

TREASURES



Chapter One

Jody and Suz had many things.

They had each other as brother and sister.

They had the indigo bunting family that nested in the hedge beside the lane.

They had big bunches of wild correopsis and black-eyed susans, large handfuls of little wild strawberries, and long, beautiful days when puffy clouds scudded over the bay turning the water all shades of aqua marine.

They had Uncle Joe and Topsy - all the family they knew.

The little house, too, when the wind blew fiercely out of the northwest and the angry waves pounded in darkness on the shore, seemed like the best place in the world.

Uncle Joe was cross, and there was always work to do. Jody would tumble off of his little mattress early each chilly morning to start the fire in the old iron cookstove which heated the house, but also boiled the oatmeal. It was his job to make sure the wood box always had dry wood. He and Suz would bring home armfuls from along the shore, letting it dry in the sun beside the porch. Sometimes he would forget, and after a nights rain it was with wet wood that he struggled to start the fire in the morning. Uncle Joe would grumble.

He kept Topsy's water trough full, and cleaned out her bed each day, tossing fresh hay into her food box. The big, brown horse was old now, fourteen. Uncle Joe said that she wasn't worth her keep. In the winter it was hard to find enough money to buy her hay. Last year the neighboring farm hands at HiLo farm had given them some bales from along the dividing fence, probably without telling the owner. The children were grateful because Topsy was their one

friend who always greeted them in her own way with sad nods, and would carry both of them safely on her bare back.

Suz had her work, too. She had cooked the meals ever since she could remember. She didn't stand on the stool anymore, but could reach the pump at the sink even in bare feet. In the summer hanging clothes on the line after scrubbing them in the big tub outside was fun, but not in winter when with numb fingers she tried to pin the frozen corners in the early morning dark.

She had a little box of treasures. A wooden box had blown up on the beach after a spring storm which she had decorated with the tiniest pink clam and snail shells she could find. In the center of the lid the final piece was a large iridescent crawfish claw. The effect pleased her; even Jody admired it. Inside she placed the little balsam needle pillow she had made; the bits of colored bottle glass that had been smoothed and rounded by the sand and water; two of the prettiest Petoskey stones with their mysterious grey designs; and best of all, a little necklace of multi-colored beads that Mrs. Martinez had given her.



Looking at them today, Suz just wished that they were worth something to others. Of course, they were worth a lot to her. When she opened the box and the fragrance of balsam greeted her nose, they even looked like treasure. Many times she fancied she was a princess with her jewels. But with school beginning in just a little more than a month, there was nothing in her box of treasures that would buy shoes for Jody and herself, or a new pair of jeans for him and a skirt for her. Bare feet are fine in summer, but will never do in school, she thought with a little stab of unhappiness.

Other summers Uncle Joe had taken them in town to the Methodist Church rummage sale where they had been able to find some things to replace their outgrown clothes, but their uncle had not been able to keep up with his usual odd jobs this summer, and somehow the rummage sale was forgotten, too. He mostly sat and rocked; it seemed to ease the pains he had. Worries made him gruffer than ever, so it was best not to bring up shoes. He sat on the side porch of the little grey house. That old building leaned slightly away from the windy lake as it slowly lost the battle with the winter gales, or perhaps it was simply trying to take shelter behind the sand dunes. But in the leaning every year there seemed more of a danger of its simply tumbling down.

Then one day after the small wash was out flapping in a warm wind, the few pieces of cracked dishes washed, the floor swept free of sand which the children's bare feet tracked in each day, and the two had gone off fishing, a big, new car edged down the lane and stopped out back. A tan man in green plaid shorts got out from one side, and two blonde children jumped out of the other. The children ran, and the man walked over to the patched fence that kept Topsy from wandering, if she had ever taken a mind to do such a thing. After a few minutes looking the animal over, the man walked up to the porch where Uncle Joe sat in his usual spot.

"Nice looking old horse you have there, sir," said the man.

"Yep," growled Uncle Joe, "not worth'er keep."

"Is she gentle?"

"Wors'n gentle, plain lazy, Will hardly find her own hay in summer."

“Would she be good with children?” asked the man.

“Good fer children? That’s all she’s good fer,” replied Uncle Joe.

“Well,” the man continued, “My name’s Ohlers, and I’m looking for a good horse for my children here. I own HiLo orchards up the highway. My workers told me about you, Mr. Nettle, and your horse. We are just here summers, but your horse would have a good place all year with my caretaker. I’d like to buy her.”

At this Uncle Joe looked a bit less surly: he squinted at the man with more interest. “You bought HiLo orchard, huh? No better orchard anywhere along the lake. Worked there myself plantin’ those very trees for many a year. Carpenter’d them buildings to house the pickers, too.” After a pause, during which he looked over at Topsy standing patiently against the fence, he glanced into the house and lowered his voice, “Yep, I’ll sell her.”



That was how the shed-stable came to be empty when Suz and Jody, with their arms laden with firewood and dragging a line of fish, scrambled over the dunes that evening. They went to bed in tears, and yet they knew that Uncle Joe was right when he grumbled over the little pan-fish at dinner, “couldn’t feed her another winter.”

The money for Topsy was generous, and it bought many things they really needed: a new pump handle, a couple of rolls of roofing for the west side of the house which Uncle Joe tacked down over the leaks

with Jody’s help, and some patching material for the rowboat. The roofing was the last job that Uncle Joe managed that summer, and after that he sat in the rocker sleeping even more. When awake, he seemed only to watch the gulls. Suz and Jody had agreed that first night that they would never wear shoes or clothes paid for by selling Topsy, but they didn’t need to worry, Uncle Joe didn’t even think about that when planning his purchases.

One morning after a summer storm, when the children were combing the beach for useful things that might have blown in (besides Suz’ box, once they found a good wooden chair, and another time the small boat they used for fishing), they walked as far north as the end of HiLo road which came down almost to the edge of the sand. They were about to pass the road when something big and dark caught their attention under the shadow of the trees. There was Topsy with a little blonde girl on her back. “Topsy!” they cried together, and the horse came to meet them, fondly nuzzling them and whimpering in her sad way. The girl slipped down from a new saddle and came around to them, “How do you know Topsy?” After they explained to her that Topsy had been their very closest friend in the world, the girl had tears in her eyes. “Mr. Nettle didn’t tell us. If Topsy was yours, then you are my friends, too.”

Cindy was her name, and she was to become the children’s best friend. Suz and Jody had had little time for play; the most part of each day was work, and the beach and the lake were producers of wood for the fire and fish for the table. It was she who taught them to play house in the cedar grove, making rooms between the outspread roots and gnarled low branches; and it was she who created an imaginative underwater world when they swam. Making a sand bakery

was one of her favorite pastimes. Creating exotic cakes and pies with can molds, they dripped wet sand over them like sugar frosting, and then dotted on wild rose pips for raisins. With Cindy they learned about all kinds of fun with just imagination; her older brother Tom riding by on Topsy considered their play kid stuff. On this first day of their acquaintance, much to their surprise, this new friend with the shinning face linked arms first with Suz and then with shy Jody, and guided them along the road toward the orchards while leading Topsy by the bridle.

“You must come to my house for cookies and lemonade, and you can come to ride Topsy anytime you want,” her warm smile assured them that her friendship was real.

Nearing the complex of barns, they passed the little houses that old Joe Nettle had helped to build for the Mexican workers who came each summer to pick cherries. At this time of the summer they were bursting with people. Clean laundry whipped about on lines everywhere. The children had to duck flapping jeans to walk across to the barns. Little brown skinned children squatted on the sandy ground playing with old pots and pans jabbering in what they knew was Spanish. Cherry picking was in full swing. The long lines of trees running east and west from the barns were invaded with workers, and the trailers of cherry boxes, called lugs, brimming with red fruit, were being hauled by tractors out of the yards to the canning factories, then coming back empty to be refilled by the tireless workers. Suz wondered out loud to Jody if Mrs. Martinez and her family were here again this year. Rounding a corner of the workers’ houses, they dodged under a big sign,

PICKERS WANTED

.75 a lug.

Suz stopped short and reread the sign. “How old do you have to be to pick cherries,” she asked her new friend. “I pick when I want to,” Cindy replied, “and I’m twelve. Lots of workers’ kids pick and they’re younger than I am.”

“Really?” Suz felt excitement all over, “Could Jody and me, I mean, I, could we pick?” (Mrs. Brand, their teacher, was strict about good grammar). I’m thirteen, I think, and Jody is maybe a couple of years younger.

Cindy noted that it was strange not to be sure about your birthday and your age, “Sure,” she said, “but we’ll ask Dad, and I think he’ll even let you borrow the belts to hang your bucket on,” and she pointed over to a big pile of empty buckets that were awaiting workers.

Early Monday morning (they could never get up earlier than Uncle Joe, and he was already out on the porch) Jody and Suz hurried through breakfast and the usual chores. Then with a lunch of hard-cooked eggs, they were off running across the fields, a short-cut to the HiLo farm. Uncle Joe didn’t even ask where they were going; he didn’t seem to notice them much anymore.

The first day was very hard. A lug was endless to fill. They worked in the hot sun, soon wishing they’d brought a jug of water. But a big man showed them where water came out of a spigot on the barn, and after that they refreshed themselves by splashing water in their faces, and rinsing the sticky cherry spray from their arms. The same man showed them how to strip the cherries down the twigs between their fingers, rather than taking them off one by one. He didn’t speak English that they could understand, but he pointed to his chest with a wide smile and said, “Evelio.” Then motioning to the ladder which they’d struggled to put up, he put his hand to his mouth, “Evelio!” he hollered, so they understood if they called his name, he would help them move the big ladder when it was time to go to the next tree. By late afternoon they had only picked two and a half lugs between them, but Evelio came by with a full bucket which he poured



into their last lug; three lugs were credited to them at the trailer. Suz added it up in her head, \$2.25.

Jody came out of the trees with Evelio. “My name is Jody,” he said, to the big man. “And mine is Susan, and we want to thank you Mr. Evelio.” “Evelio Martinez” the man said with a smile.

“You are Mr. Martinez?” asked Suz, surprised. “You and Maria Martinez?” and she motioned toward the workers’ houses.

“Sí, sí, María es mi mujer.”

“I know Maria Martinez; she’s been just as good to us as you have! And I know Juanita, Dolores, and Francisco; they were in school with us once.” Suz didn’t know if Mr. Martinez understood, but he knew his childrens’ names and smiled. Then he took their hands, *‘Vamos, vamos’* he said, and began walking with big strides toward the workers’ houses.

Juanita came running up with two younger Martinez herded ahead of her. She was shy, but last year Suz and she had been in the same grade at school for the few weeks that the Martinez’ had stayed into the school year before the family moved on for work elsewhere. Suz had firmly told the other kids to stop making fun of little Dolores’ different way of talking. On the playground they would sing “Mex. .ee. .can, Do. .lor. .ees is a Mex. . ee..can.” Telling them

to quit only meant that now they teased, “Mex. . ee. . can, Mex. . ee. .can, Suz. .ee. is a Mex. .ee. .can.” about her, too, but she and Juanita and Dolores had become friends. It was, in fact, at school that she had first met Maria Martinez. A scraped knee was bleeding down Suz’ leg, and Mrs. Martinez had taken her to the water fountain to help her rinse it off. She’d pressed the wound with her handkerchief till the bleeding stopped, and then took a small string of colored beads from around her neck and put them over Suz’s head. It was a way of thanking the girl for her friendship to her daughters.

They all were greeted warmly by Maria who was preparing a couple of zucchini to plop into tomato sauce steaming on the stove. She, too, had just returned from the north side of the orchard where the three children had been picking cherries with her all day. Her English was better, and Suz and Jody understood when she invited them to eat with the family. They thanked her, but explained that Uncle Joe would be waiting, and walked slowly home.

“My legs feel like rubber,” said Suz, “I thought dune-climbing had made me tough, but up and down that ladder so many times is hard.”

By the end of the first week Suz felt tougher, stronger, and together with Jody they now were moving the tall, three-legged ladder by themselves. The Martinez’s always seemed to be nearby when they really needed help, and occasionally the youngsters shared a treat with them - once a bottle of Coke. They never had had a Coke before. The lugs still filled very slowly, and they were happy when shortly after noon on Friday the crews began quitting early. Mr. Ohlers’ head man, Foreman Torres, was handing out the pay envelopes for the workdays ending Thursday night. In the four days Suz and Jody had picked eleven lugs and their pay envelope held \$8.25. All the way home, they took turns holding the precious bills and the quarter.

“Should we tell Uncle Joe?” asked Jody. That needed some thought. Neither of them told lies; was not telling all the truth a lie?

They knew the money was needed now more than ever just to keep food on the table. Uncle Joe’s small check came from the government the first of each month; he signed it, and since he refused to go to town anymore, they walked to Beulah where Mrs. O’Malley cashed it at the bank; then together they carefully bought essentials at the A&P and pulled them home in their old wooden wagon. The leftover bills Uncle Joe took, counted carefully, and were not seen again. They knew he had taxes to pay - he told them that over and over.

“This is for taxes, that dern government takes your last penny.”

Taxes did take every last penny, that was clear. When near the end of the month there was little to cook except oatmeal and a last can of beans, and there wasn’t a dime for bread, taxes had taken it all. It didn’t seem right, except that the money had come from the government in the first place, and Uncle Joe grew angry if they questioned,

“You two want to keep this roof overn your head, don’t ya? Well, them taxes must be paid!”

“We probably should tell him about the eight dollars,” Suz finally said to Jody as they got into their beds in the loft.

Their small area was reached by a ladder on the wall; the ceiling was so low they couldn’t stand. It was hot in summer when the wind blew from the east, but also warmer in winter than the two rooms below, that is, if the stove didn’t go out overnight. This night after whispering her decision to Jody, and hearing him grunt, Suz got out her treasure box in the dark. Reaching into her shorts by the bedside, she pulled out a glowing



piece of chert from the pocket.

The pretty little stone had caught her eye in the orchard driveway and mysteriously radiated back to her all the happiness she felt holding their first pay envelope. Shoes and a dress weren't impossible - something good could happen. It had gleamed there in the sand like it was asking to be hers, and she now felt its irregular angles between her fingers, and stroked its silky smoothness before adding it to her other treasures in the box. Something good could come, and she would trust Uncle Joe about the money they had earned.

But in the morning Uncle Joe was not on the porch. The children found him still in his bed with a strange expression on his face. His eyes followed them and tears flowed down his old cheeks, but he could not make a sound. They had never seen Uncle Joe shed a tear; it was very scary. They weren't sure that he could even hear them speak. Jody tried to help him up to the outhouse, but he couldn't move.

Suz pushed a frightened Jody to the porch, "You must run to HiLo and tell them we need help, a doctor if they can get one. Now, run!" Jody ran off like a shot toward their shortcut. Suz tore off a piece from an old white towel, took it to the pump, squeezed water through it, and went to the bedroom. First she wiped the tears from the old man's face; then she placed the cool rag on his forehead. Drawing up the chair they'd found on the beach, she sat down to hold his hand. "Uncle Joe, it will be all right," she reassured him. It seemed all he could do in reply was to cry.

Chapter two

The doctor could do nothing for the old man; he shook his head mumbling about “stroke” and that he should be taken to some kind of a home. But he could see there was no money to be had for such a move. Did he even know the children were alone with their Uncle? He was old himself, and tired of problems he couldn’t solve; so without asking to be paid, he just got into his car and drove away.

Now it took most of Suz’s time just to feed Uncle. The oatmeal had to be very thin, and she spooned it nearly down his throat because he could not open his mouth or swallow well. It had to be done carefully and slowly so he would not choke. She improvised a way for him to go to the toilet without leaving the bed, and tried to keep him clean and comfortable with pillows. Even though the summer was quite hot, he seemed cold, so she pulled out some old blankets from under the bed to cover him. The hours of feeding him, and the extra laundry of sheets to wash in the outside tub began to fill her days.

Jody now went off to the orchard by himself each day and their earnings dropped by more than one half. Evenings when the bay was calm, he still went out to their favorite fishing spot just at the drop-off to try for a few fish. He had been a swimmer since he first toddled into the water; but still the great rocks big as houses so far down in the green water seemed filled with a great and mysterious power that made him shudder. He was glad for the little boat, especially now that it no longer leaked, and he made sure that when it was poised over the drop-off he didn’t tip it. It was inclined to roll to whatever side his weight was on. Down in the dark crevices between the giant rocks, while the late sun still lighted the depths, he could watch the big lake trout cruising, cruising, and he was even more glad of the safety of his perch. These scarcely ever struck at his worms; he almost wished they wouldn’t because if he hooked one it could break his line, and if it didn’t do that it would be so hard to pull in that his boat would threaten to roll over. Yet, now and then, he would have a big fish to bring proudly home.

At night with the last light of a magnificent sunset fading into purple, they both dropped into bed exhausted. Then Suz would take out the piece of chert from her treasures and repeat, “something good can happen.” She never thought of it as a prayer because no one had taught her to pray. Now it seemed hard to imagine that anything good could happen, but hope seemed to radiate when she opened her treasure box. School was less than a month away; they couldn’t possibly go now. When the monthly check came, who would sign it, and how would those taxes be paid? The problems just grew bigger all the time.

After three days of caring for Uncle Joe, Cindy came riding over on Topsy to visit Suz. Before her mother had left for a week in Detroit, she told Cindy to see how things were going; they’d heard nothing more since Jody had come to call the doctor. After watching Suz at her bedside work, Cindy rode home to tell her father that things were impossibly bad at the Nettle’s. Her father was a busy man and the news didn’t seem to catch his attention so much as a loaded trailer whose wheels were off the track and stuck deeply in loose sand. He was shouting instructions at Evelio Martinez who was maneuvering the tractor load to firmer ground. But Mr. Martinez understood Cindy at once; it didn’t take knowing the language to grasp there was trouble. As soon as the trailer load was on its way to the factory, he sought out Maria in the orchard, and the two of them went to find Jody high up in a tree.

