "Let me see, haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

She became so accustomed to my facility for getting into difficulty that at certain times she feared each ring of the phone for fear it was an ill omen. One day my art teacher called and asked for an appointment with my mother. "Oh dear, what can Gertrude have done now," she wailed silently. The day of the appointment arrived and the teacher came to the house.

If I remember correctly, I didn't have to help with the dishes that night, for it seems that when Miss Powell arrived she began, "Now I want to talk to you about Gertrude. I have been wondering if it might not be well for her to study at the Academy of Fine Arts instead of going to college."

How Mama did beam on me that night. I think she even forgave me for some of my escapades because this time she had been prepared for the worst and got fooled.

But she was still on her guard, and when she was offered a position as Dean of Women in Greenville College, which I chose to attend, she had the good judgment to turn it down even though it was an attractive offer and would have taken her into a field of service which she could have filled with distinction and enjoyment. I think she realized that one or the other of us would cramp the other's style. Or maybe she just thought she'd live to old age with less strain if she let some other woman worry about me from then on!

CHAPTER 7

MAMA'S SUITORS VS. MINE

When I was in high school, our family consisted of Mama and three daughters--but Mama had more suitors than any of us. I never knew when I started to tell her of my latest flame whether she or I would have the better story to tell. The chief difference was that hers were almost always religious and mine were almost always not. Funny thing about hers, the one I liked the least brought her the best candy, so I had to tolerate him. Especially considering that my friends usually brought no candy but expected to eat from my hand.

For the most part she was very patient with the boys who ate her candy. She lived through an endless line of changing favorites. First came Lester--who said I wrote notes to him on everything from Marshall Field stationery to Kleenex--only in those days we didn't call it Kleenex. Poor Lester was killed in a radio station during those experimental days--otherwise Mama might still be contending with him.

She didn't approve of Aaron but she was wise enough not to put her foot down on him or she might have had him under foot for life. Instead she let time move him out of the picture to make way for my new affection for Horace or Ed. I don't remember which came first, but they were brothers, so it was all in the family and my name would have been the same one syllable if I had married either one.

If I ever let my affection fall on a family with more than one son, I took them in stride--one at a time, more or less. I remember another family like that--Harold, Jimmie and Verne, order

not guaranteed, but I was crazy about them at one period.

Paul was in a class all by himself. I recall the day I returned from a Sunday afternoon date in an aura of ecstasy and sat down and spoke quietly to Mama--a thing I have seldom done before or since. "If we feel this same way in five years," I said, "Paul and I are going to be married." For a moment there was consciously-sought-after silence, and then Mama's repressed laughter came to the surface and filled the room. I know now that she was convulsed with the thought of the miracle that would be necessary to keep me feeling the same way for five weeks--let alone five years. But at the moment I was very cross with her, for my words were sincere--not even I knew that I'd be married to someone else in three years.

Mama had lived a long time and she was aware of the truth of the old hymn: "Hearts that are broken will vibrate once more"--only she would have censored the word "once" and substituted "many times" more. Syncopation would have taken care of the extra syllables.

Or perhaps the reason she didn't take my love affairs seriously was that she was too busy with her own. The fact that she did not remarry until after we were grown and married ourselves was not because she didn't have chances galore. She would say, "When Mr. Wright comes along, I'll get married." But we found out later that she spelled it RIGHT.

She denies it, but I'm sure she would have married the district superintendent of it hadn't been for the rat episode. In order to keep the record straight, as well as Mama's reputation, it should be stated that the rat episode came long years after

the short case of amnesia in the LaSalle Street station. This was during Papa's angel stage.

Now there may have been a parsonage of this era somewhere which was not troubled with mice or rats. If so, we didn't live there. It could have been due to the hospitality of parsonages. I cannot understand how they felt duty-bound to be hospitable to the little creatures, for the Bible says, "Be hospitable to strangers for some have entertained angels unawares." Now that lets them out on two points. The rats were not strangers, for they lived there before we arrived; and although in Sunday School papers I have seen angels according to every school of art, I have never seen any in the form of rats--even artists of the cubist and surrealist schools had not come to that.

We were living in Harvey--that industrialized suburb which Thornton Township High School lifts out of oblivion in my memory. Paul and I had been over to Dalton Branch with the orchestra--no it was Aaron and that accounts for my getting in late enough to witness the debacle of Mama's love life.

As those who have seen me might judge by remote control, Mama is not particularly photogenic. But especially during middle age--mellowed by maturity with its component parts of sorrow and happiness--there was a certain dignity and charm to her bearing. But this refers largely to her platform appearance or her mingling with a group of youngsters in the various types of children's activities at which she was so adept.

She appeared in neither role the night of the rat episode. As though the rat by some malicious instinct were opposed to our having a Step-Papa, he directed his campaign against our guest,

the district superintendent, who made quarterly visits to our abode--in the line of duty--and occasional non-quarterly visits along other lines.

As Aaron and I got out of the car, we observed the dark little parsonage set far back from the street and made our way slowly toward the porch which had witnessed so many good-nights to so many Good-Fellows. I have always wondered if they were the ones who started the Chicago Tribune's Thanksgiving baskets.

Just as we seated ourselves in the porch swing, I heard a shriek worthy of a current TV program, and suddenly the lights flashed on all over the house. Rushing into the hall, we were greeted by three of the most startling sights I have ever witnessed. Two of the best Christians I have ever known were concentrating their long-forgotten emotions of hate and vengeance on a poor rat. I do not mean that he looked undernourished, but since he lived in a parsonage he must have been poor. And all the rats that I have ever seen are prey to the tragedy of our age--unequal distribution of wealth. No matter how well fed they are, they seem to have conscientious objections to sharing any nourishment with their own tails.

