

Unto The Hills,

The soft, clear notes of the wedding march permeated the church. The hushed expectancy of the guests was evidenced in the turning of heads as the wedding party came up the aisle.

"My wedding."

As I passed proudly up the aisle on my step-father's arm, I caught a glimpse of my mother's face as she turned to watch me. Her eyes shone with love and tenderness, not tears. Her strength seemed to enfold me and I could almost hear her voice, saying as she did when I was a child, "There's no time for tears now, if the need be, I'll cry later." If that need ever came I never knew it. Apparently her way of answering that need was more constructive than tears. The sun's bright rays were diffused and scattered through-out the church, intermingling with the flickering candle glow to cast a holy benediction upon us as we stood on the alter.

A few hours later, amidst the reception festivities, my husband and I made our unobtrusive departure. I had chosen a small mountain hamlet as our honey-moon destination. It was but a few hours drive from our city. My husband speculated aloud as to why I had chosen this particular place, but my swift smile and obvious happiness seemed

answer enough as he drove smoothly along the paved highway.

As the night deepened and a companionable silence fell between us, a panorama of my life flashed before me. Without conscious thought or effort, I was as a little girl again. I was walking up the church aisle with my parents and sisters, attending Sunday services. Though I was too young to understand the sermon, the reverence of the congregation, the tranquility of the church, made God a very real person to me. I felt safe and secure, without a shadow of unhappiness penetrating my small world.

Then suddenly one night, denuded of warning, terror entered our home, walking hand in hand with Death, claiming our father. We children were confronted with fear and confusion for the first time in our memory. Being told that God had taken father with Him only added to our bewilderment. My oldest sister, only thirteen years of age, and I five years younger, had little comprehension of Spiritual comfort. My two younger sisters had not felt the full impact of what had happened, and were just irritable and unhappy with the sudden fracture of their routine.

After the sharp edge of grief had dulled, our home began to take on some semblance of normalcy, but beneath the surface was some indefinable force, grouping us together as a family, yet tearing us apart at the same time, creating complex individuals, with little understanding of each other. In the ensuing weeks my sister and I were given more and more responsibility in the home. Our duties were

manifold. Mother told us it was important to take our responsibilities seriously and do our tasks well, that eventually she would have to get a job. At this time we learned that father had left us inadequately provided for, and mother had to supplement our income. This wasn't an immediate necessity, but loomed starkly in the near future. I couldn't seem to adjust to the idea of mother not being at home all of the time, becoming more unhappy as the time passed. I went to church as usual, but I no longer loved a God who had left us bereft and insecure. I rebelled at going to church and finally didn't believe in God at all.

Our home-life became tense and unpleasant. Tasks that here-to-fore had been performed willingly, were now accomplished only on the threat of being severely disciplined. It seemed my sisters and I were always bickering, with mother becoming more quiet each passing day. I thought she was worried about finding a job to support us but I realize now her worry stemmed from more than this.

One evening as we finished dinner mother announced quietly but firmly that we were moving. Amidst our questions of how, when and where she managed to get it across to us. We were going to move upstate to a small village, or to be more exact on the outskirts of it. Mother extolled all of the advantages of living in a small town and said she felt we would be much happier there. I asked if she were going to work there and she replied negatively, but refused to enlighten me further.

In less than a month we were on our way to our new home. There were no tears in my mother's eyes when we left

the city where she had spent most of her life, just a slight pallor and a new determined look on her face. Momentarily, I experienced a strange detachment from my mother. I saw her as almost a stranger, controlling her emotions with a strength I sensed, rather than knew, came from some intangible source, completely unfamiliar to me. The feeling passed so quickly that only in deep retrospect, do I recall it at all. After hours of riding we turned off the smooth highway onto a dirt road. Cut from the loamy hillside, full of bumps and ruts, it none-the-less answered the need of access to the few habitations in that vicinity. It terminated abruptly, perhaps a mile from the other dwellings, in the back of a frame house. Our journey ended here also, for we were informed that this was our new home.

A small half cleared area around the house was called the yard. Fringing this was a rocky field and small stands of trees, runaways from the thick forest behind it. In the profound silence one seemed to hear nature's clarion call of challenge and defiance to civilization. Though we were isolated to some extent, we were not lonely in our primitive surroundings. Helping each other to set our house in order was no trivial task but it was a rewarding one. Bickering and scolding were part of a past that we were at last learning to cope with.

Just beyond our front yard was an old stone quarry road full of stones and holes that had long ago been abandoned for its original purpose. We often walked down this road using it as a short cut to the main road. It was an invitation to our nimble feet and curious minds. We threw

pebbles at the tiny chattering chipmunks and jumped in horror when we startled a little wood snake out of his nap. We heard the notes of the thrush's song as he serenaded us in complete abandonment of caution. Our small fears were dissipated in the enchanting interludes.

While we children began to enjoy nature and our new freedom from hot city streets, we remembered less and less the terror we felt when our father died. Oft of a morning we were awakened by the sharp ring of an axe and ran to the window to see mother struggling with her morning chore of cutting wood. Raising the axe with both hands she brought it down on a slab, dodging the sticks as they flew in all directions. What she lacked in skill and dexterity, she made up for in determination. Wood was our only fuel for heat and cooking and she made sure we had enough for both.

Mother must have been lonely and often afraid in this new environment, with each day bringing forth new and unaccustomed tasks, but if she were, she skillfully kept it hidden.

Roaming the fields and woods, we soon learned which berries and greens were edible. Gathering them was fun and the concoctions made from them were delicious. We relished them more because we knew we earned the praise that mother gave us for gathering them. We didn't know how perilously close she came to balancing the budget each month and that the extra food was an enormous help.

We became browned and healthier than we had ever been in our life. Living close to the earth sharpened our senses. I began to realize that only a Divine Being could create the miracle of nature. I watched as the trees dropped

their leaves on the forest floor. I saw the birds leave in the fall, the flowers droop and die. I saw these things come to life again in the spring. I was witnessing the miracle of life and death. My faith in God was restored! I had seen for myself.

Then one day Mother gathered us around her and with a happy smile said we were moving back to the city. She had obtained a position in one of the hospitals. She told us she now had faith in us and herself to build our life into something good.

We did move back and it was as Mother said. We were materially poor but fabulously rich in love and understanding. I shall never forget the night before we moved. I tip-toed into Mother's room for a good-night kiss. She was kneeling by the window as I heard the soft cadence of her voice as she prayed in gratitude. * "And Dear God, I too, turn my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my strength."

My husband nudged me gently, thinking I had been asleep. Perhaps I had dozed, but as we turned into an old familiar dirt road, bumpy and rutty, I was awake and at peace. Though I might never literally go this way again, I knew there would be many times to come, that, I too, would turn my eyes unto the hills.

* Psalm: 121