That evening when their three youngsters were asleep in their bunk, the husband and wife sat outside near the door of their cabin. While the waves made their rippling sounds in the distance, they talked long and seriously into the warm night. To lose any income put them in a bad place. As it was they just barely kept their family’s needs met. Yet, here were these two dear

children, working as hard as they could, obviously poorer than the Martinez', and now with a very sick person who must be their only adult family member.

This afternoon after walking over to Nettle's, they had seen it all for themselves. Suz was trying her best, but the man should be turned regularly, Maria knew that from when she'd been a nurse's aide in Texas, and he was too heavy for the children. Besides, caring for a sick, old man was too much to ask two young children to do.

The Martinez's, unlike Jody and Suz, knew all about prayer. They, too, believed that something good comes with praying. Maria got out her beads, she called a "*rosario*," and together they softly asked Jesus and Mary to come to their help. Then they went peacefully to their bed, to see what kind of answer would come with the morning.

That next morning Suz sleepily opened her eyes realizing that she'd been hearing strange sounds from below the loft. She raised her head above the railing and looked down upon the broad back of Maria Martinez who was busy over the stove whose steam wafting upwards smelled of good coffee. Hearing Suz, she looked up and smiled, "*¿Sa?!*" she said, and shook her hand like shaking a salt shaker over the boiling cereal. "Over there," Suz pointed to the rusty metal cupboard where she kept the kitchen things out of reach of the mice. Maria shook her head; she'd already looked. "Yes, yes, it's there," Suz assured her, and scurried down the ladder. The salt was just hiding behind the tin of flour.

From that morning, Maria came every day and took over the care of Uncle Joe. With Evelio she even washed his old blankets in the tub, the two of them wringing the heavy things by twisting them between them. She brought her sewing basket and some yards of blue cloth, and began to use any free time to begin three skirts, two for her girls, and one for Suz. Whenever she had a moment, she put a thimble on her finger, and was soon at work with needle and thread. At the end she even hand-stitched some colorful braid around the bottoms of all three skirts, a different color for each.

Delicious new food like flour tortillas was prepared out of the few things Suz had in the storage closet and were added to by purchases the Martinez's made.

Suz made headway with Dolores and Juanita, helping them do better with their English, and together they were able to translate words for Maria and Evelio. Within days they were talking back and forth together with a mixture of English and Spanish. Understanding better, Suz realized that the Martinez' were making themselves poorer in helping her and Jody. But with Maria at the house, she was able to go again to the orchard. She and Jody were working now with Dolores, Francisco and Juanita, who took charge of the youngest all like a little mother, though their father was never too far away. The Martinez income, too, had become just over half of what it had been. Everyone's money envelope each Friday now went with the others' to help feed the eight of them.

One morning as she gratefully awakened to what was becoming familiar smells and sounds, Sue thought that Maria Martinez was all she had every dreamed a real mother would be. She had often looked off at the far horizon of the great lake and wondered whether she had ever had a mother and a father; and if she had, what had become of them? She'd asked Uncle Joe many times, and he had only complained that he'd had the unlucky lot of raising them. Hadn't they been left in his kitchen without any "by your leave"?

"But by whom?" she'd ask.

"By that dern woman!" he'd shout, and stomp angrily out from the house.

“Was the woman my mother?” she’d press him.

“Now how would I know that?” was the only reply.

Well, if he didn’t know that, could he really be her uncle? She had a vague memory of being driven in the backseat of a car and of a flowery smell. Occasionally she would smell something in the meadow that would bring back that strange sensation of being driven a long way in the dark with Jody sleeping against her. But after that she must have slept, too, because from then on she had only memories of Uncle Joe and this small house.

Maria and she began to share conversations, and once these were about her parents. Maria was finishing her blue denim skirt with red braid; she thought it was lovely. Shoes would still be a problem, but the skirt she would be eager to wear.

“Your mama?” asked Maria.

“I really don’t know anything,” Suz offered.

“I will be your mama,” said Mrs. Martinez. “You now call me Mama?”

“Will Dolores and the children mind that?” asked Suz.

“No,” smiled Maria, “it is Dolores who says so.”

Suz could hardly wait to tell Jody that after all, they had a mother, and along with her a father and two sisters and brother! He already loved Papa Evelio. And it was this mother with whom Suz decided to share her precious treasure box.

“Ahh,” sighed Mama Maria over the little treasures,” *herm. .,oso. beau.. .tiful, my Suzie,*” and lightly kissed her on the head. “The beads I give you.. .and this one, this piece of, how do you say, *pedra...* stone, do you know? It say, ‘all will be good.’ You are good, you know?”

Suz was surprised. “But how do you know that the stone says, ‘all will be good’, Mama?”

“Oh, I just know.”



It was the first of the month of September. All cherries had long been picked, even the roadside booth that sold refrigerated cherries and cherry pies was closed. The tourist season was over and school would start in a week. The Mexican migrants had all moved on. As the work slowed at HiLo, Mr. Ohlers gave Evelio permission to take some scrap lumber behind the sheds to begin repairs on the small house. One of the sills holding up the south side was rotted, so Evelio propped up the weight of the roof with timbers, and began to rebuild the foundation. Within a few days the little place had been righted to stand quite straight again, but one solved problem only led to the next, and Evelio often stood around scratching his head, muttering, “*que es siguiente?*” “What’s next” in English.



Inside, the drabness of the little house gave way to a mother's touch. First, out of small can of dark green enamel, Maria put a coat of paint on the rusty cupboard. Some crates in which the oranges were shipped, thrown out at the A&P, came home in the back of Evelio's truck, and were transformed for useful storage with some colorful woven fabric draped across the tops like a scarf. A very special piece of driftwood sat upon the scarf. The children had saved it from firewood duty because it looked like an exotic animal with an eye. When she turned it up the other way, Maria thought it looked like a kneeling Jesus with his hand up blessing the house. Suz and Jody decided they liked it that way, too, but to Jody it always seemed like the animal was now standing on his head.

A big packing box left over when HiLo farm's new refrigerator had been unpacked now stood upright in the front corner to serve as a wardrobe. This made possible Maria's organization of the clothing and bedrolls; she put the children to work coloring floral and scroll designs that she drew freehand all over the front and exposed side. She then showed them how to put pressure on their crayon bits to apply the colors thickly, while she took the flat iron heated on the stove and melted the crayon colors under a waxed paper. The final effect amazed them. By kerosene lamp especially, their efforts glowed, the colors reflecting onto the mother-of-pearl crucifix, a Martinez treasure that outshone any of Suz' treasures. Looking over the railing Suz thought there couldn't be a prettier house anywhere than the one her house was becoming. And watching the hands of Mama Maria busy with the sewing, she knew certainly there couldn't be a house that had more love.

When their migrant friends had all moved on to harvest the cabbage fields in Wisconsin, the Martinez's had pondered their situation long and hard, and had prayed many prayers. They were now so involved at Joe Nettle's, and had become such a family with the old man and the two children, that they had no choice but to stay. With the closing of the row of migrant houses at HiLo, Evelio, in his Ford pickup, had brought over the few family possessions left there, and now he and Maria and the two boys slept on the main room floor, while Dolores and Juanita moved up with Suz to the loft. They were three sisters now, so they took turns sleeping on the floor. Still not one of the five had school shoes, though Jody's last year shoes fit Francisco pretty well, and school began in a few days.

The money was nearly gone when Uncle Joe's check appeared in the mailbox. Now a whole new problem confronted them. The check needed Joe Nettle's signature, but how could that come about when he could not move his hand. Suz had tried to explain about the taxes, but no one seemed to take that very seriously. Evelio shook his head and said, "*impuestos?*" as he looked around at the failing house, "no *taxos.*" Uncle Joe tried to raise his hand at that, but he could make no move; only his eyes moved wildly. Each time they rested it was on the same place, through the bedroom door, toward the porch.

Lamplight at the table that night saw three chairs drawn up; the one from the bedroom was brought out and old Joe's sagging rocker was dragged in off the porch. The three younger children sat quietly on the floor, while Maria, Evelio, and Suz, who was the eldest, spaced themselves around the table.

"Now," said Maria to Suz, "you pray. Get out the *piedra*, that one who says to you, 'all will be good.' God" and she gestured toward the Jesus statue blessing the house "gave you that when you did not know Jesus or his *madre* Maria. He tell you, *creer!* uh, believe! 'all will be good'."

Because Maria's blue glass *rosario* was so lovely in the lamplight, it was always related in Suz' mind to the sparkling hue of the lake on a clear day. Both gave her the same mysterious

feeling of other worlds - as though God and the angels were almost to be seen in some created things. Maria told her that blue was the Mother Mary's color, and just for her God had made the sky and the waters blue. "Watch, and see how the blue changes with the light, especially the evening sky when it becomes nearly lavender. All that *hermoso azul* in things is made to be the robe of Madre Maria."

After the *rosario* prayer Evelio was inspired, too; his moustache bobbed excitedly. "I talk to Ohlers, *mañana*, Maria, *mañana*. He is *un hombre bueno*."

Suz knew that *mañana* meant tomorrow, and *bueno* meant good, so she supposed *hombre* meant 'man'.

"If he can help us with this U.S.A. check we can get by a while, and then who knows, "he said in Spanish, and then in English, "all be bueno" and he put his big hand on Suz' shoulder to reassure her that "all will be good".

After Uncle Joe had been turned to his other side for the night, and the boys chattering had quieted to deep breathing in their corner, the three girls climbed to their beds and Maria and Evelio carried the rocker and chair to the porch to quietly talk together.

"If we stay here, Eb," they spoke together in their language, "we must have more space. Winter is coming and we will be confined inside, we really need another bedroom."

Evelio looked around him. "Well, this porch could be closed in. the roof isn't too bad, and the floor," he stood up and bounced his weight on it lightly, "not too good, but I could build more supports. There might be enough lumber left. . . we'd need windows and a door. Everything is so much money." He sat down discouraged. "We just can't go along like this, Maria."

"Remember, *querido*, you will see Mr. Ohlers, *mañana*." and, she smiled at him, "all will be *bueno*."

Chapter three

At first it hardly seemed to be good the next day. Evelio drove the old pickup to HiLo only to have Foreman Torres tell him that the Ohlers had left the day before for Detroit. So the check could probably not be cashed: Evelio didn't know what else he could do.



“The Boss said to take all that lumber if you can use it.” Torres said in Spanish. “And there are some jobs around here I could use some help with if you can spare the time.”

Spare the time? Evelio offered to begin work on the spot. That evening he had some dollars to fill the truck with gas and buy some groceries. The boys helped stack the load of old lumber off the back of the pickup, and Papa Evelio set them both to work that evening ripping up the dilapidated porch. The old railing came off, and Jody and Francisco with a crowbar began pulling up the loose floor boards so new supports could be put underneath to make the structure sturdier. A plank was brought from the pile to bridge the hole, and Uncle Joe's rocker with a bright shawl wrapped around its worn cushions became a permanent part of the main room.

Evelio went each day to HiLo, and each day his earnings went right to the A&P or the gas station. The porch had been torn up too soon: he'd had to leave the bedroom project because another weak spot in the foundation demanded immediate attention. Several evenings went into carrying large stones from the meadow to build up and strengthen the bad place. Suz stood and watched him fit the stones together, and then mortaring them in to neatly fill the gap. It made her happy that the little house was being made to stand so stout and firm.

School had started, but the five children couldn't go. Even one pair of shoes simply was more money than they had extra. On Friday at the end of the first school week, Maria was sitting in the pickup in town waiting for Evelio when she noticed a table outside the shoe store. Sitting on it were neat rows of orange summer sandals with a sign - \$1. She took out the last bills from her purse. There were only three and some change. Then she remembered that Francisco could wear the shoes Jody had outgrown. The money was still not enough, but she stepped down from the truck.

“All will be good,” she whispered, “Thank you, Jesus.”

Picking out four pairs of sandals, she walked into the store. The woman shook her head when Maria offered her the bills and the change. But Maria smiled at her as though she didn't understand.

Loudly, as if Maria was deaf, the shoe-lady said, “No!”

No is the same in both English and Spanish, but Maria, still smiled.

The woman sighed and said crossly, “Oh, all right, then.”

Four pairs of orange sandals were dropped into a bag, and Maria went back to the truck happily thanking *Jesús*.

On Monday morning, the children, sandals proudly buckled, the girls in their matching skirts, and the boys in homemade jeans, walked down the Nettle's lane to meet the school bus. Maria had talked seriously to them after morning prayers warning that they might be teased.

"But," she said, "You are very. . .What word?" And she touched her head. "shining."

"You mean smart, Mama," said Dolores.

"*Si*, smart." "So when you do good, they will not laugh anymore. Do not be angry, most of all do not be afraid, just smile." And she smiled broadly as if to show them how. "Hold your head up like this, and be sure your eyes smile, too." And her big brown eyes crinkled up in the corners. "And ask God for *amor*." And she put both hands over her heart. They knew *amor* meant love.

It was true; things were frightening at first. The teachers had been angry. Where had these five been? Did they think they could come to school only when it was convenient? And the other children had pointed to their orange sandals and laughed. Even quiet Jody wanted to punch a big boy on the playground who said his pants were dumb, but Francisco, even though he was littler, had tugged him away, and told him, "Smile, Jody. Smile big like this with your eyes, too."

So they practiced their big smiles to both the teachers and the school mates, and it was surprising how soon the scary part was over. By the end of the day, one girl had even asked Juanita where they had bought their swingy jean skirts.

"My mama made them," Juanita had said, proudly.

"Wow, you're lucky!" said the new friend. "And I think your sandals look neat. I never saw orange ones like that." ("Neat" was the newest slang for something admirable).

Somehow eyes that smiled looked very wise, wiser than anybody else, and the five children who had such wise eyes and who looked straight at you seemed very smart. Everything about them seemed wise. The school bus ride home was much easier than the ride to school had been.

Maria looked over the group as they stood around the table. "Well, what *hermoso* children, and what smiles, all *amor*! Now, sit down, please, there is something important."

She went to the bedroom door and softly closed it.

"The uncle, he is not good. He soon will be gone from us. She lifted her eyes up to the crucifix on the wall. We have no *cure*, no *iglesia*; no. . . ' her fingers made a cross.

"No, priest, mama," said Dolores.

"*Si*, no *padre*. We must pray what Jesus wants us to do."

Evelio had just come in walking carefully across the torn-up porch, and he added, "We kneel now."

So the little family knelt on the worn boards while Evelio prayed in Spanish. Suz knew that he was asking Jesus and Mary for a *cure*, a *padre*. Speaking to Maria, he later said that being without a church was his fault; he should have had his family going to the *iglesia* even though it was twenty miles to Benzonia; they would need to go to confession to this priest and say they

were sorry. Then they would go to church. But in the meantime, would a priest come to Uncle Joe even if he knew they needed him?

“Pray with the little stone the Lord gave you, Suzy,” Mama instructed her, when she went off to bed. “Remember, all will be good.”

When Suz had written “all will be good” for a practice sentence at school, Mrs. Brandt had crossed out “good” with red pencil, and wrote “well” in its place. “All will be well,” said the teacher, “Be in this case, takes an adverb not an adjective.” So now it didn’t sound right to say “all will be good” but Suz didn’t want to say that to Mama Maria or Papa Evelio.

That night right through the floor even over the sound of the waves on the shore she could hear Uncle Joe’s heavy breathing.

Suz woke before anyone when the dawn light barely whitened the loft window, and she felt immediately that she was being called by something inside her to go down to the lake. As she inched by them, Papa and Mama Martinez slept on exhaustedly; they had been up many times in the night to keep watch over the sick man. She was able to tiptoe out, balance across the plank and then run off to the beach. She was thinking about Jesus who Mama said often went off by himself to pray. She felt strongly that that was what she needed to do. So in the September dawn, with the water now lying flat and still like a dark pan, she left her footprints along the shore, each one the mark of a prayer that God would watch over them all and would take care of Uncle Joe. When she turned back, the sun was turning the fall woods on the far hills all bright, paint box colors. Coming into the house, Maria at the stove just gave her a knowing smile.

After the five were off to school and Evelio had driven away to HiLo, Maria bathed Uncle Joe who no longer awakened. Busy at this task, she was startled when a voice you-hooed from beyond the steps.

“Is anyone home?”

Maria walked across the open hole on the temporary plank to a pleasant-faced woman who introduced herself, “I’m a home visitor,” she said, “the school sent me out to see how things are for you? Now that the children are in school, I should probably have had your name checked off my list, but for some reason I’m here.

“Oh,” said Maria openly, “Jesus sent you because we need a priest. Can you get us one?”

“A priest? Well, that isn’t usually my job. Why do you need a priest?”

Maria motioned to the bedroom, “*Enfermo* man will die today.”

“I am sorry! Well, I will be in Benzonia at noon, and I will get a message to Father Smyth. He speaks your language well, and I think he will come out here. I will try.” She shook her head, “It must be that I was supposed to come.”

“*Si, Señor* sent you,” Maria smiled, “*Gracias*, Thank you.”

When the children ran down the long lane that afternoon, a brown car was parked in the yard. The warm September sun glinted off the lake, a gentle breeze was circling through the yard, and Suz felt that there was something very special going on, the answer to her morning prayers. There was even a special fragrance in the air which grew more intense as they balanced themselves one by one across the plank into the house. A short man with a round belly dressed in a black suit that gapped at the waist sat in Uncle Joe’s rocker talking seriously with Evelio and Maria in their language. Maria hushed the children and they sat obediently on the floor as they were used to doing.