Just as we entered, the rat made the last turn on the stairs and sought succor in the folds of Mama's trailing kimono.

Now if one is objective about the whole matter, one can see that the rat had a right to object to the coming of the district superintendent; for unknown to us he had a nest between the mattress and the spring of this seldom-used and unheated guest room. In this nest he intended--I mean she, to lay her eggs in the spring or set up her incubator--or whatever it is that rats do. I can

hardly believe that a stork would have had the courage to bring anything to this rat.

It is always well to try to look at everything from both sides, they tell us in mental hygiene. I suppose the district superintendent thought he had a side too. I don't know which one he was lying on when he first took cognizance of the rat. But knowing him as I do, I rather imagine that he felt the rat--literally as well as figuratively--to be an intrusion into his private life. And how men do hate that!

At any rate, he sprang out of bed, loosening the slats, and causing the spring to fall to the floor with a vibrating rumble like the sound of Gabriel's mighty blast. Perhaps that was what awakened Mama in her first-floor bedroom. I rather imagine it was, for if she had an "eye single" she probably also had an ear sensitive to Gabriel's horn.

Forgetting his ecclesiastical vestments, the district superintendent opened his bedroom door and in a tone more vicious than I had ever heard from his pulpit, he cried "RATS! RATS! RATS!" Now really that was not a correct statement for there was only one, but I suppose in the excitement he might be excused for exaggeration unbecoming to a minister.

Sensing the imminent danger of the situation, the rat made for the opening in the doorway, plunging between the man's legs in a frantic effort of escape. Talk about clutching at the last straw--that rat ran right between two of them when she ran between the preacher's spindly legs, but her speed must have given her faulty vision, for she passed them by without so much as a glance.

Perhaps the district superintendent was ticklish on the bottoms of his feet--I don't know--but something or other caused him to lose his balance as the rat made its exit, and since his bedroom door was at the head of the stairs, he came down uncere-moniously--half falling, half bumping along those uncushioned stairs. Maybe his semicircular canals began to function so that he gained his equilibrium about half way down. I am more inclined to think that he stopped short because he caught a glimpse of Mama--frozen into a Lot's wife statue in the hall below. There may have been times that she looked like a vision to him, but oh my! this time she was a sight, and even love wasn't blind enough not to see that.

I think she came out under false pretenses. Finding Aaron in the hall, she probably thought he was the rat our friend had discovered. At any rate, she glared at him in great consterna-tion--that is, until the rat ran to her for maternal protection.

Looking at it from the distance of years, I don't know if my sympathy should have been with Mama or the rat. She says it thrashed her with its tail, but I think her emotional state was such as to render her judgment incompetent. "Get a broom," she shouted. Mama always could think of some work for me to do! I pushed past her in complete safety, for by this time the rat had reached a more studied decision and had rushed up the stairs past the petrified parson, thinking the dangers up there less terrible than the ones below.

For about an hour we ran upstairs, downstairs in pursuit of the frantic beast, slamming the broom here, there and every-where where the rat had just been. Since then I have learned

in killing flies that one should swat just behind the fly for as they rise they do so in a backward sweeping motion. But at this early age I knew nothing of the psychology of killing anything, so I failed to know that I should slam the broom where the rat was going rather than where it had just been.

Eventually, by the wisdom of insanity, I happened to slam where the rat was. Some way the rat and I got our wires crossed. He had been studying me and I had been studying him, and I'm sure it was just by accident that one unpredictable creature killed the other.

But with the removal of the dead rat, Aaron and the district superintendent passed out of our lives. After that night, I'm sure they decided that we were not the family to marry into. The rats!

CHAPTER 8

MAMA TIES THE KNOT

I was Mama's second child but the first to get married. It was a little difficult to maneuver since I wanted to begin a decade before she had. That was a great occasion--the first time Clarence and I got married. Well, it really was the first time either of us had literally approached the altar--although several girls had hinted at the idea to him. We still have evidences of two or three of them around the house somewhere, and when I come across them in housecleaning season, I always feel that he made a big mistake choosing me.

I guess we were just destined for it, for I'm sure I had no natural aptitude and I swear it wasn't my idea. He says he proposed to me by our kitchen sink, but if so I was too unconscious to remember it later.

Mama and I were alike in one regard--we both married men who were old enough to know better. You see, Clarence was one of my college professors and I was the youngest girl in college, so there may have been some ground for the disapproval of the Dean of Women. She called me into her office and with that "this-is-for-your-own-good" facial expression common to personnel workers, she proceeded to suggest the many reasons for the inappropriateness of our "going-together."

She pointed out that I might become a young widow as my mother had been before me. That is the only instance I can ever remember of Mama being held up to me as a person not to emulate. How I wish I could see the Dean now to tell her how wholly wrong she was. But that is impossible, for she is not only a widow

but a dead widow at that--making reprisals at least temporarily impractical. Her probable error may be only 50%; I may some day be a widow--but not even the laws of the Medes and Persians could make me a young widow now.

She pointed out that it destroyed rapport between faculty and students for a professor to "go" with a student. "What would happen," she asked in a nervous climax, "if all of the men of our faculty should begin to date you?" I think she misspoke and meant to say "you girls" but I did not offer to correct her. I considered its possibility for a moment and after weighing it pro and con decided against it for Mama's sake but merely answered as meekly as was possible with my temperament, "I guess you'd say I had quite a harem."

I never could understand why that Dean of Women didn't like me after that interview. But she left the campus before long, so it didn't work too great a hardship on my happiness. She always smiled very sweetly at me, but I had already learned to distrust the persons who smile too sweetly. My best friends argue and scold me. Dear Dean had a little scene with the masculine part of this family also, but my own better judgment--which I have taken out of cold storage for this temporary use--censors out that conversation, for I want to live happily ever after.

