

Chapter 3

The Busy Years Bring Change

The pleasant memories of my life at St. Cecelia's Convent School have followed me through the years. Few children, I am sure, can thank God for happier school days. Yet, as is the nature of youth, I looked forward almost breathlessly to high school and the new knowledge, the new acquaintances, the new experiences it promised.

After graduating from St. Cecilia's at the age of twelve, I entered high school in nearby Lake Linden, and there I stayed until I was 16. Here, though more ordered and organized, my intense enjoyment of play and social life continued. I was one of the school's star basketball players for a full four years, had the leading part in our senior play, loved the athletics, the school dances and parties, and other activities with which high school life is pleasantly rife. I enjoyed existence to the fullest, even the 2 ½ mile walk to school through the deep Northern snows, which with my schoolmates was merely one more occasion for laughter and fun.

Nor was my academic life neglected. I took four years of Latin, two years of German, along with chemistry, history and the other usual college preparatory courses. I took part in many declamation and oratorical contests as well. But these years, too, came to an end, as everything must, and at 16 I graduated from high school and enrolled in the Michigan State Teacher's College in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Here, however, Fate took a hand. Before graduating from college, I was offered a tempting position in a department store in my home town of Hubbell. Impulsively, I accepted and returned home to make preparations for my entrance into the business world. It is strange how certain scenes in one's past life remain vividly in the mind's eye without having their clarity dimmed by the passing of the years. On my way home from college, crossing the Straits of Mackinaw on the ferry, I was thrilled to find among the passengers a Militia, fine young men in uniform, bubbling over with the vigor and excitement of youth away from home grounds. They had been dispatched to keep order at the

copper mines during a strike and were returning from duty. I can hear them now, singing a song, the lyrics of which went:

“In the Copper Range Mountains of the UP,
On guard at the mines, you see. . .”

Little did I think, as I looked and listened with admiration, that these and most of our other young men would again be in uniform for a longer time and on a graver and more dangerous mission - the First World War.

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It was during the period between my return from college and my beginnings in the commercial world, that again I felt the now familiar touch of the *Hand* on my shoulder - this time in the unlikely surroundings of a community dance. When I felt the touch, an awesome sensation crept over me which I know now, but did not realize then, was the anointing power of the Almighty. I trembled and felt strangely arrested of God, and my companions, frightened, asked me if I felt ill or if I was cold. But it was neither of these. It was something different than I had ever experienced in my life up until that moment. Yet I thank God that during the years of my ministry since, I have felt the same sensation many, many times.

I do not believe that Saul of Tarsus felt more arrested on the road to Damascus than I felt that night at the dance. A thousand strange thoughts and wonders crowded my mind, but I buried all this in my heart, not knowing what it meant. As did Mary in the scriptural passage where it was said of her: “. . . and Mary pondered all these things in her heart.” (*Luke 2:19*)

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For five years I worked in the Toplon Department Store, assisted in the buying and enjoyed myself immensely. But all the boys and many of the young women of Hubbell were beginning to leave our little town for the big cities, where enticing wages were being offered. The war had brought a great increase in manufacturing, and indeed in all commercial pursuits, and the need for more workers was great and compensated accordingly. Friend after friend departed the city wards. And, in time, I

was attracted by the call. My closest girl friend and I decided to share in the adventure and excitement, and found ourselves preparing to leave.

But like all youth, I little realized what my leaving would mean to my father and mother. I did not understand their fear and trepidation at seeing a young girl, green and unacquainted with the ways of the world, trusting everyone and believing all to be one's friend, starting unthinkingly for the big and heartless city. Mother and Dad told me later that although they did not wish to interfere with my plans for my life, it seemed like everything stopped when I left. For years afterward, whenever my Dad would hear the trains whistle, he would go to the window and murmur, half mournfully, half resentfully: "There goes the Robber!"

However, in the excitement and anticipation of our leaving, I gave little thought to all this. When we went to the depot, practically the whole town turned out to see us off, as we had lived, played, and worked right there all of our lives and were dear to them all. My dad, despite his disappointment, came to see us off and with him was my mother's little nephew, Joseph, about five years old whom we had raised from infancy. When the time actually came to board the train, I felt I just couldn't stand to go, leaving the dear little fellow and my loving parents. Of course, my girlfriend was going through the same contradictory agony. But finally the train pulled out slowly, taking us away from all we knew and loved. The gifts, candy, and fruit with which our friends had laden us was poor compensation for the tears that streamed down our cheeks.

After we found our seats, we could not even talk to each other. We were going hundreds of miles away, and the strange and wonderful names of Milwaukee, Chicago, and Cleveland seemed to belong to another and forbidding planet. We sat and sobbed until it was time for us to go to bed. Of course, neither of us had ever been in a train berth in our lives, and the problem of what to do with our fruit and candy was a puzzler. Finally we decided to put them on a little ledge back of us. We managed to put out the light, and then could not find how to turn it on again. The ridiculousness of the situation turned our tears to giggles, as the plums, oranges, and apples began to drop down on our heads. What we had thought to be a ledge turned out not to be!

There we were, unable to turn on the light, fruit dropping on our heads, bananas and candy squashed under our wriggling bodies, and the sounds of our mirth increased until at last the porter, summoned no doubt by outraged passengers, came and turned on our light and

threatened to put us off the train. But when he saw our predicament, he stifled a giggle of his own and helped to clean up the mess. At last we quieted down much to our own relief, and I am sure that of the other occupants of the train.

And so I was on my way. Here the destiny of my life turned. I was on my way to the city where I was to meet my husband. On my way to the fulfillment of God's secret plan for me with not a hint of what He had planned to bring to pass in my life, with not a dream of what lay before me.