Suz continued to breathe in the sweet smell; she liked it. Maria introduced the children, one by one giving their names and coaching them to say, "Hello, Father Smyth."

Evelio cleared his throat and looking at them, he sighed, "Mama, tell you." She said, "The old uncle is with Jesus now." Then Evelio spoke to Father Smythe. "*Padre, bendicion . . . ?*" and he made the sign of the cross with his hand.

The priest arose and said, "I'll give each one a blessing," and he walked around the circle putting his hand on each head, ending with Maria and Evelio who both knelt down. When he came to her, Suz could smell the ointment on his fingers which Maria later told her had anointed the old man for his death journey. He had wonderfully awakened for a few moments, and Father, she told them, had accepted Uncle Joe's tears to be his confession, leaving the rest in the hands of the good God.

What a change had happened for Jody and Suz in two short months. Their life alone with Uncle Joe seemed very long ago; Suz had to close her eyes to see him as he used to sit in his rocker on the porch; she felt bad that she liked things now better than those days. After all, Uncle Joe had kept a roof over their heads when otherwise where would they have been? Maria said that Uncle Joe was where he would have another chance to please God if he hadn't done so here. She prayed that he would please God and be happy for once, and then fell asleep listening to the gulls crying over the house. The gulls would miss Uncle Joe who threw them the innards and heads from their fish.

Father Smyth had a beautiful church and Joe Nettle in his casket never had had such attention in whole his life with the songs and incense and prayers and Bible readings. Jody sat on the edge of the pew bench looking at the bright windows, the statues, and the great crucifix with angels hovering on both sides, while Dolores whispered to Suz that it was like heaven. Father in a white robe, looking rather like a plump angel himself, had said words that were so beautiful. Mama, Juanita, Dolores and Suz all wiped tears, while Francisco rubbed his nose on his sleeve, Jody sobbed, and Papas moustache seemed to need rubbing, and rubbing. After the graveside prayers, the priest gave the children a lift home in his car while Maria and Evelio drove behind in the pickup.

From then on it was not uncommon for Father to be at the kitchen table talking in Spanish with Evelio, going over papers and showing him where to sign. Maria explained that he was helping the family keep this house which could happen because of the "minor children" who were somehow related to Mr. Nettle. Maria and Evelio were to be named legal guardians for the children and their inheritance. The only thing that could be called an inheritance was the house and the land. Surprising to everyone was Father's news that the property was becoming more valuable every year. People from Chicago and Detroit were picking up lake shore rapidly to build their summer cottages. Maria's eyes went wide when the amount was mentioned. That much for a second house? Who could be so rich?

One fall day the Martinez's went off in Father's car to the judge to make it all legal. When they came home again, the children were home from school, and Maria hurried to bake the hot dish she had prepared ahead. Then they all sat down in their places, children on the floor, adults at the table, to eat. Afterward Evelio had them stand in a circle, Jody on one side, Francisco on the other, and the three girls with Maria facing them. He surprised them all when he caught up the boys hands. "Take *femenino* hands," he said, "and mama's." So they stood hand in hand around the circle. Then Maria translated his Spanish into 'Now we must praise our Lord for the new family and the good house. And we must thank him for Father Smyth who had helped us. All will be good.' "All will good' *verdadero*," said Evelio.

Juanita, too, had been corrected at school about that family phrase; “well,” she said. “It’s, ‘all will be well,’ Papa, We have been saying it wrong.”

Evelio looked down at her, “well?” he asked. Well? like water? All will be water? All will be well.” repeated the big man. “It is not right that way. . .well.” “I say good, bueno.. El Señor es bueno.”

Chapter four

Fall jobs around the HiLo farm were nearly finished, and there would not be work until the late winter tree pruning, so the porch project could proceed, but where would the necessary money come from now? Of course, there were no more checks from the government after Joseph Nettle's death certificate was sent in; Father was looking into something called welfare, but when Evelio heard what that was, he said he'd rather find any kind of work. It was true that when the cherry season was over few people wanted to hire Mexicans and the local businesses were having a hard time anyway. Perhaps the celery fields could use a worker, even though their season was closing soon, too. Father promised to ask the boss from the truck gardens who went to St. Albans; after all, he owned the lumber yard as well and at either place there should be some work. The little priest had increasing trouble remembering things so Evelio was to remind him after mass.

The whole family, quite against the law, squeezed and stacked into the front seat of the pickup on rainy Sunday mornings, was now going regularly to Father's church. When it was nice weather, the boys and one girl, usually Suz, sat out in the box their hair blowing in the wind, which made it not quite so crowded in the truck cab. Suz would have a time making her curly short hair lie down when they finally arrived. What would winter bring to that ride? She shuddered to think. Yet she was happy to have a whole hour in the "beauty of holiness" "*sarttamente hermoso*" which is how Maria described St. Albans.

Wednesday nights she was enrolled with some others from school in Confirmation class, while the younger ones went to their church school classes. It was there that she learned about glory. Glory, the teacher said, was like when the sun's light flashed off of the crest of every wave making the whole lake look like jumping, glittering silver. Suz could picture it immediately, and she knew how it made her feel; it was glorious on such days.

In the Bible His glory filled the temple when God came to live there. The people saw it, or perhaps felt it, like a great golden smoke blowing right through them. It made people fall on their faces when the glory filled the temple. So that explained the "beauty of holiness" that the family felt filled their church. Perhaps it was because she had not been familiar with churches, but the first time Suz had walked into St. Albans at Uncle Joe's funeral she had seen, or rather felt, the glory; it made goosebumps rise on her arms. Maria told her that the Real Presence of Jesus which was Glory came from the Tabernacle where Jesus just waited and waited for everyone to come to Him so He could lift their cares, and soothe away all their worries. That's why people often came at all hours of the day and night to visit Him in the silent, darkened church. "Always be still enough and look for the glory," said Mama, "if you are noisy inside you may get so you cannot see it." That would be very sad, thought Suz.

Evelio, who always said that their fortunes improved once they began going to church, now had time for working on his project of making a room out of the porch. He hoped to finish before the snow came. On a blustery day when the dark clouds fairly flew across the lake on the west wind, whipping up huge white capped waves which took turns crashing, then trailing their white tails down the shore, he pushed his hat down over his ears and bent to completing the task of the underpinnings of the weak floor which the boys had opened up the week before. The first thing was to take away the plank they had used for a bridge across the hole.

He opened the door and hollered in, "*Cuidadoso*, Maria, hole now in front of the door!"

Then he lowered himself down through it and squatted in the sand looking up at the posts that ran down the center which held the beam which in turn held the floor in place. They were in bad shape, rotted at the bottom, and the center ones would need to be replaced. One was cut oddly at the top and a piece of the beam was cut away above it. Without a whole length of beam, the post never would have reached the floor itself, but was at least six inches lower than the others. He struck a match and raised it to the top of the post; there was something dark and long lying there. Hunched over, he moved one leg and then the other over to the post and took hold of the object but it wouldn't budge.

"Nailed down," he thought. "Probably just an addition somebody put on top to make the post tall enough, but it needs to be more stable than that." His thoughts were still in Spanish.

He hoisted himself out of the hole onto the remaining floor boards and found one he thought was right over that post. The board was loose and came up easily. There was the post underneath and the object sat on top of it. It was a metal box. He lifted the lid which was quite loose, and stared.

Evelio could be an emotional man. He laughed loudly at jokes, he danced jerking his knees up high, he cried as much over Uncle Joe as any of the others, and he sang popular Mexican songs at the top of his voice while slapping his thigh. He lifted the children to the ceiling before he hugged them, and he also liked to hug his wife. But when he came charging into the house, howling and bawling at the top of his voice, grabbing Maria around her waist lifting her and spinning around and around, she was frightened.

"Stop, stop!" she cried, "What is the matter with you? Eb! Let me down *este minuto!*"

Not a sound he made could she understand, it wasn't English and it wasn't Spanish. It was some collection of sounds, half song and half yell, half prayer and half, heaven forbid, not prayer at all. He carried her right to the door, and just when she thought they were about to fall into it, he took a big step over the hole and set her carefully down about where Uncle Joe's rocker rails had made grooves into the old wood.

"Now, look! Look there! What do you see?" he asked breathlessly.

Maria bent over and sucked in a breath. "Where did all that money come from?"

"*Taxos taxos*, it's the *taxos!*" Evelio shouted.

How many years had Uncle Joe squirreled away most of his monthly government check? For as long as Suz could remember the check had come; first Uncle Joe, and later it was she who had bought the necessary things to feed them the whole month, mostly beans and sausage, flour and shortening, oatmeal, sugar and dry milk. Fish could always fill their stomachs; they'd become good fisherman from the boat in summer and through the ice in winter. And the rest of the money had had to go for those endless taxes. She was fourteen now, she thought, so for at least nine years the money had been put in the metal box that was nailed to the top of the post just under the floor board next to Uncle Joe's rocker. About \$200 a month for nine years accumulates a lot of bills. Evelio decided not to count it until the children were there, so he and Maria carefully put the board back over the box, and though his thoughts were racing, he tried to go back to his work. But everything had changed; he couldn't help but imagine a nice door where he had thought he'd have to use an old door salvaged from Topsy's shed, and he could see windows now where there certainly would have been none.

Finally, his excitement was so great, he lay down the hammer, called in to Maria, who was sitting at the table staring into space, and went for a walk to calm himself. He started out

across the dunes to the lake. The water had never been attractive to him because he was a man who had been born in the barren hills south of Texas and he loved the open country. He had not learned to swim, and only since eating so many of them at Nettles had he liked fish. Fresh from the cold water, fried in hot grease, he was surprised at how good fish could be.



Now, he just needed to think; besides, it seemed that the Lord wanted to talk to him; there was something very pressing that he was to hear. He set out against the wind watching the white tops of the waves breaking out at the sandbar, and the cormorants diving for fish. Then overhead a bald eagle glided by on gigantic wings; its great shadow went over him making his skin crawl. Evelio was always trying not to be superstitious. Father Smyth had a few times corrected him with, “Now

Evelio, that’s superstitious” when he had crossed himself too many times, or said, “Jesus, Mary, Joseph” three times in a row. So now, he knew it was not really an omen when the shadow of an eagle fell on him. But still, it felt that way.

But wasn’t it that shadow that Jesus used to warn him that things might go badly because of the money, unless he was very wise? He could hear these words in his head in Spanish, of course, “You cannot serve God and mammon. You will hate the one and serve the other.” He had been told that mammon really meant *dinero*. In English it even sounded something like mammon - money. He found words in his mouth, “Dear Lord, do not let this money be a curse on our family like that huge black shadow.” And he could see all kinds of miserable things in his mind. The girls minced about in fancy clothes and grew haughty. The boys wouldn’t mind him anymore, and on their bright new bikes went off to town all the time. Maria even had less respect for him because she had money that took his place. She no longer liked the little house, and thought the new bedroom was barely worth having. In his heart he found he would like to go to the bars in town on Saturday nights, and no longer sit around by lamplight playing children’s games and singing children’s songs. It would be very good to be accepted by the American men. In his mind’s eye he looked over his old pickup. To have respect from American men he would buy a new pickup, or perhaps better yet a Chevy stationwagon, maybe a gold one or a red, or maybe even both a pickup and a family car. Why not? There were thousands in the box, and a new car in 1954 would be less than \$2500.

But, what was he thinking of? This money was not his by any way of looking at it; he might be the legal guardian of the children, but it was really Jody and Suz’s money. Through all the deprivation they had suffered for years with their uncle, they had earned it. Yet the rich feeling was still in his throat; that was the eagle’s warning from God - a warning about that rich feeling that burned, yet felt delicious – it wasn’t good, bueno; it was very *malo*. He had really thought of taking that money for himself!

“*Rezo!* I must pray!” Evelio had not paid attention and the breaking waves were running up over his shoes. He didn’t dance back as they advanced, he was too intent on getting rid of this unexpected desire for *dinero*, and he plodded on unfeeling of his wet socks. The wind ruffled up his dark hair and plastered his mustache against his mouth. If he could not win this battle, how could he expect Maria and the children not to be overcome by a love of richness. And now he could plainly see that God wanted him to be free of something that could destroy them. “Dear God, help me, don’t let this darkness overcome my family.”

He saw their dear, suffering, patient faces - the beauty, the *hermosa*, of being poor. He looked down at their little orange sandals, and slowly raised his eyes to the skirts and pants Maria had so lovingly made. He saw into their little hearts what it had cost the children being different from others, but those hearts were as clear as glass without any dark richness burning in them. *Hermosa*. It was up to him to shield that purity from the contamination of this money and all the evil it could bring upon them, but how?

As a test to himself he thought again of buying a new car and a new truck. But God was answering his prayer, sitting side by side there they were, a shiny red one and the other of whatever color; they no longer mattered. In his mind, he turned to his old pickup - it could do with some new tires; it had nearly eighty thousand miles and might easily just give up on the road someday, but buy anything new? No. No. He was good at repairing Fords.

He was feeling much freer. Bars? Going by them, he had never even liked the smell; besides they were so dark. He turned around on the beach; he wanted to talk to Maria before the children came home, so he began to run. The wind now at his back pushed him along wet shoes and all. It felt like a firm hand of encouragement. To him it was the hand of God on the small of his back lifting him and propelling him till he felt he was the one with eagles’ wings.

“All will be good.’ What was it the children said, ‘All will be well’? No, it didn’t sound right, ‘All will be good.’ Good like God.”

He found Maria still at the table. She sat there not in great happiness, but with a cloud of sadness gathered around her. He knew he had the answer for that gloom. Breathlessly, he pulled her up and drew her to his big chest. “Do not worry, my Maria, God has told me, and with him we will not be hurt by this *dinero*. And he kissed her.

“Oh, Evelio, I am so frightened!”

“No, no, it will not be our boss,” Evelio’s voice was strong. “Until we talk to Father Smyth we will not tell the children. He will help us to be wise.”

So that evening after the supper dishes were dried and put into the green metal cabinet, the family had their prayers and sang their songs. Then homework was spread out on the floor with the children flat on their stomachs working with pencils. Meanwhile Maria mended a tear in Jody’s pants, and Evelio figured out how much the new pair of socks apiece would cost. Socks had risen to the top of the shopping list. They would have to be good heavy stockings, days were getting colder, and though the sandals were fine, stockings would keep warmer feet. After that they would need some kind of boots for the snow. Evelio couldn’t help think about the money under the board in the porch then, if only for a moment.

“No, No,” he corrected himself. The job at the celery farms would come through, and then he could supply the things that were needed like a good papa should. He went out into the night to bring in wood for the woodbox. There was a new supply of good firewood from the ripped up porch and the scraps of lumber from HiLo that were not usable for construction. The children hadn’t had to bring up driftwood for days. Passing by the loose board in the porch he

was tempted to just nail it tight so that whatever evil was in the box would stay there forever, but he realized this was superstition.

The next day as he stood looking at the torn-up porch pondering just what the next step should be in its progress, to say nothing of what the next step should be with the money, Father Smyth, his head barely visible in the windshield of the car, drove up the lane.

“Evelio” he hollered continuing in Spanish, as he rather rolled out from behind the steering wheel, “Good news! You’ve got the job! Jim Schultz says you begin Monday! The pay is not great, but good enough.” He hesitated and added, “But then there is this, not such good news,” and he drew a paper out his pocket. “I’ve tried to fix this for you, but the powers-that-be say there are back taxes due on this property and they cannot do anything. They must be paid at once.”

He handed the envelope apologetically to Evelio.

“Don’t be too concerned, I think we can manage it some way. Perhaps the church can help. But right now the assessor says the house will have to be put up for sale for the taxes. Some guy from downstate has his eye on this beach and has pressed them to take this action. Trouble is the guy has clout. He’s even looked over the books, so he knows legally he can insist. The county office folks were willing to let it slide for a while, knowing what a good job you’re doing with the kids, but they can hardly hold out against this guy.”

“All will be good” said Evelio calmly. “Come in, Padre. He shook his head, “Those *impuestos* again. But now we have *dinero por los impuestos*.” He helped Father Smyth across the plank that was back in place.

Chapter five

At first the good priest could not get the story together, and he looked carefully into the two faces across from him for signs that they were cracking under the strain of being so poor. So Evelio went out with the crowbar, wrenched up the box under the loose board, and brought it to the table. When the lid was opened, Father Smyth whistled through his teeth.

“My good God!” he exclaimed, his eyebrows nearly escaping his forehead, “Would you look at that?”

Evelio slowly described how Jesus had warned him that this could be not the blessing he first thought. “What can we do about it, Padre, to be safe with Jesus?”

“Well, you can certainly pay the back taxes. That can’t hurt a thing! It is the children’s money, like you say, but paying the taxes is a good use for it. You haven’t told anyone about this, I hope. There would be folks . . . well, you know, it wouldn’t be safe having this laying about. It should be in the bank.”

Father began to thumb the edges of the bills, “Must be thousands here. Phew! pretty moldy. Down at the bottom there’s something white. Well, it was white once,” and he pulled out a yellowed envelope.

When the children came running down the lane from the school bus, the brown car was gone, and with it the money to be deposited in the bank. Father Smyth was driving Evelio into town to open a savings account and get a certified check. Later they would set up a trust, a special account managed by the bank just for the children, but for now the money would be safe and the taxes could be paid.

The bank gave Mr. Evelio Martinez new respect because he was depositing so much money, \$23,745. If Father Smyth hadn’t been with him it might have occurred to the bank manager to call the police to investigate how a poor Mexican man came to be depositing so much cash. With Father’s help Evelio then purchased a cashiers check made out to Antrim County for \$338 in payment for four years’ back taxes on lot 23 Traverse Bay Shores. That would surely disappoint some out of state buyers who had been ready to take over the property.