If I had been less naive in high school, I should have known that I'd marry a man named Clarence, for I was the brat in Booth Tarkington's play of that name. As the final curtain descended, I stood alone on the stage calling in my most poignant and wistful voice, "Clarence, Clarence, Clarence." A girl can't do that three nights and matinees and not expect some degree of success--

at least not a girl of my optimistic frame of heart.

Funny thing, Clarence in that play was a soldier and so was mine--in World War I--enlisting the week after he graduated from high school. That is my idea of diplomacy. Don't fall in love with your soldier till he gets back from the danger zone. It is much easier on the heart and it also saves postage. Of course, you must understand that he is such a prize that I'd have taken him with or without uniform.

We made no effort to convince the Dean. Fortunately one did not have to have her permission to marry during the summer vacation. And anyway the college president and his wife were on our side. I worked for them and they liked me and thought in time I would turn out all right. I never did ask how many millenniums they judged would be necessary, for there are times when it is better not to go into details.

I lived in the dorm but had to work at odd jobs to earn my voice and violin lessons--and my pocket money, though I knew I wouldn't need much of that--this being a coeducational college. My first week at school Mrs. Prexy asked me if I could iron shirts. "Oh sure," I answered--never having seen one on anything but a man, but having pressed a few of these. Papa died when I was a youngster and my brother had married before I reached the ironing stage. So I did not even know that shirts went on beyond the trouser belt. And to top it off, these were white dress shirts with tiny tucks at each side which were stiffly starched. Can you imagine whoever thought up such a dumb idea? Sew in a lot of hard-to-iron tucks to make some woman unhappy at the ironing board so some man may cover them up with a vest and coat and

step out to make some other woman happy. I call it unfair labor practices. Well, at any rate, I ironed Prexie's shirts for a long time, and when I began to appear regularly with a certain Prof, the president said, "I'd write a recommendation for you to take to your teacher--but you don't seem to need one." My, but Prexy was nice--one of those rare college presidents who knew each student by name and by heart as well.

Prexy was willing, but we still had Mama to convince. I should have thought she'd have thanked her lucky stars to be rid of me. Perhaps, being a real Christian, she felt troubled in conscience, fearing that it would be a case of short-changing the prospective son-in-law.

He was my speech instructor and debate coach and he says now that he wouldn't have trained me to argue so well if he had known he was going to marry me. All I can say is, "Don't blame me for your ball and chain. I was required to take speech, but you weren't required to take me."

At any rate it took our combined skill in inductive and deductive argument to convince Mama and secure her permission for us to be married before I finished college. You see, we wanted to be married at the end of my Junior year--having been in love since I was a Freshman. Mama was willing to have me marry some day--but why must it be that summer?

She looked forward to the day I should become domestic--at that time she considered it possible although she probably predicted I would continue to be worthy of classification as a domestic animal. She hoped to see me pushing a baby carriage some day, but she wanted me to possess a cap and gown first. Can't you

just visualize me holding a sheepskin in one hand while I pushed a little lamb in the carriage? Well, both goals seemed of value to Mama, and it took a lot of effort to win her to our point of view. I think she held her breath my whole Senior year for fear the charm would fail and I'd break my promise to finish my college work. Later when I went on to graduate school, she worried for fear I'd fail along the line of her other ambition for me, to make her a grandmother.

But before she became a grandmother she had to become a mother-in-law. And in her characteristic way Mama decided that in order to have the knot tied well, she would do it herself. Relatives and friends hinted that it would be more conventional to have the marriage vows given before a member of the male kin, but she knew that breaking conventions would not break my heart. I had no father on whose arm to drift up the aisle and so why worry about one more irregularity. There was really to be a groom, and that made it legal in the eyes of the state and also in Mama's eyes--which was a more important detail.

So Mama married me and it seems to have been quite a success through the years. The moon was full and the night was warm--ideal for a garden wedding. Under pretense of going from the garden to the gift room we slipped away during the reception. Our first night together--ah! what a night. What I remember most is that on this warm August night we slept on a feather bed. Which proves that there was at least one female in existence dumber than the bride. I awakened the next morning to see my lovely mate lying on the floor. In reality he had sought out the coolest spot in the room, but he still insists that I kicked him

out of bed the first night we were married.

On our way back from our Niagara Falls honeymoon we stopped with relatives on a farm in Ohio, and my uncle conceived the brilliant idea of riding back with us to his childhood home in Illinois. It didn't bother us for we were past the stage at which chaperones are a deterrent, so we made him most welcome. If he had one sin, it was his intemperate love of coffee, and so he took along several containers. Our Model T was already well-loaded; for when my mother-in-law took one look at me, she began to pack canned fruit and other delicacies which were intended to see poor Clarence through that first winter with "this mere slip of a girl."

My mother-in-law was as sweet as they come and it must have taken real grace to bear with me, for I found out later that they had mistaken me for a girl who had been expelled from college with a questionable reputation. And yet they had taken me in with genuine if reserved kindness. Now I am not bragging. I'm not saying that I couldn't have been expelled. But I am a member of Sigma Xi, and in the interest of scientific accuracy I must state that I was never expelled or disciplined for the infraction of rules during my three dormitory years. By the end of the three years I was running low on gas, I will admit, but I made it!

Added to the bounty which my in-laws had stored away in the car and Clarence's books, which were to form the nucleus of our library, were my uncle's thermos jugs and a box of choice tomatoes selected from his Heinz acres. Each was carefully wrapped and packed from green in the bottom up through the maturing tones

of yellowish pink to the top layer of firm, red Rutgers which I was to slice for supper that first night in our new home.

Several attempts were made at loading the car. First, we put in the baggage and then the passengers, but since that wouldn't work we pried ourselves loose and reversed the process-passengers first, completely surrounded by baggage. Fortunately we were not stopped for the corn bore inspection.

When we reached Ft. Wayne--I mean when it appeared that we might reach Ft. Wayne if the clock of time ticked long enough--it became apparent that something was wrong. At first I thought that it was the voice of conscience, but I found out later that the crank case cracked open. I took it as a personal affront that this dear old car which had taken us on so many jaunts before our marriage should now go into tantrums. But nothing that I could say to it gave it the slightest change of heart. It was definitely cracked as anyone could tell after five minutes of conversation. Some old-timers are like that!

Clarence decided to hitch-hike to the nearest garage and left me in the custody of my uncle, who kept track of the passing of time by periodic draughts from the coffee jug.

Garage men are like doctors--they give you a bill even if their efforts at restoration are a failure. They pronounced the car practically dead. They offered no hope for its recovery, and the fee they wanted even to make a try was more than we possessed. When I was a student I always thought the teachers had more money than the students, but now that I was married to a teacher I was beginning to see it differently. The only thing to do was to sell the car and go home by train.

The wrecking truck pulled us into Ft. Wayne, and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these junk-bound Model T Fords. By arrangement they parked us beside the depot--and while my uncle unloaded, my husband frantically called junk men to find a prospective buyer. I tried to help him but I had never before seen a dial phone and arithmetic always has given me the jitters. I called the correct numbers but not always in the right order.

In a slightly jarred mood he decided to take over the business transactions himself. In no time at all he located a junk man, and I went back to my uncle somewhat hurt. It was an approach to a quarrel and I felt unwanted. On my return I found my uncle in the process of selling the box of tomatoes which he offered to an eager woman for 30 cents. Later that fall we discovered that what he had actually sold was a box of valuable books. We discovered rotten tomatoes when I began to arrange the bookcases and they hardly seemed appropriate for a professor's library, and it was still too early for Halloween so they were a total loss!

When we consulted the train schedule, there was no possible time for changing into street clothes, and I was dressed in knickers. Nothing that I could say would date me more positively than to say I was wearing knickers.

"No one will look at you," Clarence said in a tone intended to be comforting. I knew I wasn't much to look at, but it is not very flattering to be told during your first month of married life that no one will look at you. That was once that he was mistaken. I don't know if it was my knickers or my uncle's periodic coffee sprees or the motley array of luggage. But there was not a man,

woman or beast on that train who didn't look at me--not merely once but at fidgety intervals--some never taking their eyes off our section of the coach.

When we got back to the Fox River valley where we had been married, we found a month's accumulation of wedding gifts. The itinerant system is not without its compensations. Every circuit my folks had served had sent me a box of silver or a set of crystal goblets. My, they must have liked my folks, for I didn't dream I had so many friends.

Clarence went about the task of packing the gifts for shipment to our little college town with characteristic patience and lack of enthusiasm. Sometimes his facial expression said, "I wouldn't have spoken to you by the sink if I had known this was in the bargain." Sometimes it took on the fatalistic look of one who decides that this is the best one can hope for in the present incarnation.

Wood packing boxes seemed to be an unknown entity; but a piano case was purchased, cut down, and made into boxes of convenient sizes into which were carefully packed the crystal stem-ware and the other lovely gifts--beautiful except at packing time.

Everyone feared that the things would be broken if the boxes were shipped, so Clarence decided to buy a delivery truck which would be for us a sort of prairie schooner--carrying us and all we possessed to our first home. The garage at St. Charles had no truck to sell, but a car washer who happened to overhear the inquiry said he'd sell us a truck for forty dollars and deliver it to our driveway. The deal was closed and we once more found ourselves in the family-car class.

With great excitement the truck was loaded and at last we were ready to start. But that was the thing farthest from the thoughts of that truck. No amount of ingenuity or mechanical knowledge would budge it from its location in the driveway. For a few minutes it was a bit humorous, but after an hour one feels rather silly sitting in a truck that won't start. I can think of only one time when Clarence looked more frustrated. That was years later when we took a burro trip in the Rockies, and no amount of moral suasion or physical manipulation would entice his little beast to move. I remember how I doubled up with laughter to see his legs dangling at either side of the mule--practically touching the ground. It seemed he should resort to the technique of a little brother riding his big brother's bicycle. If Clarence had just leaned down--first to the left and then to the right, he would have been able to walk under his own steam using the burro's back for a bicycle seat.

Perhaps the truck may have boasted thirty horse power, but just one reliable horse would have done us more good. Finally a friend got us a hot shot battery, and we sallied forth with the feeling that if we stopped even once on the three hundred mile trip we'd be lost.

In buying the truck, the new head of the home had failed to notice that it was without floorboards or windshield. I am rather glad for this, for if love is blind, it reassures me that he was still in love at the conclusion of the honeymoon. Before many hours had passed, my feet became very uncomfortable from the engine heat--but that is much better than to become hot-headed. Then it began to rain. At first I considered this a misfortune

but later revised my opinion when I saw it in its proper light as a counter-irritant. At least it cooled off my feet and as I became wetter, it gave me the illusion of being at an ocean beach with the spray from the white caps cooling my face. As the wind blew more forcibly, I had the sensation of surf riding. I had never done it but the sensation was genuine none the less--and I was happy at heart--until I turned to the left and sensed that the truck driver was not. We both wear glasses, but he sees trouble coming farther away than I can sense it. His expression warned me that a crisis was in the offing. I was not warned prematurely, for just then a tire blew out, and several others followed suit in rapid succession resembling a Morse code.