Meanwhile, Maria greeted the children as they walked single file across the plank into the kitchen. There were never snacks except on special occasions - birthdays for instance. Without steady income, bottles of coke drunk in the orchard were only a memory, but Maria had used some of the brown sugar, chicken fat, raisins, flour and oatmeal to make cookies. “We have something to celebrate,” she explained, as their eyes grew almost as big as the cookie apiece waiting on the plate. “It’s a kind of birthday. But we should wait for Papa. He should be here soon, so change your clothes and bring the school things here *por limpio*.”

After getting their play clothes from the big wardrobe case, the girls clambered up the ladder to the loft, giggling as they tickled the legs of the one ahead, and the boys went into the bedroom, which was now their parents’ room. These old clothes were on the short side, patched and mended, but changing after school saved their school clothes each day, and soon they were reappearing with their bundle of skirts and blouses, or pants and shirts. It was the mid-week night that Maria washed them and hung them to dry out in the fall night wind. She would arise early the next morning, heat the heavy flat-iron on the stove, and press them smooth while they still held the nighttime dampness. Suz loved to put on her blouse and skirt on Wednesday morning, because the smell was so fresh and the blouse so perky with its vigorous ironing. Again on Saturday with an even bigger laundry Maria would do up the same clothes so they would all look their best for Sunday Mass. Then Suz would take out of her box of treasures the necklace

that Maria had given her a year before and again consider wearing it for Sunday. But she didn't want Dolores and Juanita to feel bad; they didn't have a necklace, so she always put it back into the box,

"I can't wait, I can't wait," wailed Francisco, eyeing the cookies.

"You don't have to, Francie, there's your papa."

In the manner of Father Smyth's driving, the brown Dodge had weaved down the lane dislodged its passenger, and then weaved even more perilously as it backed out.

Maria held her head, "There goes the hedge; ohh, there goes the fence," but in the end, as was the case with Father's coming and going, no great damage was done to either hedge or fence, or, miraculously, to the car. And the beavies of young cedar waxwings gathering on both sides of the lane for their long migration south all settled down again.

Earlier in the day, Evelio had made a curved board out of a piece of the scrap lumber, sanded it carefully to minimize splinters, and had fastened it to three sturdy pieces of tree trunk. Coming into the house, he hoisted that creation to his shoulder. It fit around one side of the old round table nicely - a curved bench.

"Now, no more floor - you youngest sit on this!" While the four found a place for themselves - after a bit of a struggle it ended up in order of age - he drew over the rocker for himself, and the other two chairs were arranged for Maria and Suz.

"Mama, pass those wonderful looking cookies. It is a birthday party!" Never before had they all been able to sit at the table at one time. They were close, elbow to elbow.

"A party! But whose birthday?" Jody and Suz had no idea when their birthdays were, so the family had made them up. Jody loved swimming; about the first of July the lake water was really warm enough to swim so he chose July 1; and Suz thought spring lilacs were her favorite thing, so she chose May 15. They hadn't been celebrated yet because they had only become a family in August; they were to wait just like the rest to celebrate a birthday.

So whose birthday was this October day? Suz remembered that the golden glow of the leaves had colored the very air this morning; she'd felt it was a special day and now she guessed it was Mama Maria's birthday.

"No, no *mi querida*," said Maria and they were all munching happily, "It's better than that. Look! We have two papers here that tell your real birthdays. "Yes, yes, you Jody, and you Suz. Also the papers tell your real mama and papa, and where you were born. What do you think of that?"

For a moment, Suz's heart nearly stopped, and Jody looking far away, chewed his cookie as though he had not heard a thing.

"A mother? A father?" She looked at the paper that Maria was holding out to her. Something gripped her throat so she couldn't swallow, her life was about to change, and she didn't want anything different than it was now. Yet, who she was. . .who she was, that she did want to know. She took the paper nervously and carefully unfolded it.

"What is this?" she asked.

"It is your birth certificate," said Maria. We found it today, along with something else we will tell you about."

“Oh dear,” Suz’s hand trembled. Maria got up and stood behind her to look over her shoulder at the English words and to breathe closely by her cheek. That helped.

“See, it says your name, “Suzanne Elizabeth Rogers.”

The words seemed so very dark, so black, so very impressive typed in capital letters. SUZANNE ELIZABETH ROGERS. Could that really mean her? Maria turned to Jody and opened the other paper, and you, my *hijo* you are Joseph Edwin Rogers.

Jody nearly choked. “Joseph? Oh, no! Wait till the other kids hear about this . . . Joseph!” and he dropped his head on the table, mumbling, “I’m Jody Nettle, not Joseph.” Evelio reached a big hand across the table and put it on the head, patting down Jody’s corkscrew curls.

“It *nombre grande y importante* (big important name); *no* tell *niños* at school, but *A veces queden un nombre* (sometime they will want a name like). . . Joseph Edwin Rogers.” His deep voice made it sound so very good, even with a Spanish accent, that Jody looked up, believed his Papa, and was snatched back from tears just in time.

“Now,” said Maria, “see, it tells your mama, too. Jean Louise Rogers, and here it tells her mother, Lois Eleanor Rogers, nee Nettle. That n . e . e means Nettle was Lois’ name before she marry. Then here is Jean Louise’s father, too, Charles Anders Rogers. So, what Father Smyth says it means your mother wasn’t married to your father because that space is blank and she didn’t want to tell who it was. Because he’s had lots of experience with things like this, Father thinks that they were probably living together like a good husband and wife but didn’t get married because Jean Louise’s parents, Lois and Charles, didn’t like him, or maybe he was the wrong religion or something.

Father guesses something bad happened. Maybe Jean Louise’s man, your real papa, got very sick and died, or he went to war and did not come back. But her parents were very angry and would not help her, so she brought you both to her uncle Joe Nettle; she didn’t know what else to do. Father thinks he remembers this Jean Louise; he couldn’t say anything, of course, but he heard a confession of someone once - a stranger... that’s all he could say. And he thinks she may have been very sick herself. She probably thought she would get well, and come back to get you both. I’m sure she loved you very much, and this thing must have broken her heart.”

“Broken, Mama,” said Dolores softly. “broken her heart.” She had tears running down her face for Jody and Suz who both looked like they were too overwhelmed with all this to even breathe. She thought faces of drowning people might look like that.

Maria moved away to sit down, but still kept an arm around Suz. “Yes, this broke her heart,” she agreed.

Suz’s shoulders began to shake, she broke out in sobs which, because Suz rarely cried, made Jody more frightened. The tears he had conquered earlier were close to the surface, and he began to wail, throwing himself into Evelio’s arms. Francisco swung his legs over the bench and added himself to the huddle. And the two girls joined their tears to the cluster as Maria pulled Suz over into her lap. All seven were occupying no more space than two persons normally take, and for several minutes nothing could be heard but sobs dying down to loud sniffs, and then a howl from Jody would get the whole thing going again. Slowly they disentangled, and Maria, dabbing at her eyes with a corner of the dish towel, in a tremulous voice with a little half laugh asked, “But don’t you want to know your birth date? This is supposed to be a birthday party we’re having here, not a *funerales*, for goodness sake.”

“When is Suz’s real birthday?” choked out Juanita, “Is it in the spring? I’ll bet it’s December.”

Emotions were high, and as often happens, it all went the other way. With tears on their faces the girls got the giggles. Francisco and Jody looked at them totally perplexed; what was it with girls?

Suz reopened the certificate, “I was born on 5, 7, 1940. What is that?”

“*Cinco*, five . . . *mayo!*” exclaimed Evelio, “*Mayo, siete*, 1940, in Detroit.”

“Now, what do you think of that? May 7th.” Mama patted Suz’s hand. “No wonder you like spring best. Maybe the first thing you smelled as a baby in her carriage was lilacs.”

“You know I do remember a wonderful sweet smell the night I must have been brought to Uncle Joe, maybe by my real mother, “ her voice trailed off, “ maybe my mother liked lilacs, too, lilac perfume. I think so.”

“Oh, I think so, too,” said Evelio thoughtfully. His English was coming easier. “Now, want to find out Jody’s birthday?”

“Oh, I remember Jody’s,” said Mama Maria, “ he was born on my birthday only in 1942.” Isn’t that wonderful, too?” November twelfth in 1942. Jody my *hijo*, we haven’t long to wait; it is just a month away, and what a birthday party we will have, you and me, together!”

Somehow it just didn’t seem like the right time for Evelio to bring up the money. There was enough to take in without that, and besides, he was still somewhat worried about what would happen to his family when this big thing was known. No one had asked where the birth certificates had been found. Suz had had that question fly through her brain, but the thought had followed that it must be something from the church, possibly because she had just seen her Papa come home with Father Smyth. Still there was one more thing he would tell.

“Another *bueno* thing, my *niños*, your papa works *mañana* at the celery farms, Si, through el *invierno* they have work for me.”

“Through the winter! Oh, Papa, that is so good!”

They all suddenly felt so light they could have floated off. The weight they had carried of a certain fear just lifted. A job for Papa was *bueno*. One of Suz’s favorite book scenes was when Mary Poppins and her friends all sat at the ceiling drinking tea, and was that what was happening to them?

“So we must thank the *bueno Señor* for having ‘all be good.’”

The girls no longer corrected their papa’s English. It all was so good, after all.

Late in the night Suz awoke as an autumn storm thrashed the lake and the wind rattled the windows and roared through the pines. With a loud crack that made her jump, lightning for an instant made everything brilliant as ten thousand Point Betsy lighthouses. Ordinarily, storms made her afraid, but she had taken her small stone from the treasure box before she fell asleep - it seemed so right to hold it on such a very special day when so many wonderful things had happened. “All will be good” was a prayer, all right. It still was clasped in her hand, and even in the midst of the angry storm, she fell fast asleep again. The thunder and lightning had awakened Maria who got up, found the blessed candle she’d brought from church, lighted it and in its own melting wax stuck it to the top of the stove. Then she went back to bed. The blessing would keep

the family safe even if the lightning struck around them, and the wind threatened to blow them all away.

Chapter six

Only once in the four years since the money was found had the bank's lawyer who managed the Nettle Trust come out to the house on the bay. That house was now so different from the little two room shack whose porch had held the rocker of Joe Nettle, that it was hard to determine just what section of it was the original. Besides the bedroom that had replaced the porch and a new entry with a Dutch door to the kitchen at one end, there was now a large wing that was at right angles to the rest out to the front overlooking the lake with a picture window. This new section was made from cut field stone, and along the north side a large fireplace chimney reared up from the ground to a height above the blue roof.

No longer referred to as "The Nettle Place," folks in town called this rambling house "The Blue Martin." It was the only place on the shore with a blue roof, blue as the indigo buntings that sat along the electric wires that swung between the last pole and the house. In an inspiration with the leftover shingles, Evelio had built a blue-roofed martin-style birdhouse to encourage families of martins to move in (of course, martins are purple not blue, but that didn't matter), and do their special work of keeping mosquitoes from the vicinity. This martin house with all its apartments was raised on a high pole in the side yard, clearly visible from the road. This had spilled over into another inspiration, a sign that Evelio had had Jody letter and paint. "The Blue Martin" now hung from the mailbox post. It was just a way of shortening Martinez, after all.

Electricity had made a great difference, and running water, too. A bathroom would always be a luxury to the seven occupants of Blue Martin. When the bank officer had come, Evelio and Maria had only asked to add one room and electricity, but the bank man thought that for the children's sake any addition should include a bathroom and an up-to-date kitchen.

Evelio was worried, "Too much money? Suzie and Jody go to school in Traverse City after graduate High School."

"The investments from this account have grown greatly," the officer said. "If the girl and boy are happy to go to the state school there should be plenty to see them through."

"I build," said Evelio. "I chop (he meant split) field stone. Lots around."

"Well, at least hire a plumber and an electrician," said the man. And he authorized use of \$10,500 for a living room, a bath, and modernized kitchen - a magnificent sum.

Each summer all five children worked at Ohler's HiLo orchards, even when the older three were in High School, and they had been able to save most of their earnings. Their papa was now a well-paid foreman for Schultz Celery Farms, and in the winter he drove trucks for the lumber yard. All the Martinez's were hoping to go to college because as Mama Maria had said so long ago, "they were shining children."

It was working at HiLo each summer that now deepened their friendships with Cindy and her big brother Tom. The childhood games had fallen away, but they occasionally enjoyed evening swims together and had spontaneous marshmallow roasts on the beach.

Topsy had died at the full age of seventeen. Instead of the old horse, in his spare time Tom now rode a small sailboat, swooping up and down the bay. When the girls sat with Cindy on the beach talking about the day and watching the sunset spread its fantasy colors across the sky, his bright sail would be seen far out catching the offshore breeze. At HiLo he was assuming more responsibility for running the summer cherry operation. He never noticed her, she thought, but Suz would notice him. He would be directing the workers in the orchards, or under a trailer

in one of the sheds with a protective face gear welding something broken, or joking in Spanish with some of the men around the loading dock. Mr. Ohlers went back and forth from Detroit often, keeping his family at the lake but still running his primary business. At the end of August the family left to resume city life which included private school for Cindy. Tom was in his second year attending the University of Michigan studying Business Administration. Suz corresponded with Cindy through the winter, and then there was that early spring day when the letter from her Detroit address came written in a different hand.

Suz's heart beat strangely as she carried the mail to the house. She felt slightly out of breath, even Mama noticed it.

"Oh, you have a letter?"

"Yes"

"And you are surprised? Why is that?"

"Well, I think it is from Tom Ohlers."

"Oh? And this makes you breathe fast, my Suz?"

Suz was already into the downstairs bedroom that she now shared with Dolores and Juanita. The boys, big teenagers themselves, had moved up into the loft room which long ago had seen a wide dormer added by their papa, so they could stand up. He had also built closets along the eaves, and had enclosed the room so that it no longer looked down over the kitchen, though it was still reached by climbing the ladder. Being boys, they liked to jump from about six feet above the floor and shake the house. Maria would holler, "Do your jumps outdoors!" Jody at fifteen was taller than Evelio and a budding star on the Junior Basketball Team. When chores were done, and he wasn't working, he practiced constantly at the basket that Papa had rigged up to Topsy's old shed. It wasn't very good; the ground, no matter how he tried to smooth and pack it down, wasn't much like a basketball court. But because the ball wanted to bounce in off-beat directions, Jody kept his eyes on it and was quick to keep it under control. The coach was amazed how well he ball-handled; there wasn't much of a chance of stealing a ball from him.

Mama and Papa's room was the porch-bedroom which had a whole row of six-over-six paned windows down the outside wall, Just when he thought the room would be nearly windowless, Evelio had heard about an old house that was to be torn down in order to extend Beulah's business district. He salvaged the windows and added them to the new room. This gave a quaint New England-like cast to the house's appearance.

She clambered up onto her bunk and opened the letter.

"Dear Suz," it read, "I'm not good at writing letters. In fact, besides the thank-you notes to my Grandmother for Birthday and Christmas presents over the years, and the ones I had to write to get into college, I think this is the one of the few. But it important that you should know that Cindy is very sick; the doctors tell us it is leukemia. You can guess how worried Mother and Dad are; we all feel so helpless. Then I thought about you and your family. I know you and Cindy are close and that you all pray a lot. Would you please pray for Cindy. Actually, not just Cindy, we all it need it, because we are all pretty scared. Sincerely yours, Tom

P.S. You know, you are the very best friends our family has.

P.P.S. I am home only for the weekend, but if you write to her, please address it to my folks because she is supposed to come home from the hospital soon. If you want to write to me it's Wrightly Dorm, Room 245, Ann Arbor, Michigan. I sure would like it" T.O.

At the This and That Store in Traverse City, Maria had found six rolls of lilac wallpaper which, just before the girls had moved into this room, she had hung herself. Suz found herself looking very closely at the individual blossoms that made up each grape-shaped clump of bloom.

“Cindy. Lively, blonde Cindy. How could this be?”

She looked again at the strong round letters of Tom’s handwriting, and felt such a mix of emotions, so glad for this piece of him that was in her hand, and so deeply sad for Cindy and for the family’s worry and sorrow. The heaviness of the message made her wish to just lie still on her bunk, not thinking, only counting the small four-petaled purplish spots that swam before her teary eyes. That bright striped sail that ran so gaily up and down the bay, how could anything so dark stop its course? But when she closed her eyes the sail was limp, and a great cloud shut out the sun over the distant figure at the tiller, not just over Tom but the whole Ohler family. For a minute she didn’t believe that God would remove that cloud no matter how many prayers were offered for Cindy. But then she felt ashamed, hadn’t God always been good? Her treasure box now sat on a dresser just out of reach; she rarely looked in it anymore, but she knew that bit of chert still lay holding its promise.

Slipping down off the side of the bunk, she carried the letter out to Mama Maria and silently handed it to her. Maria noting her tears, wiped her hands and sat right down to read; she now read English well. “Ohh, dear” she sighed. “Ohh, dear. . . dear Blessed Mother. Yes, we will pray, tonight our rosary will be for Cindy. Now, you talk it over with God, Suzie, and let Him give you hope. Do you think that this disease is too much for Him?”

“No, but, Mama, leukemia.”

“It doesn’t matter the name, remember, ‘all will be good.’ Just because you get grown up, do you not believe anymore?”

“I want to, but I’ve prayed and people have died. Father Smyth died, and we prayed and prayed.”

“I see. And does that mean that God failed? Should everyone live and never die? Do you think you would plan things better? We will pray for Cindy to be healed and live, but we will know that He may have a better plan.”

“But why should we have to pray for that, then? Doesn’t God do what is best for her anyway, though why would He ever want a fifteen year old to die?” she began to cry again.

“Ahh, Suz, the plan of God. . .it is so big and wonderful that your little mind cannot understand it. Never! And we pray for a simple reason, so that God can answer our prayers. He is like a Papa, remember? And Papas want their children to ask Him for things so that He can give them what they ask for. The Heavenly Father loves to give His children good things. That’s what the Bible says.”