"In the meantime, in between times, Ain't we got fun?" was a song popular in that era but we didn't sing it that day. Poor Clarence tramped to town when our spare was used up; and after five tires blew out, his patience was exhausted--or his wisdom kindled to realize that we had too heavy a load. We drove into Gilman on flat tires or no tires, I cannot tell which, and decided to abandon the offending vehicle. How I wish my brother-in-law had been superintendent of schools then instead of later so that we might have found some encouragement there. Stopping beside the village hardware store, we took stock of our assets. The storekeeper offered to buy the truck for fifteen dollars and furnished us crates and tools with which to repack our wares.

When everything was ostensibly in readiness, I found myself holding the handle to my new Bissell sweeper. Now as the manufacturers will tell you, no woman can afford to be without a Bissell sweeper--but I think they mean on cleaning day and not

when travelling on the Illinois Central. But that is exactly what I did. I debated whether or not to pose as a cripple and use it as a cane. I don't remember now what I decided, but I rather imagine I ended up by unconsciously posing as a mental incompetent.

When we reached Effingham, we found we had missed the Pennsylvania so were forced to spend the night in a decrepit old railway hotel where they set us up in anything but a bridal suite, but eventually we reached our home. Sometimes folks give up marriage if the road seems hard, but we knew that home was the finest retreat from the hardships of life's roads.

CHAPTER 9

THE UNPREDICTABLE WOMAN

So the years moved along for Mama, and Mary Frances and I left for college and then for homes of our own. Mama's meditations now were threaded with tingling remembrances of the days of romance in her own life. Perhaps planning weddings does that to every mother--and especially to one who has been a widow since those daughters were just little girls. To be two parents to one's children is a real venture, the accomplishment of which leaves little time for romance on the side. And when the children have outgrown the nest, it always seems unbearably quiet and incomplete even though the mother may have previously declared that she would give anything for a bit of calm.

Before giving consent to my marriage, Mama had been rueful lest I become so domestic that I wouldn't finish college. Well, later on she began to wonder if I'd ever become domestic. Year followed year and college gave way to university graduate work and teaching. Somewhat shyly Mama hinted that an M.A. might be more fun if repeated in two syllables. But by that time I was busy reading proof on the research which had been accepted as my thesis toward another degree. But one day I decided or discovered that for me the Ph.D. would mean Prefer Having Daughter. A week-end at home provided an opportunity to tell Mama.

While we were mixing up a cake on a busy Saturday morning, I casually announced that I was going to have a baby.

But as usual Mama had a bigger announcement. "I'm going to have <u>four</u> children," she said, and reaching into her apron pocket, she pulled out a rather worn letter and handed it to me. It was

nothing less than a proposal from the sweetheart of her youth. Now this was not the first time I had read one of Mama's proposals, for there had been a good many through the years--even when I had been visible as a liability.

One time it was a good-looking minister from another denomination who looked to me like a wise bargain--but Mama didn't want to leave her own church. Another time, a wealthy but eccentric gentleman urged her to be his wife. "You'll never need to turn your hands to do a single bit of work. Just be an example to my children." Ah, me, did the man not realize that she had been trying for years to be just that to her own? And what success did the facts reveal? There was the usual assortment of men--those who had heard that her first husband had left her a nice home, those who had seen her professional work and thought this would be a neat way to get a pastor's assistant without charge. What logic men do use! The ones who were ministers used her love of the Lord's work as an argument; those who were not, used the fact that she would just love to get clear of a parsonage for once. Those who had no children made that an inducement, and those who had several appealed to her inherent sympathy. Those who were strong Christian workers reasoned that they would make an excellent team, and those who were weak urged that she would be such a help.

So we were quite used to hearing the pros and cons in relation to marriage. In fact, I thought the pros were the ones who had proposed and the cons were the ones who were being considered. It was not that Mama had a proposal that startled me but the fact that it was from <u>this</u> particular person.

"Oh, but Mama, you can't do that!" I bluntly announced. Imagine my telling Mama what she could or could not do!

"Why not?" she asked, not rebelliously but with her usual desire to get to the facts.

"Why....what would his children think? Why his wife just died this spring. He can't be thinking of marrying again already."

"He seems to be," she said with a smile and left me standing speechless beside her.

Immediately I went into a huddle with myself to organize possible campaign tactics. We mustn't absolutely oppose her, I reasoned, for she is enough like me to be sure to do it if we try to dictate to her. But what in the world can we do to stop her?

I remembered having read that in certain African tribes, a widower picks out another wife on the way home from the burial of the first. But I felt that any approximation to such a custom would be an awful breach of etiquette on Mama's part.

Of course, as far as she was concerned, she had been a widow for more than a dozen years, so it would be perfectly proper for her to consider another marriage. But not with someone whose wife had died that very spring. Ah me! These men! Even yet I fail to understand them. If someone had only told me when I began college that anthropology was the study of man, I'd surely have made that my major. Not that I haven't studied it more or less, but it has always had to be extracurricular.

All that fall and winter I worried about Mama. The tables at last were turned. She had done it for years on end for me,

and now it was my turn. It really didn't seem fair that one who was planning for the coming of the next generation should have to guard the conduct of the former generation. But such was my lot.

All winter long Mama's life hung in the balance. It was as if she stood on a dangerous precipice and we didn't dare to shout our warning for fear she'd jump instead of stepping back. We knew that letters from Chicago to Morris were coming with increasing rapidity, and we had an idea that it might be a reciprocal agreement. But all we could do was wait and hope for the best. The most satisfaction we had been able to gain from Mama had been, "If I decide to marry him, I won't do it right away." That had been on receipt of his first letter. She had been faithful to that promise not to do it right away, but we wondered how near she and Emily Post would come to an agreement as to a definition of "right away."

In May she came to make her premiere bow as grandma and when we met her at the train, I asked facetiously, "Well, are you engaged, Mama?" With dignity and self assurance she answered, "No, but I'm married."

So that was that. She had stopped off in Chicago to see Ray on her way to Indiana and that had settled matters.

"I won't let you go to see Gertrude," he said, "until after we are married. I know if I did, she'd talk you out of it."

So they went to the study of a minister who was a personal friend and made the decision irrevocable. I never did find out if they had had the license on cold storage or if they secured that, too, on that exciting morning.

As simply as that, I became a step-daughter whereas all I

had planned for that month was to become a mother. And neither ordeal turned out to be as bad as they are sometimes pictured.

Mama for the second time in her life became step-mother to a family of four--both times two boys and two girls. I don't know if she is partial to mixed quartets or if it just happened that she liked the director of both of these choruses.

For three months, however, she postponed taking on her new duties. As soon as she made friends with her little granddaughter, she returned--not to Chicago to her new husband but back to Morris to fill her old pulpit until they could secure another minister at Conference time. That was what her official board asked her to do and since the Lord came before love, she agreed. Ray continued preaching in his Chicago church and Mama in Morris, and the only thing that saved their lives was that the Rock Island line was most cooperative. One week Mama would go to the windy city and the next week Ray would bring a breath of it to Morris.

"Isn't it fortunate that I renewed my clergy railroad permit this year?" Mama would say, but I'll swear that half-fare or double-fare, Mama and Ray would have managed to get together some way.

Once I asked Mama, "Don't you wish you had married him when you were young as long as you have done it now?" She looked away for a moment and then said with a smile, "No, because then I wouldn't have you girls."

That's what I call real mother love.

CHAPTER 10

NEAR JOURNEY'S END

Charles Dickens created a character called Mrs. Jellby who is remembered because of her complete unconcern about her home and her children's welfare in her great zeal for the church. Sitting in a room strewn with papers and nearly filled with a large writing table covered with litter, she says,

"You find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the world. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating and educating the natives of Borriboola-Cha, on the left bank of the Niger."

Home was never like that at our house, although Mama was an ardent supporter of missions. I cannot remember a single occasion in which dishes were piled in the sink after a meal or beds left unmade. "All things done decently and in order," seemed to be Mama's motto.

Now once again she was called upon to make the transition from the role of minister to that of minister's wife. In a sense she had performed the function of both during most of my childhood and adolescence. You see, Mama was single, married, single, married, single--in sort of "on again, off again" fashion, so it is perhaps understandable if the years fade together somewhat in my memory.

As I look back on my years at home, it seems to me that Mama did everything that a minister normally does. Never did we have

a maid or a hired girl or a woman "who came in by the day." Mama did all of the washing, ironing, cleaning, sewing, cooking, dishwashing, and unmentionable details that any housewife does. That is, all except what we did to help. She taught us to be self-reliant and to be happy and willing to do our share in the social order. We were raised on the rhyme "What kind of a home or church would this be if every member were just like me?" My own son pointed out to me that ours would be a crazy church if every member tried to edit a church paper--as I did at the time. But Mama didn't think of that and she thought it would be fine if we were all workers and boosters. Looking back on those years, I doubt that we were as big a help as we imagined we were. Our daughter once asked after a few errands, "What do you think I am, Mama, your maiden lady?" So I realize that even my generation was not the immense help that we thought we were.

There will be those who will say, "If your mother did all that, then she didn't have time to do what is expected of a minister." I'll admit that it was before the time of the eight-hour day and the six-day working week, but I don't argue with skeptics. I just let my mind bring to life the different roles in which I have seen her work--and doing well whatever she did. Shovelling snow from the sidewalks, singing with us around the piano, chopping wood for our stove before I was old enough to take over the masculine chores, teaching a Sunday School class with my baby sister on one arm, mowing the lawn and stopping to chat with the paper boy, reading us bedtime stories, emptying the ashes and finding a tramp to be fed, putting the bread to set before she left for missionary meeting, preparing and preaching two weekly

sermons, cleaning the church when a janitor was not available, presiding over a suburban ministerial association, packing missionary barrels, teaching Bible in a large city high school, sitting up at night with sick members, taking examinations in preparation for ordination, presiding over an Orphan's Home board, working with the Red Cross, carrying on the executive responsibilities of a county W.C.T.U., acting as angel of comfort in homes of sorrow, superintending a city-wide Daily Vacation Bible School, entertaining all the missionaries and bishops and evangelists who spoke in our church, coaching dozens of children for Loyal Temperance Legion speaking contests, seeing the police about mischievous boys who got themselves into trouble and becoming their psychological counsellor and preaching at the State Reform School. These and a hundred other incidents flash through my mind. Not all accomplished simultaneously, no, but so many within the same year that I have yet to see her equal in energy and accomplishment.

No labor was commonplace in her appraisal of life. A scrub brush and a fountain pen were esteemed of equal dignity--their value depending on the need of a particular hour. Perhaps this was the key to her influence among both the underprivileged and those generally considered more fortunate. She moved with equal grace among the cultivated and those untutored.