Suz thought of the joy in Evelio’s face when he could give his children what they asked for. He couldn’t always, and she understood more as she grew older why he couldn’t. Sometimes it was just that it wouldn’t be good for them - like those new bicycles that would have introduced his boys to teen idleness in town. Other times it was because it would be unfair to the rest of the family, and still others, it wasn’t the right time for the request.

Suz and her sisters had wanted another bed in their loft; sleeping on the floor every third week was all right when they were little girls, but it was harder now that they were all over five feet tall, and nearly women. Evelio had in mind a total reorganization with some remodeling of the bedrooms as soon as the new living room was complete, so the answer was, “No, not now.”

“Not even a mattress?”

“No, not now.”

He never bothered to explain his plan, so they thought for many months that he didn't care about their need. Even Maria had seemed to think it wasn't important for now. It made Suz embarrassed to think about it, because when the house was finished the girls' bedroom was better than anything she would have asked for. She had a single bed, and Juanita and Dolores shared a bunk bed. The furniture matched - a maple set from a store! It even included a chest with a mirror, and a knickknack shelf with a small drawer in the bottom.

Yes, God wanted them to always be like children, asking for what they needed, sometimes it was all right to ask Him for a frivolous desire, not even a need, and all so that He could answer their prayers. He might have something better in mind, but He wanted them to ask, “Papa, please.” If He said, “No, not now,” then they must trust that He had something better in store for them.

Could death ever be that something good, even better than what they asked for? That was very hard to think, especially when she thought about kind-hearted, bright-faced Cindy. But, trust, trust that ‘all will be good.’

Suz felt a goodness begin to buoy her up. She would sit right down to make one of her special cards for Cindy, and answer Tom's letter. Could she write to him that he could trust God, and ‘all will be good?’ They had never talked about anything so personal as that favorite family saying, and she thought Jesus would show her if it was all right. Maria had always said it was better not to share the things closest to your heart unless you were very, very sure you were supposed to. “If in doubt, don't,” was her way to judge.

The High School art teacher had encouraged Suz with her drawings. Jody, too, had become a fine letterer. Last Christmas Papa and Mama had given him a case of special pen tips with a holder. He had let her try one of those tips in drawing her fine designs, usually from carefully studying pieces of cedar, or lady's bedstraw, or another plant with delicate fronds or flowers. She would try to duplicate it on heavy white paper she'd saved from a school project. Now she went to a small table in the living room that was by the front window; the sun felt good on this spring day, and the lake out beyond also was soaking in the welcome rays. It had only recently been free of the last remnants of wind-carved snow banks; and on very cold mornings the light ice, frozen on its surface through the quiet night, was tossed up like fine, broken window glass along the shore.

What would she draw on Cindy's card? She thought of lilacs, but they were a month, even two, away from blooming. What would lift Cindy's spirits and make her believe that asking God to heal her was right? What would give her courage to believe that all would be good? At once the little snowdrops that had already poked their heads through the frozen ground in Maria's herb garden popped into her mind. They would be just right. In a moment she had gathered three, put them into a drinking glass and had them before her in the sun which accentuated with light and shadow their delicate form.

Snowdrops didn't like being picked, so she sketched them rapidly first on a piece of brown paper bag to get the idea down, and then more carefully on her card stock. Gracefully - they posed gracefully, and her deft strokes with Jody's pen soon imaged them on the paper. She rubbed one spot with her thumb while the ink was wet and it set off the white blossoms with a shadow. When the ink was dry, she opened the card, and wrote;

“To dear Cindy, our friend,

We are praying to Jesus and Mary
to have healing break out for you
like these snowdrops that have just broken out
of the cold, frozen ground.
Don't be afraid; God loves you.

Holding it at arm's length she could see that her printing wasn't as good as Jody's. She probably should have waited for him to write the words. But it was done.

After dinner that night, their family rosary was said with more attention than usual because they were asking God to make Cindy healthy again. Maria told them how to do it.

"Imagine inside your head, each of the mysteries like a scene. For instance, this is Thursday, so the five mysteries are The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Birth of Jesus, The Presentation, and Finding Jesus in the Temple.

"With the first decade of beads, imagine that Cindy is in the very room when the great angel Gabriel comes to Mary. Cindy would, of course, fall on her knees and be filled with joy that Mary was chosen to be the Savior's mother. Joy can heal Cindy.

"Next, see Cindy there when Mary greets Elizabeth; she hears Elizabeth say loudly, 'The baby stirred in my womb! Blessed is she who believed!' when Mary enters the room carrying Jesus within her. These words can cause Cindy to believe in great things, too.

"With the third mystery, see Cindy as though she were kneeling in the stable looking at beautiful baby Jesus, hearing the angels sing, and watching the shepherds come in to adore Jesus. She will adore Him, too, and in her heart she will know that this is the Savior of the World who has come to heal her and everyone. Such love will heal Cindy.

"For the fourth mystery, remember the two old people who greeted Jesus in the Temple when Mary and Joseph brought him there? Well, imagine Cindy is there, too. Perhaps Simeon holding Jesus puts his little hand upon her head for an instant. There is great power in Anna and Simeon's belief. That power and the touch of Jesus can heal Cindy.

"With the last mystery, Cindy is in the Temple and hears Jesus' wonderful words when he talks with the elders. She is older than Jesus, so she is amazed at the faith-filled words of this twelve year old. When she hears him say to his parents, 'Don't you know I must be about my Father's business,' Cindy wants to be about whatever the Father wants for her, too. Faith will heal Cindy, and one way or the other she will be about her heavenly Father's business; but we don't know what that is.

So they prayed the rosary for Cindy, and they all felt hopeful that the answer to their prayer that night would be, "yes." "All will be good."

Then Suz brought out her card. They all admired the snowdrops, and passing it around the table, each one signed his name. Juanita circled her name with a heart, and Maria wrote JM above the message. (The little round table and curved bench Evelio had made had become yard furniture - the family now sat on English-style wooden chairs around a big trestle table in the new living room. Evello sat in an armchair at the head, and there was even one extra for a guest. Maria said that the guest at every meal was Jesus. They always acknowledged His presence when they asked him to bless the food).

Chapter seven

Later that evening, when her homework was done, Suz took a sheet of notebook paper and a pencil and climbed up on her bunk to write a letter to Tom. There was so much she would tell Tom, her heart was full of things, but somehow there were no words that looked right. She tried a beginning sentence twice and both times erased the attempt. The paper was unusable and she needed more.

Evelio and Maria were sitting by the fireplace where a cedar fire burned brightly; he had learned just lately to pick out chords on a new guitar, and Maria was humming, laughing “si, si” when the tune was right, and “no, no” when he hit a wrong note. Dolores had been asked to baby-sit for Mrs. Calhoun, a widow with seven children who had recently moved into a winterized cottage down the beach. Juanita and Jody were arguing over checkers at the table while Francis lay under it snuggling the new dog, Prince, *Principe*’ as Evelio called him, whose eyes squinted in pure pleasure.

“Your letter isn’t working?” said Mama.

“Oh, I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, if in doubt . . . don’t.”

“That means I must just not say everything, then.”

“Probably not - a short note, I think.”

When she went back to the bunk it was easier.

“Dear Tom;

We were very sad to hear about Cindy’s illness. Very sad for her and for you and your parents, too. We will pray like you asked. We have a new collie dog that wandered into the yard this winter. Staggering from hunger, his pads were all cut and crusted with blood. Dad (she almost wrote, “papa”) said he must have been lost and walked a very long way, miles and miles. We have named him Prince because he has a very noble face, long and thin with fine eyes.”

Was it right to spend so much time writing about the dog when there were more important things to write about? She wanted to comfort Tom. She wanted to write that though she had doubted at first, she believed that the good God would heal Cindy, and how anxious she was for summer to come when he, and Cindy, too, would be back at HiLo, and how glad she was that she had his address now. But no, that wouldn’t be right, why did she want to say she was happy to hear from him when his letter brought this distressing news. So she left all that out.

“Everyone is well here. I will close now; please keep us informed about Cindy. We do hope that she will get well quickly.

You are our best friend, too.”

She wanted to leave it like that, but added an “s’ to friend to include the whole Ohler family. And signed it, “As always, Suz.”

The next news from Detroit came within a week and it wasn’t good. This time Mrs. Ohlers wrote. Cindy was in the hospital in isolation while she took a six weeks course of a new medical treatment. She thanked them for the card from the family. Cindy appreciated it very much. Now the Ohlers would pay the bus fare if Suz could come for the weekend. They thought her positive outlook would be very good for Cindy who was weak and downhearted. Could she

come by the next Friday evening? The bus trip took six hours, and she would be met at the Downtown Bus Station at 11:00pm by a family member.

After a family conference during which everyone contributed their loose change, Suz took the car to town to make her call from the pay phone at the drugstore. (She had had a license to drive the old truck when she was fourteen; now she drove the family's vintage station wagon and occasionally Evelio's newer pickup). That next Friday afternoon, in front of that same store, Suz waited for the five o'clock bus with a small cardboard suitcase that had been hastily purchased for the occasion.

Packing it, she had felt impatient with her clothes for the first time in her life. Here she was going to Detroit with nothing to wear. Maria was very quiet while she complained discarding one thing after another as not right. Her mama remembered how happy Suz had been with one skirt and one blouse. As it was, a white shirt and a striped, dirndl skirt was what she settled on taking. This was completed by Dolores' best blue cardigan which she gladly loaned her. Neither her pajamas or slippers were nice enough, but they would have to do. Maria brought into the bedroom her own pink chenille bathrobe that she had carefully washed for Suz. In her mood she almost forgot to thank her. She decided to wear her first pair of dressy khaki pants with a pullover, pants were just becoming stylish for girls to wear. With those, her school jacket would look all right. The skirt for church would get her over the weekend if she was careful.

She did like her shoes. Last fall it had seemed like Christmas every morning for a week when she had been allowed to buy the pair of saddle shoes in the shoe store window. They were more expensive than any of the other shoes she could have chosen, so from her summer savings she'd paid half, and Papa Evelio had paid the other half.

The month had come in like a lamb but was going out like a lion. Waiting with three others for the Detroit bus, the cold March wind blew in from the lake, and she shivered, but mostly from nervous excitement. What would it be like? She had never spent one night away from home. Would Tom be home from college? She hoped so, but then, she reminded herself, she was going for Cindy and that was the important thing. Maria had told her not to forget that her friend Jesus was with her, to think of Him in her conversations and not to take anything for granted, especially when she was with Cindy. Already, she thought, to do that would be hard, she felt distracted by the newness of the adventure, and by the whole weekend of possibilities that lay ahead.

Opening her eyes in the strange bedroom, a feeling of homesickness swept over Sue; though she had slept well, she felt nervous and wished she were home. She closed her eyes and saw the familiar lilac wallpaper, the tips of the pines out her bedroom window, and imagined the typical morning smells of home. Then she opened them again and looked around the guestroom of the Ohlers. The furniture was a very shiny, dark mahogany, and each surface was covered with a thick glass. The corner glass cabinet held a collection of fragile china figures she later was told were Hummel. Though the heavy draperies were pulled, a crack of radiant light meant the sun was up. She pulled her hands out from under the sheets, and moved them appreciatively over the satin comforter.

"Sue." That was what Mrs. Ohlers had called her last night, and she liked it. It made her feel like another person, more sophisticated and mature than the Suz who lived at the Blue

Martin. The great mirror at the foot of the Ohlers' stairs had shown a Sue that she had never seen before. The bathroom mirror at home didn't reveal a well-formed figure, but only an ordinary oval face framed by short curly blonde hair that Maria cropped for her with the kitchen shears. The figure in the mirror startled and pleased her; that was the way she looked? In the khaki pants her legs were long and slim, and the pullover gave a modest accent to her developing feminine form. Yes, from now on it would be Sue.

Then there was that other exciting thought. Through the long hours last night on the bus, she had suddenly realized that she was really going to Detroit where she had been born. Beginning by imagining where in that huge city she and Jody might have lived with her father and mother, she had had a thought that stabbed her through. My goodness! Her grandmother and grandfather could very well still live in Detroit. She was now almost eighteen. If they had been in their fifties when she was born, they would be in their seventies. It wasn't unheard of that people lived that old. And she knew their names! She had often unfolded that birth certificate and reread it; because of it they had changed the school records from Susan Nettle to Suzanne Elizabeth Rogers.

"Lois Eleanor (nee Nettle) and Charles Anders Rogers." There were phone books in cities. She would look up the name the moment it was convenient. Would she dare to call if she found them? Impossible!

She thought of the day ahead; there would be the visit to the hospital. She would save the skirt and sweater for church and wear what she had worn yesterday. With that decision, she slipped out of the big bed, pulled open the draperies, and looked out into the Ohlers' backyard. There was a heavy frost on the ground; a small pond surrounded with dead flower stalks lay frozen; stacked summer furniture in covers waited on the patio for outdoor life to begin again. Then she walked into her very own private bathroom.

It was obvious at breakfast that any hope that Tom would be home for the weekend was not to be. Though it was Saturday, Mr. Ohlers was off to the office, so Sue sat with Cindy's mother at a small breakfast table that sat in a circle of windows overlooking the patio. Violin music like she had only heard on a record in a school music class was piped in from somewhere. The Martinez had recently bought a radio, but the music Maria and Evelio chose to listen to was nothing like this.

"Do you like Dvorak, Sue?" Mrs. Ohlers asked as she reached for the coffee pot?"

"Dv. ., I'm afraid I don't know that word." Then she felt very stupid. Obviously, this world was going to be very strange, and she wanted to seem like it was no different than what she was used to. Already she was stumbling, just a poor, ignorant girl.

Mrs. Ohlers just went on, "That's one of my favorites. My father used to play it on his violin, Dvorak's Humoresque. I'm so happy that you were able to come, Sue. Cindy has always thought so highly of you. You should have seen her eyes when I told her you were coming - bright for the first time in weeks. If you can just help to lift her spirits." Tears filled her eyes. "Without a different attitude we are so afraid that she simply may not get well."

"How will it be if we leave for the hospital right away? Bud, that is, Mr. Ohlers, will come to the hospital at noon, and we'll go out for lunch, so I'll just give Tilly some instructions about dinner and we'll be off."

While Mrs. Ohlers went to the kitchen, Sue walked down the central hall and looked into the rooms on both sides. Dark woodwork, with finely worked detail graced the paneled library. Books lined all the walls; Sue would have loved to spend hours there; the special sliding ladder

to reach top shelves especially intrigued her. Then the formal dining room opened the whole length of the house; multi- branched candelabra on the long polished table reached up to nearly touch a great crystal and china chandelier. Fresh flowers, daffodils, one of her favorites but not up yet in the Martinez garden, stood in a big bouquet on the sideboard. On the other side stretched the expanse of living room. Leaded, prism windows framed both sides of the large marble fireplace and sent rainbows onto adjacent walls. Fine china figurines, a Victorian man and woman, stood on the mantel piece above which was a painting of an ocean scene with great, green translucent waves alight with sunrays breaking against dark cliffs. A pale yellow sofa sat in front of the fireplace, flanked by two white brocade chairs. At the far end of the room in a window bay the grand piano gleamed; another early bouquet in a huge crystal vase reflected on its surface.

“Isn’t it good to see lilacs already, Sue?” Mrs. Ohlers was at her shoulder. “Leo - he is the gardener - is able to force lilacs by bringing them into the conservatory three weeks before he wants them to bloom. They aren’t as beautiful, of course, as when they open outdoors, but I love to have them early. It just assures me that spring will really come.”

“Lilacs are my very favorite flower,” is all that Sue could say. It reminded her of what Evelio had said once, that lilacs in Detroit might have been the first thing she smelled in her baby carriage. She had seen a telephone on the desk in the library. Where there was a telephone there would be a Detroit phone book. She would do her detective work by herself when she had a chance. The Ohlers wouldn’t have to know about her peculiar background.

What she didn’t realize was that when they had bought HiLo, the caretaker, Torres, had talked plenty to the Ohlers about the Nettle kids and their old uncle. He had had to keep the horse alive, and he had expressed wonder at how the kids kept things going there, especially as the man grew senile.

Chapter eight

Detroit was an amazing place. The wide avenue that led into town was crowded with automobiles, pedestrians filled the sidewalks, and when the first streetcar zoomed up beside them, Sue was wide-eyed - a bus-like vehicle on tracks. The buildings were so tall and so crowded together; how did people ever know where they were going? "I am just a poor country kid," she thought. "Think of all this right in the same state as Beulah. I wonder if Evelio and Maria have ever seen this; they used to drive every year back and forth from Texas, but I don't think so. Wait until I tell them." She didn't want to act startled by the big city; she tried to be calm and not too interested. Suz might be knocked out by this city, but certainly not the new, sophisticated Sue.

This pride made Sue want to talk as intelligently as possible about the visit to Cindy. Did she ask Jesus to help her as Mama had advised? No, she simply wanted to act very knowledgeable about psychological and spiritual things.

"The first thing to do for Cindy is to assure her that God wants her to be well. You know that God is a healer, and He doesn't want anyone to be sick or sad. Anyway, when a person doesn't have faith then it is impossible to think positively. There is power in setting your mind on how God loves us, so we will certainly need to help Cindy feel God's love. I didn't think of bringing a Bible with me. But we should read to Cindy, maybe some of the parables of Jesus, or some of His healings. That would make her understand that God wants to heal her, but she must begin to think with assurance about healing." She especially liked that last sentence; "assurance" in it was a good sounding word.

If Sue had noticed, Mrs. Ohlers had just a hint of a puckered brow as she turned into the parking lot. Cars and cars. My word! How did a person ever come back and find the right one?