Insight and tactfulness were outstanding characteristics. Instead of becoming disgruntled when appointed to a circuit which included many underprivileged families, she secured the assistance of one of the finest musicians in town who came to our home one evening each week and taught our new friends the lovely hymns of the church, as well as sharing her own natural talent. This

was before the day of radio. In this present day it is difficult to realize what that experience meant to those who could not afford concerts or private lessons. Was this done merely to improve the congregational singing in our services? That alone would have been of great value, but Mama knew that there were some things more easily taught in a home than in a church. The informal social hour was a time in which intangible gains were realized in cultural and aesthetic realms. If those families had been asked, "What did you do at the parsonage last night?" they might have answered, "Learned a couple of new songs." The other learning was that unconscious and effortless.

But city and school officials would say to Mama, "It is simply wonderful, the change in that Jones family since you got them interested in your church." It was one of these children who at a time of great sickness faced a serious operation. A kind and fatherly surgeon explained to her that she was going to sleep and when she woke up the pain would all be gone. Little Marilyn looked up with sweet confidence and said, "If I am going to sleep, I must say my prayer first." There on the operating table, surrounded by the doctor and several nurses, she closed her eyes and said,

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray Thee, Lord, Thy child to keep.
> If I should die before I wake,
> I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take."

The doctor was right that the pain would be all gone, for when she awakened, she was with the Lord.

That was just one of the many families brought to the Lord by Mama, and even one would be worth all the effort of a life time.

When Mama was young, folks said, "How old she is for her years," and when she began to get old, they said, "How young she seems." Such was the blending of the enthusiasm of youth and the discernment of maturity.

For seven happy years she enjoyed again the role of minister's wife. My step-father--Dad, we called him--was never known as Mr. Lady Astor. Mama had no need to shine by reflected light, but she was careful to make her own light one which would assist her husband in his work. She knew that the work of a minister's wife is less conspicuous than that of her husband, but she did not feel his competitor.

Happy years they were. And then I was awakened in the middle of a winter night by the ringing of the phone and heard Mama's steady voice saying, "Gertrude, Ray has just gone to be with the Lord. Can you come?"

The clouds of sorrow were upon her once more, but we knew that she would stand through the storm. At the time of our own Daddy's death, she had been somewhat prepared for it through his long illness. But this time sorrow came unannounced. However, both times God was there and she was not alone, even though no human being was with her when this sorrow came so suddenly.

And so she changed her customary place in church. Instead of sitting near the front on the right aisle, she now went up to the pulpit--requested once more to carry on the ministry of her husband.

A few years later she received an invitation to speak at the Harvey church in which she had preached as a young girl and of which she had been pastor while her daughters were in high

school. The letter said: "We are going to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of this church, and we want you to be our speaker, for you are the oldest minister in our Conference who had any connection with the early days at Harvey."

For a minute Mama felt almost insulted. Was she so old? And then Chris and Joe did a little arithmetic about their grandmother:

13 years as evangelist in the Band work
16 years as a pastor
24 years as a pastor's wife
53 years of active Christian service

"It doesn't seem possible!" Mama said. "Imagine me going to speak at a 50th Anniversary! It sounds so ancient!"

But she went and she loved it as she had loved every one of the more than fifty years she had been in Christian work.

It would be fine if we could say, "And she's still going strong and looks good for another fifty years." Yes, it would be fine but not true.

A serious illness forced her to give up her pastorate at last. Her daughters had urged for some time that she was too old to live alone any longer.

Many times during her life she had spoken nostalgically of "the good old primitive days." When the Conference had sent her to Fairbury, we laughingly said, "Well, here you are--back to the good old primitive days. Three stoves to tend, no gas to cook with, and no modern sanitation." But Mama didn't offer any vocal objection. Only at Halloween time she'd say, "My, it was nice to live in the city at Halloween." But when the cherry and apple trees were in blossom in her yard, she'd say, "How much better this is than Chicago." And we were too kind to remind her that another

October was forecast for that year.

But when she had pneumonia there all by herself, we realized that if necessary we'd have to do more than urge. As was her usual custom when in trouble, we didn't know it at the time, but later she told us that during her illness she would get up from her bed and fix the stoves and fall back exhausted with fever and lassitude from the pneumonia.

After much persuasion she agreed to quit "next Conference," and we accepted that as a sort of moral victory. I'm not sure if she really intended to do it or if she acquiesced as a matter of tacit compliance with the private mental reservation, "I'll see how I feel in August."

But circumstances beyond her control determined her future course. She was invited to be guest speaker at a special service at Morris--the town in which she had received her call to Christian service. As she stepped out of the car in which she was being taken to the church, something went wrong with her leg. "I don't seem to be able to walk," she said calmly.

"What in the world will we do?" her companions asked."Everyone is counting on hearing you speak and the folks are already in church."

"If some of the men can help me get into the church, I think I'll be able to preach, for I don't feel sick," Mama proposed.

Two of the men carried her in on a chair and she preached sitting there in the church in which she had been converted and which she had served as pastor just before her second marriage.

The next day she phoned me, and I took the car and brought her to our home. When we called our family doctor, he said,

"Mercy, that was an awful thing for you to do--to go travelling around with an embolism. If that had gone to your brain, where would you be?"

"In heaven, I guess," Mama replied, giving the impression that she thought heaven was about as nice as Wheaton.

It was a long tedious illness accompanied with much suffering but it did not prove to be fatal. Finally, she insisted that I take her home as she was sure that just being home would make her feel better. This was once that she was mistaken--and I shall keep it in mind as a classic example. Before long, she was very sick again and was taken to my sister's home nearby.

The new doctor said that it was a travelling embolism--and no wonder. With a travelling Mama, how could it be expected to be a quiet, tame kind of illness. For awhile we really thought we'd lose her when it settled in her lungs. They were evidently weakened from the pneumonia and we'd kid her and say, "Lucky you have weak lungs instead of a weak brain. Remember what the doctor said would happen if it went to your brain."

We kept her in good spirits and she did the same for us even when the outlook looked dark. When it looked as if she'd never get out of bed again, I bought her a fancy silk slip--no gown or bed jacket to remind her that she was sick and we expected her to keep on being sick, but a feminine little silk slip which said, "The girls must really think I'm going to get well."

Finally, when her illness continued indefinitely, it was agreed that I would have to go and break-up housekeeping at her parsonage home since it was Conference time and a new minister would be entitled to access to the parsonage. And what a job that was!

Before I left, she insisted that I sit beside her bed and make detailed notations of what was to be done with her things. I said to myself, "Judging from her appearance and all that the doctors say, she will probably die; but knowing Mama, I added, "however, she may not, so I had better get down these suggestions she is giving me."

If she recovered, she'd be sure to find out how well I had carried out her requests. And if she died, I could even visualize her standing inside the pearly gates, asking me on my arrival, "Gertrude, did you give Susie those stemmed goblets?" Not wishing to face such a cross-examination, I resolved to try to do my best to follow her minutest request as to the distribution of her effects. But don't get the idea that it was simple!

A few favorite pieces of furniture, the silver and choice dishes, and her personal items were to be kept in the family.

Then the fun began. A keep-sake was to be given to each of her close relatives and to each woman in the church. Not hit or miss--but hit. Imagine sitting miles and miles from the scene and being told what to give to whom. Some of the things she described, I had no remembrance of ever having seen, but I made a penciled notation. Then I was to sell the rest, and she even told me what I should expect to get for the antique chest, the book cases ad infinitum. And all the time she looked the picture of death!

The sequel to all this is that she may have looked the picture of death but the picture came to life. Then, sometime later, after she had revisited her Fairbury friends, came the check-up. "Why didn't you give Ellen....or Grace, or Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Johnson the little keep-sake I mentioned. Ellen has the basket I meant

for Lizzie, Grace the sherbets I meant for Mrs. Olson, Mrs. Smith that horrid looking motto which I meant for you to discard." And so on, far into the night. Ah me! Could I turn to her and say, "Listen Mama, I thought you were going to die, and so I just went ahead and did what I thought was best."

I should have known that my sin would find me out. I had revised Mama's list thinking it was more appropriate to give all the nicest things to her best friends.

But Mama had planned otherwise. She had meant to give her choicest things to the ones who had not quite approved of the idea of a woman preacher, or to the ones with whom she somehow felt she had failed to establish rapport. This was Mama's idea of "Love your enemies." She didn't really feel she had any enemies, but there were occasionally those who gave her at least a lukewarm shoulder.

In death as well as in life, Mama had planned to be generous and forgiving. But she didn't really scold me for getting her instructions mixed-up. Maybe she got well on purpose to check up on me and see if I had done what I was told. It's probably hard to break a life-time habit.

At Conference that autumn, she received the most difficult appointment she had ever faced. She was superannuated. Why do they begin that word that way? There is nothing super about it. If you spell it superannuated, retired, pensioned, or any of their synonyms, it is all the same. It means "You are old now," and no person wants to hear that announcement. Anyone would rather go to the most drab, underpaid circuit in the Conference than to become superannuated.

But it came and Mama managed to take it in stride. All of us were amazed at the fine adjustment which she made after such an active life of leadership. Now she does what she wants to do--much or little, depending on how she feels. When the pep is running high, she attends two services on Sunday mornings--one with her daughter and family at eleven and another at a church across the street by herself for good measure at a different hour. Then Sunday evenings when these two churches are closed, she often attends a mission service if her strength permits.

So perhaps many modern church members would say, "You're wrong. Seems to me she <u>is</u> still going strong."

I don't make any predictions anymore as to what she will be doing next. We urge her to take care of herself, but in the next breath we tell her to go ahead and have a good time--a person is only young once. One week she went to one of her old circuits to conduct a funeral and wrote, "I guess I shouldn't have gone to the grave on such a bitter day. I seem to have taken cold."

And I wrote back, "I guess you'll go to the grave once and for all if you don't take better care of yourself."

But before she received my reprimand she wrote again: "I am feeling fine now and plan to go to Fairbury this week-end to speak at a Young People's Missionary Convention."

First thing I knew she had been invited to preach the Homecoming sermon at Mackinaw where she lived when her son-in-law was the high school principal there.

Then she went to Kewanee--where we were living when Daddy died--to be superintendent of a Daily Vacation Bible School for a month. And she added, "I'm going to stop off at Peoria on the way

home to have charge of the children's work at the Youth Camp."

Imagine a woman in her seventies and eighties trotting around from city to city on speaking engagements and going to camp meeting every year. Of course, she makes all sorts of friends that way.

The last time she made such a trip, she found that she had lost her pocket-book as she was boarding the bus in a strange town. The bus driver kindly got out and looked all around for her pocket-book and when they failed to find it, he said, "Don't worry about that. I'll be glad to pay your fare for you."

A woman passenger said, "No, let me pay it for her. I live in the same town as her daughter." It turned out to be the housekeeper for the Catholic priest, and so I may hear next that Mama is getting chummy with the Father.

And what will we do about it if she does? Just the same old line of approach--hope for the best. For Christmas we gave her a leather suitcase, and a gala looking overnight bag. If she's going to travel, she may as well be prepared. Just as the slip was a sign that we expected her to get well, so the good-looking luggage tells her that the future is before her. And who knows? Her first years of Christian work were spent travelling. Why not similar golden years at life's close?

Ready Mama? All aboard! One of these days that angel band will come to take you on that best trip of all - to your immortal home.

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This was written in 1946, but the angel band didn't come till 1966. She had twenty more years to prove God's faithfulness day by day.