"Yes, dear, I'm sure that is right. But what Cindy really needs is just for you to be yourself with her. You know, talk like you used to when you sat out on the beach in the evenings."

Then her grand speech about God and healing seemed a bit foolish. Or was it just that Cindy's mother didn't believe the way her family did?

The nurses on the oncology floor asked if Sue had had a cold or any other disease in the past two weeks; then they had her wash her hands carefully, dressed her in a sterile gown and gave her a face mask to cover her mouth and nose. Mrs. Ohlers was dressed similarly and they were guided down the hall to a closed door. "We must keep as many germs out of the room as possible," explained the nurse. "Cindy would like the door open, she feels very lonely by herself, but we simply have to follow the rules. We do try to pop in to see her when we have a minute."

Cindy was lying in a white bed making a surprisingly long and thin rise in the sheets; some tubes hung down from a pole beside the bed, all of them ending in her arm which was on a kind of splint. Her eyes were very large and dark; Sue was unprepared for how very sick she looked. On the window ledge among many other beautiful cards stood Sue's snowdrop card.

"Suz! Is that you? Oh, it's terrible you have to wear a mask!" Her voice was weak, but in speaking Sue saw more of the old Cindy emerge from the drawn face. "I've been waiting and waiting for Saturday because you were coming. I was so afraid that something would happen and you wouldn't come."

Sue went to the side of the bed and took her hand wondering how to tell her that she had just changed her name from Suz to Sue, and decided not to.

“Nothing happened, and here I am.” For a few seconds she doubted she could ever cheer anyone up who was this sick, or what she had to say, but Cindy was asking questions about the family especially Dolores who had been her favorite next to Suz and soon they were chatting away about the months since they had last seen each other. True, Cindy didn’t seem to have much strength for talking, so Sue carried the ball.

Cindy loved Beulah. To a girl who lived in the city, it was like a storybook town with the great lake as a backdrop. So when Sue began to describe the latest changes there, she easily transplanted herself into the place she liked most in the world and saw in her mind’s eye everything that Sue described.

Last fall the Schmidt Celery Farms had planted perennial gardens down the highway leading into town. They had put up big billboards in the back of five different plots advertising the town’s features for the benefit of tourists, and in front of each sign a different colored flower bed was designed. The half-mile long row of signs were connected by a cedar fence against which were planted a row of evergreens to set-off the multi-colored flowers. One bed was mostly yellows, one blues (delphinium was one of Suz’s favorite flowers) one red, one purple and pink, and one white. Oddly enough, her Papa, who had designed the borders and ordered the flowers, predicted that the white blooms would eventually be the most beautiful and popular.

Sue described how when the flats of plants arrived from downstate commercial gardens, Evelio had been in charge of the crew that did the planting. First in every spare minute he had studied about perennial flowers and had educated his family - at least those who wanted to know. The books he had brought home were filled with entrancing pictures of all the kinds of flowers. Though he didn’t read English, he soon understood the diagrams and numbers that described the stages of blooming, their height, how they related best to other plants, and whether they liked shade or sun, damp soil or dry. All this information went into his planning of a really beautiful perennial bed. It was a complicated business.

“What exactly is ‘perennial?’” asked Cindy.

Sue explained that it meant the flower came up every year. It would die down with the frost, but then come up again in the spring. So if you planned correctly you could set out a bed that would begin flowering in the spring, then one by one the plants would make their contribution, coming into bloom and ceasing to blossom, until late fall frosts sent them all into dormancy.

“What about the billboards; I would think they’d make it ugly? I never did like billboards.”

“Well, no, but you’ll be surprised. I think you’ll really like these. Some local artists have painted pictures of all the tourist activities around the area; Jody was even asked to help with the lettering. The first has a classy lady in a red swimsuit on the beach; that is an advertisement for Johnson’s Realty Office. Oxley’s Hardware Store has a big Chriscraft on the lake with its bow coming up on a big wave. That’s my favorite.”

“Oh, Mom, I love Oxleys.” Cindy’s voice was a bit stronger. “She let me buy a knickknack there each summer since I was a little girl. Remember that set of Indians and the real birchbark canoe we played with when we were little? Didn’t we have fun making rivers and lakes in the sand? Woods even, when we stuck in branches of pine.”

“And the Indian grass we could pull apart.”

"I kept that teepee we made; it's on the mantel at the farm," she was out of breath and began to cough. Then added, "Last summer I bought a mother-of-pearl cross on a chain from their special jewelry display case. Where is that Mom?"

"Must be among your things."

"Will you bring it next time? It's in a blue box. See if you can find it, please. I'd like to wear it. But what's on the other signs?"

"Let's see, next is an advertisement for the Lumber yard, and it has water-skiers on it, a boy and a girl on calm water, just skimming along."

"I hope we can water-ski next summer, but Tom says we'll need a bigger motor on the boat."

Her mother smiled. It was good to hear Cindy thinking about next summer.

"And one of my favorite places has always been the lumberyard. When he had errands for stuff, Dad would take us there when we were kids. There was the most delicious smell."

"I always thought it was a mixture of apple cider and cedar shavings. You remember there used to be a press where people brought their windfalls to make cider."

"Ummmm, didn't that smell good? You know, I'd like to have some cider right now."

Mrs. Ohlers rose, "I'll go and see if the nurses can get us some," and she left the room.

"The fourth sign is really funny, it has some kids on the beach with their sand pails, but the little one stooping by the water is almost losing his pants, can you imagine?"

"Cindy laughed out loud. "You mean his little bottom. . . ?"

"Yes, it's hilarious, and his tan contrasts with the whiteness of his little behind. I suppose it advertises suntan lotion, because it's the drugstore sign. And the last one advertises the bank. It is more respectable with a hunter aiming at a big buck whose head is peeking out from some bushes."

"You know we have some antlers in the living room at the farm. Oh, I wish we could live there all the time. You are really lucky. Suz. To me, Lake Michigan is heaven; heaven couldn't be more beautiful, do you think?"

"It is beautiful, but heaven must be better than anything we can imagine. Yet, you're right there is something very special about living with the water and the wind; I find it easier to pray there than here in the city. But Cindy when you talk about beauty, you have the most beautiful home."

"Really? I don't think it is so special. It seems so . . .oh, I don't know, not very much fun like yours. You have that ladder to the loft, and the big stone fireplace your dad built; your kitchen always smells of good stuff that we never get to eat. Tillie doesn't cook like Maria. I love hot peppers right out of the jar - your mama lets me have them all the time. And I'd just hope that heaven is more like that!" Cindy had to stop for breath every now and then, but she sounded stronger all the time.

Mrs. Ohlers came back with a tray holding three glasses of cider. "The nurses will really be happy if you drink this, Cindy. They tell me it is hard to get you to drink enough, and this will even do good things for your digestion."

She turned to Sue, 'Those gardens will make a lovely change to the highway into town. You must be proud of your father and all his abilities. We have been amazed at what he has been able to do at Blue Martin these past years. He's so good at transforming into useful and beautiful things materials that others wouldn't think of using. Now, it sounds like he has become a flower expert.'

"The leftover plants, some that didn't look so healthy, and some that they just had too many of, Mr. Schmidt told Papa to take, so we will have a garden all around the Martin House this year."

So it was they passed the morning until Cindy's dad stuck his head around the door. "Hi, sweetheart. Well, aren't we looking better, though! Can't come in - haven't got the gown, but will spend time with you this afternoon. Are you two ready to go out to lunch?"

The little restaurant was pleasant and homey. Sunshine streamed in the front windows, and Sue, who had eaten in a restaurant only once before, looked at all the choices on the menu wondering how she would decide. A hamburger basket had been brought to the next table. She didn't want to act as though she was new to this; the look of all those french fries settled it, and she ordered a hamburger basket as though she did it often - "with a coke . . . a cherry coke, please." She was a senior in high school and had never eaten a hamburger in a restaurant.

The lunch conversation partly concerned the Sunday morning schedule. The Ohlers weren't Catholic, but went to the Episcopalian Cathedral on Woodward Avenue. Sue would go to the early mass at the Catholic Church not far from their house, and then, if she didn't mind, she could attend St. Paul's with them before they all went over to the hospital. She wasn't sure that going to a different kind of church was all right, Maria wasn't there to ask, but she wanted to be polite.

"And Bud," Mrs. Ohlers exclaimed, "to have Sue here is certainly the best therapy, Cindy was looking better right before my eyes. She even drank cider." Mrs. Ohlers herself looked happier than Sue had seen her since she had arrived.

With a big basket of french fries and a delicious hamburger in front of her, soaking in the warm sun and the approval from the Ohlers, the enjoyable surroundings loosened Sue's tongue. Sue found herself telling about the possibility of having grandparents whom she had never met living right in Detroit. She hadn't meant to bring it up, but it seemed to be all right. They both were more impressed with what this might mean for her than she had been.

"Bud, we must help her find these relatives. If they aren't listed in the phone book, well, you have the city directory at work. Of course, we aren't even sure they are alive. What are their names, dear?"

Sue was happy that her grandparents' had good sounding names. "My birth certificate lists them as Charles and Lois Rogers."

"Ummm, Rogers. That is a common enough name. Charles, you say. I know a Chuck Rogers who is retired CEO of Tunny Corporation, but probably isn't him," he laughed. "That would be quite a connection. Do you know his middle name?"

"Charles Anders Rogers."

"No. Really, Anders? Hmmmm. C.A. Rogers. Those are Chuck's initials. Good grief. But it must be a coincidence. You know the Rogers, Lucy. They belong to the Cathedral, or at least they did. I haven't seen them for some time. How could we find out about this? Do you remember her name? Could it be Lois?"

“I have no idea. I know who they are, of course, but I haven’t seen her in ages. She has the reputation of being a recluse.

Sue’s thoughts were racing. What was a “CEO” and what did it mean to be “a connection” or “*the* Rogers.” Looking from one face to the other she tried to get her bearings. Should she tell everything - that these grandparents had probably disowned her mother, and that they didn’t want anything to do with their grandchildren? If they were big and important people, acquaintances of the Ohlers and their friends, shouldn’t she. . .well, what should she say? Maybe it was the wrong Rogers, they both seemed to think it was improbable, so she just decided to say nothing more.

“Bud, I think the next thing to do would be to find out if Chuck Rogers middle name could be Anders. That would settle everything because certainly there aren’t two Charles Rogers with that middle name.”

“Yes, that’s what I’ll do. Well, my girl, wouldn’t that be something if the Rogers were your grandparents. But why in the world wouldn’t you be in touch with them, and what would Joe Nettle be doing raising you? That would be a tremendous story for some newspaper! Think of a reporter getting his hands on it. There must be something juicy there!”

“For heavens sake, Bud, we don’t even know there’s any truth to this, so why think of that! Come on, we should get back to the hospital.”

Chapter nine

They found Cindy asleep; looking very frail upon her pillows, but with a slight pinkness on her lips. The morning talk had quite worn her out. They sat quietly in their hospital gowns and masks, like three paper pyramids, thought Sue, reading magazines or gazing out of the window. Now the big city held even more mystery; Sue was excited to complete the puzzle that, for now, had been put on hold. Every now and then she would notice Bud or Lucy looking at her with a quizzical expression, and she found herself spinning all kinds of fantasies. Would the Rogers have a house bigger than the Ohlers? Would they have a three car garage while the Ohlers just had two cars? Would there be great gardens and more than one gardener, maybe more than one maid? The Ohler's situation had seemed to her to be the most magnificent imaginable, but with the way they talked about the Rogers, there was reason to try to imagine something even grander.

Then the serious thought occurred to her that it didn't really matter. The Rogers never wanted her or Jody, and nothing had happened to change that. It was probably best to tell the Ohlers the whole story and save the embarrassment that otherwise surely lay ahead.

Finally, with Cindy continuing a peaceful sleep, her mother wrote her a little note, putting it on her gently lifting and falling chest, "Dearest, we are happy that you are resting. Sleep well, my darling, and we will see you in the morning. Love and kisses, Mom."

Sue drove back to the Grosse Pointe house in Mrs. Ohlers' car, while Cindy's dad went to a car repair with his Lincoln. Nothing more was said for the time being about Charles Anders Rogers.

The Ohlers had television. Sue hadn't noticed it when she had taken her brief house tour that morning because it was in what they called "the den." This room which lay behind the living room on the backside of the house was furnished in a southwestern style of heavy dark oak. The easy chairs were huge, upholstered in two-toned brown leather, and were arrayed opposite a massive three part cabinet which when opened displayed a phonograph system on side, balanced by an array of records in the opposite end, and the first television that Sue had ever watched was in the middle. She had seen advertisements for televisions, and noticed that strange blue light shining out of a few people's windows at night, but she had never watched a show on "t.v." as they called it.

That evening watching t.v. was what they all did, including Tillie who had served them a dinner of poached flounder. Sue thought she had eaten every kind of fish, but never flounder which was a salt water fish, and never "poached", which seemed to mean it was kind-of boiled. Tillie was a Baptist from Maine which accounted for it. There was always something new in this world, even when it was about fish.

Lawrence Welk was wonderful. Sue tried to remember every detail about the beautiful costumes, even in black and white you could tell that they were beautiful, and the dancing and the music to report to her brothers and sisters. Wouldn't they love this though? The detective story that followed was about a murder, and Perry Mason and his secretary weren't fooled by false clues, finally exposing the villain right in court, and it wasn't even the man who had been accused! She kept pinching herself; think of having such a thing right in your own house to watch whenever you wanted.

Not a further word was said about C.A. Rogers, so Sue went to her room without bringing it up either. The alarm clock woke her at 6:00 in time for the short walk to the Catholic Church. Mrs. Ohlers had made sure coming home yesterday that she knew the way — over three

blocks and down two - it was easy. After bathing in her huge tiled shower - Sue smiled when she thought of the first shower at home which was a wooden affair with a barrel fastened overhead rigged up with a showerhead which drizzled sun-warmed water over you while you stood on a slatted platform - she put on her dirndl skirt and white blouse, with Dolores' sweater. It was the sweater with the sweet scent of Dolores that made her want to hug it. She did have the most wonderful family, and she did like home better than any of these mansions that lined the streets of Grosse Pointe.

The morning had more promise than any spring morning yet; in the air was the feel that a really warm day was ahead. With the necessary veil in her pocket, she walked quickly, arriving in the church fifteen minutes before mass. It was the fifth Sunday of Lent; the statues and large crucifix were draped in purple, yet the interior was filled with the glory. She knew immediately it was there, just like St. Albans, the very same Presence of Jesus. That special odor of incense and the beauty of holiness seeped over and into her while the voices of fellow worshippers continued a rosary. Her first overwhelming thought was that she had not been able to remember to do what Maria had told her, she had not been thoughtful of Jesus at all; her little speech in the car came back to her. What a phony! She was ashamed. "Dear Lord, do forgive me. I am such a failure at being a witness for you. I would like to, but I will never, never be a saint. And I am sorry. Please, please, dear Jesus, heal Cindy, if it is your will."

She walked back to the house more slowly; the mass had been lovely, the priest had seemed to read her mind and he talked about how though we will always be failures in our attempt to love God, still He loves us beyond our wildest dreams, and we should never be discouraged as long as we keep on desiring to please Him. The desire, he said, was what was important. We gave God our desire for Him, and He did the rest. Lent was given to stir up that desire with fasting, giving more to the poor, and prayer. Sue knew that in her heart she wanted nothing more than to love God. She walked along with the Latin refrain still singing inside her head, "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi." It had a Spanish sound, and she missed her family.

As she approached the Ohlers house she noticed immediately that something was very different. The Lincoln was sitting in the drive with its motor running, its two front doors open; the storm door to the entrance was swinging in the breeze, with the inside door ajar. People must have been coming and going in something of a panic. "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi misserre nobis."

She heard voices as she stepped inside; despairing voices, even loud sobbing came from the living room. Tillie's back was disappearing at a run down the hall. On an entrance table a little blue box next to Mrs. Ohlers black purse had the appearance of being hastily thrown down. A horrible feeling swept over her totally subduing the inner song. She knew immediately. It had to be Cindy. While she was at mass praying that she would be well, God had sent His angel of death and even now Cindy was on a journey far from where anyone could follow.

There was a chair at the archway to the living room, and she dropped onto it silently. When this family needed absolute privacy and no one from outside to interfere with their grief, there she was like a big unwanted rock. The crying went on alongside of groans and the pacing of feet. Mr. Ohlers was walking up and down talking to himself, "Oh God, oh God," while Mrs. Ohlers sobbed, "Cindy, my Cindy." The depth of her cries wrenched Sue's heart. Then, "Oh, Bud, what can we do?"

"Do? What can we do?" he sounded angry.

"Well, shouldn't we go to the hospital?"

“What for? She isn’t going to be there.”

“We have to call Tom. Oh,” broken sounds came out, “poor, dear Tom, how can he, how can we live without her? My Tommy and my Cindy, my Tommy and my Cindy.”

It seemed that the call had come while the Ohlers, according to the plan, were already in the car waiting for Sue to arrive back before proceeding on to the Episcopal services, after which Cindy’s hospital room was to have been their destination. Tillie had answered it, and had run out to tell them that the hospital was on the phone.

Finally, after thinking about how she would do it, Sue wiped the tears off her cheeks, and stepped into the living room.

“I am so, so sorry,” she said softly. “I will pack my things and call a taxi to take me to the bus. I am so, so sorry.” And with a choked voice, she could no longer continue.

The two in the living room didn’t seem to hear her, so she quietly went up to her room to gather her things. She didn’t know how to find a taxi phone number, but Tillie could help her. In the midst of this overwhelming emotion that wanted to break out of her throat and clouded her brain, it was necessary that she think carefully about everything now that she would have to handle the return trip by herself, and she put her bus ticket into the front pocket of her handbag, and with it, ready to pay the taxi, the \$5 bill that Papa had given her to carry for emergencies. Then she took the backstairs down to the kitchen. Tillie was rocking back and forth on a kitchen stool, her head on the table cradled in her arms; she looked up red-eyed when Sue came into the room.

“Oh, Sue, dear. The worst, this is the worst. Cindy and Tom have been like my own children, the grandbabies I never had. I cannot bear it!” She put her head back down moaning.

“I know. . . I know, and I’m sorry to be such a bother, but I think I should call a taxi. There will be an earlier bus maybe, and I’ll take it. Or if not, I will just wait at the station for the scheduled one. But I really shouldn’t be here now.”

The front doorbell rang. Tillie rose, wiped her nose, straightened her apron and went off to answer it, but didn’t come right back. While Sue waited, voices, including a new one, probably in the living room, carried on a conversation. When Tillie finally came back, Mrs. Ohlers was with her.

“Oh Sue, will you forgive me? I can’t believe it; it’s so impossible! But, please, we don’t want you to go home.

“I think I should go, Mrs. Ohlers. I’m really in the way of your family here; it just isn’t right that I should stay.”

“No, no you are not in the way! Definitely not! We’ve talked it over with our pastor. Dean Wilder is here. He, too, thinks it would be helpful to all of us if you could stay through the funeral.”

“I don’t see how that could be.”

“Well, when Tom comes, it would help a lot to have someone to keep us from all collapsing into each other. You are so easy to have here. You don’t demand attention at all, and just having your presence can keep us from simply falling apart. You know Cindy better than anyone else; you remind us of happier times. I can’t describe it, but I feel you have a strength that . . .,” and she began to cry. “Please, stay, Sue.”

“Of course, if you want me to, I will.”

“You are a rare girl.”

“But my folks will expect me tonight.”

“Yes, we’ve thought of that. Bud will call the farm; he has to let them know. He will tell Torres to go over to Blue Martin and explain what has happened. You’re a good student, certainly they will excuse the week’s absence at school.

“You mean I should stay for the week?”

“Do you mind? The funeral. .“ and here she could not continue, but weeping, turned and walked away.

Monday morning Sue was relieved that her slacks and pullover still looked fresh. In a week clothes would become a problem; what would she wear to a funeral? No one was at the breakfast table, so she helped herself to some dry cereal. Orange juice was in the frig; she poured a glass, and then set to work filling the sink and washing up breakfast things from the earlier eaters. When Tillie came from the laundry, the kitchen was spotless and Sue was looking into cupboards to find where to put the clean dishes away.

“Mr. and Mrs. have gone out early, there are the funeral arrangements and they will pick up Tom at the bus station. They should be back in time for a late lunch.”

“What can I do to help?”

“What you’ve done is enough.”

“How about if I make lunch for everybody. I’ve cooked a lot.”

“Really? Well, that would lighten my load today.”

Which is why Sue busied herself in the kitchen, stirring up one of her family’s favorite Mexican dishes. She found cornmeal and from there improvised just like she was used to doing at home. There were no green chilies, but tomato sauce in a can and some Tabasco sauce spiced up a half package of leftover ground beef. With the dish ready for the oven, she put on her jacket and went for a walk.

Despite the overshadowing bleakness in her heart, there was room for a little anticipation. She was eager to see Tom though the circumstances called for special wisdom. This time she didn’t forget to talk with Jesus about it. He helped her to think compassionately. Tom would be absorbed in sorrow, so she resolved to be out of the way, to keep to her room or to go on walks so that the Ohlers’ privacy would not be violated. They had wanted her to stay because another person kept them from sinking into themselves, but a little of her presence would go a long way. She would find ways to be helpful.

Her other task was very important; that was prayer. So she walked over to St. Theresa’s to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament. When her eyes adjusted to the dim light, only one other worshipper shared the pews. It was a woman shrouded in a long black veil and a black coat who blended into the shadows. For the first few minutes, the grief for Cindy that she had managed to contain at the Ohlers, spilled out silently. “Oh, Jesus, did you have to take her? She was so young. We loved her so.” She wept. Then slowly, very slowly, she felt a calm fill in around the pain. Finally, she could say, “Thank you, dear Lord, help me to trust you. I must trust you, because everything you do is good.”

Appetites were not at their best around the table, though both Ohlers expressed appreciation for her casserole. Only Tom had nothing to say, picking at the food. She decided he didn't like it. He looked almost angry, and had not even greeted her since walking into the house. Perhaps his parents had thought she would be helpful to the family, but that certainly was not Tom's opinion. Her presence obviously upset him, so Sue knew that her idea to keep to herself as much as possible would be best. Unhappy that she had stayed, the next morning she went back over to the church for a visit, hoping to again experience the peace and presence of God of the day before. As she left the church the little old woman in the black veil was coming in; her wrinkled face looked infinitely sad. "Some people have heavier sorrows than I do," thought Sue.

Chapter ten

Peg Rice was Lucy Ohlers best friend, and it was she who was to take Sue to Hudsons for new clothes for the funeral which was to be at the Cathedral on Thursday morning. When Sue had protested, Mrs. Ohlers had told her to consider it an early birthday present, but she wanted very much to do this for her because, after all, she was doing so much for them.

Mrs. Rice was a well-dressed woman with medium length brown hair worn in a loose pageboy. Her wide smile showed an even row of white teeth that looked like a toothpaste commercial on one of Woodward Avenue's billboards. She drove a special little sports car which Sue had had to curl up to get into, and smoked Chesterfield cigarettes.

"You have good English," was one of the first things she said to her. "Most country kids give themselves away with all those "he don'ts, and 'aints."

"Yes, We had a mean teacher in the first grade, Miss Brand; she made us stand in the corner when we talked that way."

Peg looked at her with some appreciation. "It paid off. There's no making a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but good English is a step in the right direction.

A pig's ear. . . was that what it was to be raised poor, far from the city life, ignorant and stupid? Did Mrs. Rice think she was going to make her into a "silk purse?" But she was grateful for Mrs. Brand for the first time in her life.

Hudsons was breath-taking; palatial; filled with chandeliers and glittering display cases. She would have been lost in a minute, but Peg Rice guided her expertly up an escalator, one of the first to be installed in any store anywhere, Peg said, to the Juniors Department. She commanded immediate attention from the clerks who were soon swooping in and out of the dressing room with this dress and that suit. It was embarrassing to be standing there in her respectable but hardly attractive underwear, until Peg, as she insisted Sue call her, slipped a new lace-trimmed slip over her head.

They left the floor with several Hudsons' boxes, one a hat box which held a rose velvet cloche with a short veil. Sue had never owned a formal hat and didn't think she wanted one, but Peg said it was necessary for a funeral at the Cathedral, and besides it would be nice for Easter which was just ten days away. Secretly Sue couldn't imagine wearing a veiled velvet hat to mass at St. Albans with her family. Maria, she, and her sisters just wore their circular veils that were like small handkerchiefs they hair-pinned into their hair. But she did love the light pink sharkskin suit that was wrapped in tissue in one of the boxes she carried. Yet, she felt more than a twinge of guilt that she was having such good things happen in the midst of a tragedy that was so overwhelming to people she loved. She kept repeating to herself, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph" thinking of her Papa so as to keep her feet firmly on the ground. She did not want to be carried away with all this luxury that was pouring into her lap.

On the way down the escalator, Peg had spotted a model wearing a spring cotton dress fashioned in a shepherdess style with a white bodice. "Oh, Sue, with your figure, that would look just heavenly. You will need something else to wear this week, there is the visitation at the funeral home. We must have it." At home they wore dark colors to funerals, this looked frivolous, but when she questioned, Peg said, "Oh, we don't do that anymore," and had them box the dress. And with that dress there was still a further need - a short swingy white jacket; it was after all, Peg said, still cold out. A white jacket? How impractical was that for a country girl?

“Now, what kind of shoes do you have with you.”

“Just these shoes.”

“Saddle shoes. Not good. The shoe department is on the first floor and you’ll need silk stockings.”

Sue had no idea how much all this was costing. Peg waved off the question. “My dear, Lucy Ohlers spends this much without batting an eye. She told me to outfit you and that’s all we’re doing. Relax, for once somebody is doing something for you, and you know part of graciousness is being able to accept gifts.” And she laughed in her musical way that was irresistible.

Sue couldn’t help wondering though, what would Papa Evelio say. She wasn’t sure. That last argument about accepting gifts might sway him; but chances are he would be worried that all these fine clothes would change her. Hadn’t she already changed her name to Sue - very significant to his way of thinking. And Mama Maria - she felt badly that she had made a fuss about clothes just before leaving home. Maybe if she shared these new things with Dolores or Juanita it would be more acceptable. She didn’t know how they would share one hat; when could they wear it? Though Juanita would look wonderful in it with her thick black hair.

She spent the evening in her room, trying on her new clothes. This new Sue was certainly someone she didn’t know - pink suit and rose hat, pumps and silk stockings; the starched peasant dress with its petticoat and white lacy front. She would be embarrassed to have anyone know how long she looked in the mirror, turning to gaze first at this angle and then that; putting on the coat first with the suit and then with the dress. Tom had not even appeared at dinner; she kept wondering what he would think when he saw her like this. Would he be stunned at the transformation of the common Suz he knew into this, well. . . pretty Sue? And then she felt worried that she thought so. She carefully hung up all the things and went to bed early. The next day would be free until afternoon when “viewing” began at the funeral home and continued through the evening. She would need to be prepared to meet all the friends of the Ohlers and the out-of-town relatives who were already calling from the downtown hotel. Without any of the social graciousness of these people, being quiet and staying back would be the best thing she could do, she decided, but at least the clothes were right. Peg Rice had seen to that.

It was Papa Evelio’s low voice, merely a whisper in her ear, but his unmistakable voice that awoke her. She sat upright in bed; the room was dark. “Que? (what) treasure, Suz?” That was all that had been whispered.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” was the next thing that came into her head. Her treasure had been summed up in a little piece of chert, that symbolized the family prayer, “all will be good.” That was where she wanted her heart to be. The dress and the suit hung on the closet door; she could barely make them out against the dark woodwork. They weren’t right for her at all; she wasn’t Sue, after all; that Sue was someone else. She turned on the light, and got out of bed. It didn’t take long, the boxes and the tissue were all where she’d left them. When she got back in bed, the stack of Hudsons’ boxes was waiting inside the door, receipts in each one, ready to be returned. But she didn’t sleep well, her dreams were disturbed; first she arrived at a funeral in a slip, then she was carrying on a conversation with an important person in a hat that wouldn’t stay on her head but kept slipping over her eyes.

When she came down to breakfast, Tillie had a message. The family had gone to the hotel for breakfast with out-of-town relatives; Peg would pick her up shortly after noon to go to the funeral home. When Sue had passed the stack of boxes by her bedroom door, a strange

strangled feeling grabbed her throat. Should she see what Tillie thought? After all, the maid would know how she felt - she hadn't been from a wealthy background either, Sue was sure. But Tillie also knew enough about this kind of life that she would tell her if it was all right not to accept the clothes. In the night it was so clear - Papa would not want her to be someone else, a Sue who dressed in such things. But now it was not clear at all. She had come to breakfast in what she planned to wear all day, her white blouse, dirndl skirt and saddle shoes. The toast was dry and tasteless in her mouth.

"Tillie, I don't know what to do about all those beautiful clothes Mrs. Rice bought for me yesterday."

"What do you mean?" Tillie put her hands on her hips. "You'll wear them, of course."

"But, I've never worn things like that, and I'm not sure my Papa would approve."

"You are a religious girl, always going to church," said Tillie brusquely, "but you Catholics don't know the Bible! And so you don't know the 45th psalm."

"Forget your people and your father's house . . . the king desires your beauty. . . .the princess is decked with gold-woven robes, and led to her king'? Something like that! Now don't be silly! Who do you suppose gave the princess those robes? If God gives you something, be grateful. Such a silly girl!" She almost stomped off to the utility closet, dragged out the vacuum cleaner and pushed it determinedly toward the hall calling over her shoulder, "after lunch at the Cathedral we have a big affair here tomorrow, and I'd better be proud of you!"

Sue knew the 45th psalm, but had been taught that it referred to Jesus' mother Mary. Nevertheless, she had her answer.

Chapter eleven

St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral was filled with the "beauty of holiness," too, but in a much more elegant way than St. Albans. The great Gothic stain-glassed windows soared up and up, speckling the nave with sunlit colors, the most glorious of which was blue - blue like the lake on the clearest, cold spring day. Yes, it was a Cindy-like place, full of lofty mystery and dim alcoves where votive lights twinkled their multi-colored messages of hope, and where many chapels beckoned a person in for private meditation.

Suz had been placed by an usher right into the family pew to wait until they came down the long aisle following Cindy's draped casket to file in somberly beside her. She had prayed to have God and Cindy first in her thoughts and that Cindy might see His face; she kept clinging to that childhood prayer, "all will be good," so that she would not weep, though she was well supplied with tissues, just in case. Even though Tom should sit beside her, it was not to be him, and, oh, please, dear Lord, not her clothes, that would fill her mind, but Cindy, Jesus, and Mary his loving mother who prayed for all at the hour of death, a heavenly mother to be there to envelop Cindy in her arms and lead her to Jesus.

It was impossible not to think of Tom, however, because when he sat down beside her, he wasn't prepared. She had to loan him one of her tissues. Just offering it to him more pieces were torn out of her heart. His mumbled "thanks" was so sorrowful; his large hands that always impressed her with their capability looked totally helpless holding the tissue. What should those hands be doing; they weren't comfortable anywhere. She wanted to take both and hold them. He wouldn't look at her, but that was as it should be.

Other than Tom she had never met a young man she liked, and she realized that he was a man. Sorrow made him even more a man; she felt his heartbreak right through his shoulder which occasionally touched hers. His obvious youthful strength was even more entrancing because he was man enough to cry for his beloved sister. She wept with him, as did everyone around her.

The bright faced Cindy would not fill the house with her laughter and her songs, would not run down the beach to dive into the waves, or climb the cherry trees, and she would not in any future year bring grandchildren to HiLo to follow in her footsteps.

The white-haired Dean of the cathedral read reassuring words of Jesus' about the place he would prepare for those who loved him and Sue's imagination saw this place to be like HiLo farm; the choir, which did sound like angels, then sang glorious songs. There was no Eucharist at this service, she knew better than to receive communion outside of her faith, anyway. The last hymn was sung, and the family slowly followed the casket back up the aisle, and this time Sue walked with them.

When they all came back to the church hall from the cemetery, the somberness began to lift from the family and guests. It was true, thought Sue, that life goes on - it must. Peg Rice had taken her arm leading her to a table filled with the Rice family, proudly introducing her as, "Sue Rogers, dear friend of Cindy's."

Chicken fricassee was served on little biscuit-like affairs with a ring of candied apple beside it. It was hardly a funeral luncheon like those at St. Albans' whose Altar Society served ham sandwiches and salads even at beloved Father Smyth's funeral. Peg explained that the Cathedral hired a cook and a kitchen crew; Cathedral members were much too busy to serve meals!

While their guests ate, the Ohlers went through the big hall from table to table, greeting everyone. Sue envied the ease of this level of society - how naturally and warmly they had

learned to speak to each other even while their hearts were bleeding. She could only be grateful that Tillie had insisted that she conform with her clothes. In saddle shoes she would have been a fish-out-of-water, and what would Peg have thought, what would the Ohlers have thought, how would she have explained? It was an important lesson: there are things to do that must be done, not for pride, or even because it is easy, but simply to make other people comfortable. She was sure that Papa would agree. She had sorted things out. It was not for herself that she had kept the clothes, her heart's treasure was not in them, but it was for others. Yet, she did love to feel so fittingly dressed - thank you, Jesus.

Mrs. Ohlers was at her elbow.

"Sue, there's all kinds of food left over. I've asked the women in the kitchen to prepare it to take to the Mission downtown. We churches try to take any extra food down there. I've asked Tom to drive; will you help him? Then we'll see you both later back at the house." And turning to Peg, "Doesn't she look wonderful? Thanks so much, Peg."

"It is I who must thank you, Mrs. Ohlers," said Sue. "I love it," she patted her pink skirt.

"You have been the greatest help to us," murmured Cindy's mother, and she moved away.

Mysterious, indeed, how she had helped anybody.

Tom drove up to the backdoor of the church kitchen in his father's Lincoln, and together they put the food containers into the trunk. He knew Detroit well, and found their way downtown then along the river to where the Gospel Mission sign swung in the wind amidst vacant, time-worn buildings, empty lots with burning trash, and dilapidated tenements. A group of men lounged around the steps, poor men in ragged coats, and worn boots. Most had long hair and were unshaven. Now Sue was immediately conscious of her clothes; she looked like a person who knew nothing about poverty. She felt their eyes judging the car, and then looking over Tom in his wool overcoat and herself - with a rose velvet hat, yet.

She wanted to say, "I may look rich, but really I am just as poor as you." She felt their suspicion and resentment, and wanted to say, "Judge not and ye will not be judged." She knew just what they were thinking. Maria had kept her children from bitterness because of her immense gratitude and her hope in God. Sue could see in a moment how much she had been blessed, that being very poor did not necessarily make a person humble and sweet like her brothers and sisters, or like her dear Mama and Papa.

They followed a long hall to the back of the building. Balancing two food containers, Tom opened a door. A couple of women were preparing a meal. One stood at the stove stirring a pot, the other approached. "Ahh, some food! We can use it. Would you, please, put it on that counter and write down the church that is sending it over there on that pad."

"There's more in the car," Tom said, "I'll be back in a minute."

The woman at the stove turned to look at them. Sue writing on the pad looked up, and then took a second look. Where had she seen that face? But could it be? Without the veil could she be mistaken? But it was! The very same woman she had seen coming out of the church on that last morning she had gone to pray. The woman looked hard at her - Sue looked different too, with the hat. She took it off.

"Ohh, it is you. The young woman that came into St. Theresa's this week. Are you feeling better? You were so very sad. I was worried and prayed for you."

"Thank you. I was very sad, in fact, I am very sad. My best friend died this week. This food is from her funeral. He is her brother," Sue motioned to Tom as he came back into the kitchen.

"And your name?"

"I'm Sue Rogers, and this is Tom Ohlers."

"What was that again?" The woman seemed confused; she reached out to balance herself against the counter. "Rogers?"

"Yes"

"How strange. My name is Rogers."

"It is a common name."

The two women just looked at each other. The grey-hair of the elder curled around her forehead just like Sue's. Her hazel colored eyes looked into the hazel eyes in the other's wrinkled face.

"Could you. . . could you be Lois?" Sue could hardly bring her voice up to a whisper.

There was a long pause.

"Suzanne?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Oh, dear God," to the alarm of the other kitchen worker the old woman fell down on her knees on the linoleum. Tom's jaw hung open; he couldn't understand a thing of what he was witnessing.

Telling it later, Sue didn't know what she said after that. Something to Tom that this was her grandmother. All the while Lois Rogers was bent to the floor, moving her head up and down as if in agony.

Her nervous co-worker was trying to raise her to her feet, but she could not stand. She spoke to Tom, "Come over here, young man, help me! There's a room across the hall where she can lie down." But by this time Sue was on her knees next to her grandmother with her arms around her.

"Grandmother, grandmother, oh, oh, grandmother."

Lois grabbed at her hand, and held it tightly against her breast in her time-worn one. "How I have prayed for this day," her words came out with a strangled sound, "God has heard my prayer. I thought I would die before He answered."

By this time Tom was trying to get both of them to stand; they seemed rooted to the floor. The other worker was beginning to complain, "We have to get this meal ready."

"Isn't there anybody else to help? asked Tom.

"Well, maybe, I'll have to go and find Eunice. But see if you can get them to go over there," and she motioned across the hall.

It was in a room rather like a jail cell, or a monk's cell, where Lois and Sue began to put the pieces of their lives together with the last few minutes being the final piece in both their puzzles. The small window had only a half shade and beyond it there was a partly dismantled brick wall. The sagging bed on which Lois sat was covered with a faded blue spread; Sue sat on a

wood chair while Tom stood straight and tall against the olive colored plaster wall. That room would live in her mind and would be remembered for the rest of her life as a kind of chapel. Her grandmother's face, streaked with tears, shone radiantly as she gazed at Sue.

"How like your mother you are! Yes, I should have seen it when I first set eyes on you. You don't know how many prayers have been offered at that Tabernacle that I would find you."

"Where is my mother?"

The old woman looked confused. "Your mother? Of course, you don't know about her. And where have you been all these years? And was there not another child?"

"My brother, Jody. That is, Joseph."

"Yes, a boy, Joseph. Ohh, dear God, dear God." And she began to rock back and forth again, while a fresh stream of tears coursed down her aged face.

"How come you didn't know about us? Why did you let us get lost from you?"

"Oh, my dear, dear Suzanne, there is so much to tell. So much. Where have you been? I don't know where to begin. And I'm thinking now about Charles. How will I tell Charles?"

"Charles is my grandfather."

"Yes, your grandfather. But don't be afraid. He's mellowed greatly over these past years."

"Why should I be afraid of him?"

"There is so much to tell, I don't know where to begin." Still rocking back and forth, she fell into silence.

Tom broke the silence.

"Perhaps we should take you home Mrs. Rogers. I think they have someone else in the kitchen now. You have had a shock; it would really be best if Sue and I drove you home."

There was still no answer from Mrs. Rogers.

"Grandmother, shouldn't we take Tom's advice and drive you home?"

"What time is it?" there was a weak reply.

"It's about 1:30 or so."

"I suppose that would be all right. James won't be coming after me until 3:30, so we can get there before he sets out."

Sue thought how much had happened since she came into this place. Incredible. Simply beyond possibility. Her head swirling with questions, she was now guiding her grandmother through the same knot of men who waited for their meal.

"I would really rather wait to talk anymore about this," answered Lois Rogers, when Sue began to ask just one of the thousand things she had to know. "Charles must be in on this, and there is so much and she held her heart which frightened Sue.

"Of course, I don't mean to be impatient."

Tom followed the directions out north along the river on Lake Shore Drive, then through Grosse Pointe Woods heading on to St. Claire Shores.

“You can see why I go to St. Theresa’s every day,” Mrs. Rogers in the midst of her directions, waved down one intersection. “It’s right on the way to the mission.”

Sue wanted to ask about her being Catholic. Hadn’t the Ohlers said that the C. A. Rogers belonged to the Episcopal Cathedral?

“Was my grandfather once a CEO of some company?” she had to ask.

“Yes, Tunny Corporation. How did you know that?”

“Tom’s parents mentioned it.”

Her grandmother’s head jerked around to look at Sue in the back seat, and then at Tom, “Tom’s parents! How many people know about this?” And she sighed, “Oh, well, it had to come out sometime. These secrets just poison those who must keep them, and we’ve kept ours for a long, long time.” Then turning to Tom, “Are your parents the Byers Ohlers?”

“Yes.”

“And they know about our family affairs?”

“I didn’t know it.”

Sue felt uncomfortable; she was the one, after all, who had told them.

There was silence again, until Mrs. Rogers told Tom to turn right, then right again, and left. Emerging at the end of a long drive sprawled a long house in a series of low levels with deep set windows, culminating in a wing that jutted out over the lake. Great juniper-like plants hung down from the upper stories, softening an otherwise stark, modernistic effect, and the whole was framed in evergreen trees of varying heights.



Tom whistled, “This is the Frank Lloyd Wright house.”

“That’s right. Charles is a friend of his. Do you like this style?”

“We’ve been taught to admire it in Art Appreciation.”

“Well, that’s not the same as liking it, I think.” She looked from face to face, “You will both come in to meet

Charles. And then you may ask all the questions you have been so good to save.”

It was late in the afternoon before Tom and Sue returned to the Ohlers. Most of the company had left the house except for a few of the out-of-town relatives, a brother of Byers, Ralph and his wife, and an aunt of Lucy’s. They were having drinks in the den where the young people found them.

“Where have you been? Couldn’t you have been more courteous to our guests?” Mrs. Ohlers sounded tired and cross. “I was about to call the police!”

Tom went over to put a hand on his mother's shoulder, "Mom, when you hear this story, you will never believe it. We've been out to the C.A. Rogers place for the whole afternoon, and Sue has found her grandparents!"

Chapter twelve

Sue planned to leave for home on Saturday. Grandmother Rogers had begged her to stay, to spend Easter week at Stonetears; it was tempting because there was no school, but a week away from home was long, and now she was full of news for her family, full to bursting.

The first afternoon it had been Charles and Lois' story she and Tom had heard, from the sad beginning to the poignant end that they were experiencing.

Her Grandfather Charles was a tall, stooped man, quite bald. His height and build reminded Sue of her brother. He had been very stern faced and frightening at first, probably because it was so difficult to make out what his wife was trying to tell him about these two young people standing in front of him. But when he spoke and greeted her as "granddaughter," she could tell by the tremor in his voice that he was moved by this unexpected turn of events.

They had sat down in what seemed to Sue's taste as a rather bare sunroom. The light coming in specially beveled glass, was pleasant, but the polished, uncarpeted floors and severe furniture were a strange kind of luxury, she thought.

The conversation had to begin with Jean Louise.

It was as Father Smyth had guessed, only a few weeks after receiving a notice that her husband, who was not really officially her husband, had been killed in the Battle of the Bulge, their daughter had died in the summer of 1944.

"Jeannie was an only child, with every possible good thing a child could want. Possibly, we spoiled her."

("Possibly?" thought Sue, I how could she have helped but be spoiled. Though it might have been the kind of spoiled-by-neglect that happened to rich kids when parents were too busy with business and social things, and when there were maids to do the care-taking).

As a teenager she was strong willed and hard to control. She had gone to private schools, and they thought she was quite safe from any involvement with boys at Kingswood, certainly safe from meeting any Catholic ones. But one weekend at home she had met a boy who had come to help the gardeners clean up the autumn leaves. Big and strong, fairly good-looking, with a hearty laugh, he had not been shy about flirting with Jean Louise, and she was totally smitten by him.

Here it had to be explained, that though Lois was a Catholic now, she had not been one then. In fact, quite the contrary. Being Catholic was not in the spectrum of her social connections - her parents, the Nettles with their Scotch ancestry, were Presbyterians of the First Presbyterian Church downtown. In fact, her father had belonged to a group dedicated to keeping Catholics from positions of prominence in Detroit's prosperous days when the great car companies were being founded, money being amassed, and whole areas of the city being built up with great houses, like the one they were in. No Catholics were going to get power in Detroit! None of that riffraff who were now pouring into the factories from the east, Poles and Italians, and southern Germans. This young man, the Catholic leaf-raker, true to what they thought about adherents of that religion, within that month, had helped Jean Louise sneak away from Kingswood. She had been missing for two weeks which had nearly driven her parents to distraction. The police finally found her in a cheap hotel, where she and this fellow had been living.

"What was his name?"

“He was Robert Shane Kelly - the worst; son of an immigrant Irish bar owner near the Ford plant.”

For the one and only time since the day he worked with the garden crew, they had met him with Jean in the downtown police station. No arguments were able to force her to come home, and because she was nearly eighteen, the police said she was of age to make up her own mind. As horrified as she was by this Robert Kelly, Lois would have tried to find some compromise, but Charles, distraught and feeling powerless for the first time in his life was convinced that the fellow was just a fortune hunter. In a terrible scene he'd finally told Jean and Robert, that she was disowned, that they never wanted to set eyes on her or hear from her for as long as she lived. Convinced that being cut off from the family money would loosen Robert's interest in Jean, he had then taken a sobbing Lois from the police station, leaving the two young people who would never be seen by them again alive. Money proved not to be what Robert saw in Jean. Father Smyth had thought something like this, too, thought Sue.

Jean had sent one card; to tell her parents about the birth of a baby girl, their granddaughter, Suzanne Elizabeth. There had been no notice of the marriage of Jean and Robert though her parents had sifted through weekly announcements of marriage certificates issued in Wayne County posted in the newspaper. Then Robert must have been drafted. Once searching the Detroit News, they had found a birth announced in a long line of babies born in November 1942. Lois had clipped it; she now handed it to Sue. Underlined was “Boy, Joseph, born to Jean Louise Rogers, 11-12-42.” There was no listing for the father.

There was no further contact with the couple until a police officer had called. The Rogers were to come to the County Coroners office to identify a body that had been taken from a southside apartment. The young woman, thought to be their daughter from papers found in the house, had died from dehydration, though she was seriously ill with tuberculosis. Among the papers was one of those dreaded notices from the United States government, “We regret to inform you. . .

Were there children in the apartment? No, no children. The police were to send out a communiqué searching for them.

Sue had felt her insides churning. Tom sensing her nervous tension (why would such an emotional load be added on a day that already had more than its share of intensity?) leaned forward to pat her chilled hand lightly, saying, “It's all right, Suz.”

“But you hated Catholics. Why? The whole trouble was because of that. And you are Catholic now?”

“I'm not!” said Charles, emphatically.

“He said once that if my turning Catholic ever brought our grandchildren back, he'd become Catholic. Didn't you, Chuck?”

There was no answer; he looked grim.

Lois, struggling with depression for months, had kept her daughter's room exactly as she had left it when they had last seen her. She had stopped going to the Cathedral; there was no help in God when she had failed as a mother, and was now, because of His punishment, to be deprived of not only her dear daughter but also her grandchildren.

Unknown to Charles, she often pulled out a small packet of things that had been handed on to them; her daughter had seemed to think these were precious. A small gold ring that she had worn as a toddler and had worn on a chain around her neck, a faceted bottle of Lilac

perfume received as a Christmas present, a leather-covered diary that had never been written in, and an ivory, yes real ivory rosary which must have been in Robert's family. Maybe it had come from Ireland. At first she had just looked at these things, then she noticed a booklet in the packet that told how to pray the rosary. Because it had been Jean's, she had begun to pray it every day.

Her grandmother left the room for a few moments, coming back she held a yellowed string of intricately carved rosary beads. She had known nothing about the rosary prayer, which had been considered a silly superstition in her church, and was certainly below notice by most Episcopalians, but she was sure that Jean had been praying it because the instruction booklet was well thumbed. Always in great distress, praying the rosary had proved to be peace-giving, partly because she imagined Jean's hands holding these beads. Yes, Jean would pray for her Robert, and for her children, and for her own fading health; she would have asked God on these beads to find a place for her poor dear children, and while she prayed these prayers she would have wept over Robert lost in a foreign place - dead in battle.



Seeing her grandmother in such bottomless sorrow, made Sue feel pain right through her heart which already had been sliced in slivers. Jesus, Mary, Joseph. She had cried so much today that her head ached, and Tom, who had enough grief of his own, sympathetically reached out to again pat her hand. Her grandfather was muttering, "I didn't know that."

Finally, Lois continued. She had visited St. Theresa's one Saturday, and without knowing why she did it, joined a line of folks waiting in front of a booth that had a small yellow light. She knew enough to know a priest was in there. A person would enter, close the door behind him, and the light would blink on. He would come out and the light would blink off. The people were quiet and respectful, the church was filled with peace, so she decided that when the line brought her to the door, she would turn and leave. As it was, it was restful and comforting to stand with these people who seemed uncommonly plain and unassuming, take a step or two, and stand again as though one with them. She needed to be one with them. Being Catholics they prayed the rosary, too, and they had something that she wanted so badly.

Then she was the first in line, the man in front of her had disappeared into the booth. She should go, but she felt unable to move, except forward. When he came out, without another thought she had stepped into the gloom of the booth, closed the door behind her and the sliding window to one side had opened.

"Well," said Lois, "it was half an hour or more before the next penitent got into that confessional."

Lois had taken private instructions to join the Church from the same priest who had spoken with this Protestant lady who had stepped into his confessional that Saturday afternoon. After some months, Father had suggested the mission as a possible area where Lois could shed her guilt by serving people who were like Jean and Robert, without family or friends, alone and needy. Added to that was her daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament where she prayed that someday she might find her grandchildren.

Through this narration, Charles did not remain unmoved. "I didn't know all this. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You were so angry when I became Catholic, I had to trust that the right time would come to tell you, and it has, today."

Sue had spent the next afternoon alone with Lois and Charles. Their chauffeur James had picked her up in Grosse Pointe, and at the end of the day had taken her back again. This time it was her turn to tell them all about her life first with Joe Nettle, and then at Blue Martin with her Papa and Mama, her brothers and sisters.

They went from shock to shock. The first being that it was to Lois's degenerate brother that their daughter had taken her little children.

"Why would she take you there? In all our searching, we never thought of him! We wouldn't have known where to find him if we had. I wonder how Jean Louise knew where he was? He was nothing but a drop-out from society; alcoholic and totally unredeemable."

"But he couldn't have been unredeemable, grandmother. Before he died, when he could no longer talk because of a stroke, a good priest who became our family's best friend, accepted his tears as a confession, and he was baptized right in his bed. Our family buried him in the blessed ground of St. Albans cemetery in Benzonia. Besides, he never drank that I knew of.

The two had more head-shaking to do than over Uncle Joe's deathbed conversion. The idea of their grandchildren being raised by Mexicans with foreign children as brother and sisters? Impossible. Still, this granddaughter - such a humble, loving girl - was hard to explain unless whatever the Martinez's were doing as parents was . . . well, good.

"These Martinez' they must have money," Grandfather Charles, had said. He was looking at the new peasant dress, the white coat, and the new shoes.

"Oh my, I don't think you would think so. You see, the Ohlers bought me these clothes for the funeral."

"The Ohlers bought my granddaughter her clothes? Well, that will never happen again! And when can we meet Joseph? Perhaps Lois and I should drive you back up to Beulah."

Her immediate reaction was that she didn't want that to happen.

"I think I should go home on the bus and give my family some time to take in all that has happened. The right time will come, and I think it will be soon; then I'm sure that my parents, and brothers and sisters will be very happy if you will come."

With the five dollars of emergency money still in her purse, Sue had had James stop at a flower shop on her way to Stonewaters, and bought two flowering African violets, a pink one for her grandparents and a purple for the Ohlers.

Her grandmother had tearfully said, "Then you do forgive us?" And Sue wanted a tangible way to tell her grandparents that of course she did, and that she loved them. She had said it over and over, but the little plant would say it for her when she was far away in Beulah.

The purple violet would be a small attempt to thank the Ohlers for their hospitality, and for their kindness to her. All the time she was thanking them, they kept protesting that she had been a blessing. Even Tillie came from the kitchen to give her a hug, "Come back to visit us here, Sue; and we'll be up at HiLo in just a few months." Tears filled her eyes, "It will be hard; it will never be the same there without her." Then Tom drove her to the bus.

He had very little to say; the traffic was thick. He parked in the lot, and carried her little case, and a second one that had been Cindy's, now packed with her new things, to the waiting room. She had only a half hour before the bus to Traverse left, so she found a seat near passenger doors to the ramps and sat down, carefully tucking her cases at her feet as Tom handed them to her. He stood awkwardly, and then leaned over to take her hand.

“Thanks for everything, Sue. I apologize for being such a jerk those first few days. I really didn’t want you around, but you’ve been great. And I only hope that everything works out now with your grandparents.”

She felt tongue-tied, but mumbled something about seeing him soon at the lake, and he was gone.

The long bus trip was welcome, she had purposefully chosen a seat by herself against a window. It was a dark day with squalls of rain drumming on the window making the countryside go by in blur which was good when there was so much to think about.

To be Continued